

Patriarchal Censorship under the Psychiatric Reading in 'Prelude'

Yanfang Lai

School of Language and Culture, Tianjin University of Technology, Tianjin, 300000, China

Abstract: *It is evident that Katherine Mansfield adopts illusion or dream to react against reality in "Prelude", which may easily lead to psychological reading. This essay intends to argue the relationship between the covert progression and the overt plot, because the overt plot points to psychiatric reading, while the covert directs to patriarchal censorship. Therefore, their relationship is subversive. On the other hand, female characters are constrained by the patriarchal censorship, and these downtrodden women refer to both the female characters and the author as the cultural context and the author's biography occupy a significant position in exploring the covert progression in "Prelude" so much so that the writing is also constrained by the phallogocentric norm.*

Keywords: *patriarchal censorship, psychiatric reading, modernism, covert progression, overt plot*

1. Introduction

Radically different from the writers in 19th century, the early modern writers prefer to represent life as it really was, and they start thinking of what constitutes "life" and what might be the best ways to communicate it. Moreover, modernists begin to emphasize the rich moment or trivialities rather than unfolding narrative; the synchronic rather than the diachronic. Katherine Mansfield's works conform to the modern trend and attend to a very limited temporal moment, the richness and complexity of which becomes the major preoccupation of the story. Wendy Martin (2006) makes a conclusion for this as he claims that "(a)s modernists sought to put modern life into words, they threw off the aesthetic burden of the realist novel, which purported to reflect life as it really was" (471). Remarkable as "Prelude" is as a piece of revolutionary fiction, it overthrows "the aesthetic burden" of the realism but focuses on the fragmentary moments of life. For example, the moment in "Prelude" when Kezia seems to react to the questions of morality when she realizes the duck is dead, merely to be distracted by Pat's earrings. In regard of Mansfield's writing style, Gerri Kimber (2015) notes that "Mansfield's short stories develop over the course of time into 'slices of life'-glimpse into the lives of individuals, families, captured at a certain moment, frozen in time like a painting or a snapshot" (10). Additionally, Julia Van Gunsteren (1990) also perceives Mansfield's work as "brief, episodic and fragmentary" (22). Suffice to say that the short story "Prelude" marks Mansfield as a mature modernist writer.

Apart from the rich moment, modernists also emphasize the significance of revealing characters' inner world but not purely concentrating on the outer reality when they manage to shape the image of a character. Subsequently, this new trend is defined as modernism, and Candice Kent expounds that "[m]odernism is noted for shifting the emphasis from the external world to the internal, and for focusing on how the world is perceived by an individual mind" (3). Significantly, Mansfield's narration follows the flow as she focuses on depicting the characters' inner reality in "Prelude", in which the world is gazed at by the individual. Therefore, this writing style easily leads the overt plot to the psychiatric reading. For example, Beryl splits herself into two selves- the true and the false; Linda always resorts to the fantasy to distance herself from domestic chores. In this respect, the psychiatric reading obviously shows that the characters are suffering from mental health. Having said this, if it is further explored and related to the cultural context and author's biographical information, there exists a "covert progression" that is formed by the implied current of the overt plot (Shen 1). The covert progression and the overt textual movement direct to different ways in "Prelude". They interact but conflict each other. Namely, the intended meaning may subvert or supplement the surface meaning (Shen 1). In other words, the relationship between the intended meaning and the overt plot "fall into two basic categories: the subversive and the supplementary" (Shen 2). Simultaneously, it is critically significant to explore the covert progression of a text if there is. Otherwise, if a fictional narrative has dual movements but readers merely focus on the overt meaning, readers may "see a more flat or a distorted image of the characters

involved” (Shen, 26). In other words, further exploring the dual dynamics contributes to “complicate(ing) the audience’s response in various ways” (Shen, 1). Moreover, Shen emphasizes the significance of connecting with the cultural context and the author’s experience, for which is important to see a comprehensive picture and “complicate the audience’s response”. As far as the overt plot of “Prelude” is concerned, the overt psychiatric reading directs to a covert progression that refers to patriarchal censorship and social convention. At the same time, the covert progression of “Prelude” forms an undercurrent and runs parallel with the textual movement. To be more exact, the undercurrent resonates with the implied meaning behind the overt progression and subverts the seemingly psychiatric reading, but simultaneously running parallel with the thematic movement.

2. The Overt Psychiatric Reading

When it moves to the end of the short story-“Prelude”, the overt plot obviously leads readers to psychiatric reading as it reads:

No, that wasn’t true. She felt all those things, but she didn’t really feel them like that. It was her other self who had written that letter. It not only bored, it rather disgusted her real self. ‘Flippant and silly,’ said her real self. [...] She jumped up and half unconsciously, half consciously she drifted over the looking-glass. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 41)

Insofar as the overt plot, Beryl is suffering paranoia, and her splitting self gives rise to the concern of her mental health. In addition to this, the prevalence of Freud’s theory in the early modern time also orients the overt text toward the psychoanalytic reading as Mansfield is sufficiently influenced by his theory. Lorenzo Mari (2013) argues that “although Mansfield may not have been aware of Freud’s work before writing her short story, ‘How Pearl Button was kidnapped’”, she still integrates “Freudian scheme of the family romance” into her early works (64). Furthermore, another short story, “Psychology”, provides compelling evidence for Freud’s influence on her. Meanwhile, other details in “Prelude” also confirm psychological reading as Alice reads the Dream Book:

To dream of black-beetles drawing a horse is bad. Signifies death of one you hold near or dear, either father, husband, brother, son or intended [...] Alice dropped the knife and slipped the Dream Book under the butter-dish. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 41)

These details easily remind readers of Sigmund Freud’s masterpiece-*The Interpretation of Dreams*. Wendy (2006) perceives *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a “grounding breaking text [which] appeared in its first translations from the original German just before World War I; modernist writers’ inward turning and their preoccupation with personality and inner psychological processes reflect Freud’s early theories of the unconscious” (473). Anderson (2008) regards Beryl’s story as the story of the “double self” (69). Heather Murray (1990) criticizes that Beryl in “Prelude” “recognizes [...] the falseness of her letter to Nan; Beryl’s(her) true saves her for a time from the excesses of her other destructive self” (57). Shen (2014) also observes the explicit meaning of the overt plot that refers to “Beryl’s conscious awareness of the opposition between her false self and her real self” (21).

In addition to these psychological indications, psychoanalysis can also provide more persuasive evidence inasmuch as the true self and the false self are technical words when it is related to Donald Winnicott’s notion of the “False Self”. The False Self, from Winnicott’s view, “is closely bound up with the individual to live in an area that is intermediate between the dream and the reality” (*The Maturation Processes* 150). Winnicott’s statement implies that the subject in the state of False Self is incapable of figuring out the difference between reality and the illusion, intervening in the “intermediate” place. Beryl’s unstable psychological state is precisely coincident with Winnicott’s notion as she has herself been restricted by a hallucination, struggling with the real and the false. Subsequently, splitting Beryl suffers hysteria, and the real can see the false: ‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘I am so miserable- so frightfully miserable. I know that I’m silly and spiteful and vain; I’m always acting a part. I’m never my real self for a moment.’ And plainly, plainly, she saw her false self running up and down the stairs, laughing a special trilling laugh if they had visitors. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 42)

Seemingly, the overt plot displays Beryl’s mental suffering, which leads readers to Winnicott’s observation that refers to the subject that falls into the state of the False Self in which the subject takes himself as an actor and imagines himself as the other. The symptom that Beryl has had exactly echoes Winnicott’s statement that “who can be themselves and who loss when not in a role” (*The Maturation Processes* 150). According to the overt textual movement, Beryl does trap into the state of False Self and perceives herself as an actress. The unstable psychological state leads Beryl to do roleplay through a

mirror in which the false self and the real self crystalize into phantoms: '[w]hy must you suffer so?' said the face in the mirror. 'You were not made for suffering... Smile!' (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 28)

The overt plot suggests that the abnormal mental crisis is impending and even directed to the complex of narcissism since Beryl signed, "How beautiful she looked, but there was nobody to see, nobody" (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 27). According to some details of the short story, the overt plot apparently falls on the analysis of psychiatric reading.

3. The Covert Oppression behind the Overt Plot

However, when we further seek the deeper meaning of the overt plot and relate the psychiatric reading with the cultural background and Mansfield's biography or journal, the overt textual movement may orient toward the social conventions and phallogocentric oppression in the early 20th century. In this connection, we need to refer to the concept of "real author". From Shen's observation:

Our knowledge about the "real author" (involving the experiences of the person or the whole span of her life comes from various biographical and historical materials, while our knowledge about the implied author (on the occasion of writing that particular text) come from the text itself- the implied author's image is to be inferred from the "completed artistic" whole of that particular text. (14)

Shen explicitly explains the concept of "real author" as she thinks that studying "real author" is critically important to explore the covert progression of a text. Therefore, we need to move to social background when we manage to uncover the implicit meaning of the covert textual movement.

As both the expectant virgin and the huntress, Beryl is expected to fish a husband by family and the society, whereby she is kept within the restraints of social convention and familial expectation. As a result of the restraints, Beryl fantasies marrying "a young man" as it reads:

A young man, immensely rich, has arrived from England. He meets her quite by chance... The new governor is unmarried... There is a ball at government house Who is that exquisite creature in eau de nil satin? Beryl Fairfield... (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 41)

Despite the overt plot is apparently directed to the psychological reading, the implicit meaning is easily directed to social convention when it is bound up with contemporary social culture. The unmarried girl is commanded to marry, otherwise, she would be "social waster". Simone de Beauvoir responds to this, and she elaborates the significance of marriage from the view of gender since she states that "for girls, marriage is the way to integrated into the group, and if they are 'rejects', they are social waste" (453). Being constrained by the despicable social convention, Beryl is urged to get married, or she would become 'social waste'. The social forces exert a great negative effect on the young girl so much so that she suffers mental abuse and imagines the oppressor as the 'young man'. As regards the "young man", Anderson (2008) criticizes marriage oppression on the young girl as she claims that "Beryl's vision of the oppressor takes the shape of the "young man", something which may suggest "distance and is thus a reinforcing device in conveying the two characters' degrees of oppression" (67). Moreover, the aftermath of the social expectation gives rise to phantoms and the uncanny appearing in Beryl's illusion, which is supported by the voice of the letter that "seemed to come up to her from the page" (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 41). Being tortured by the illusion, Beryl splits herself into the real self and the false self. The splitting, from Winnicott's observation, is a protective mechanism. To protect the real self, the False Self "does by compliance with environmental demands" (147). Therefore, in order to adapt to the current cultural environment, Beryl forces herself to catch every chance to fish a husband. Simultaneously, False Self is found "a poor capacity for using symbols, and a poverty of cultural living" (*The Maturation Processes* 150). Beryl's failure to fish a husband exactly echoes Winnicott's observation that she fails to cater to the "cultural living", as a result, Beryl traps into fancy to escape the suppression from the outside world. In another word, Winnicott's notion partly expounds the reason why Beryl splits herself. In essence, Beryl's splitting may be traced back to the social expectation which imposes heavy pressure on Beryl's inner world. As a financially dependent woman, Beryl fails to get rid of the marriage crisis, whereby she splits herself and acts as an actress. Suffice to say that the splitting self can be assumed as a way for Beryl to escape the reality, shielding herself from the patriarchal gaze. In other words, the False Self can be viewed as a facial mask to protect the True Self. Consequently, the mask and the social censorship respectively form the dual textual movements-the overt progression and the covert movement.

Similarly, Linda also suffers mental hardships and intervenes between the reality and the illusion. However, different from Beryl, Linda mirrors a part of the reality back to her dream since she

monologizes, “[h]ow much more real this dream was than that they should go back to the house where the sleeping children lay and where Stanley and Beryl played cribbage” (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 38). Linda’s interior and psychological life confirms the female’s current plight. In keeping with Beryl’s psychological splitting, Linda is also in an unstable psychological state. Having said that, Linda is restricted by different social norms as the social expectation for a married woman is extremely different from the unmarried women. The married women who are to be known by their husband’s name lose their previous identity. Accordingly, Beauvoir (2011) criticizes that “[s]he takes his name; she joins his religion, integrates into his class, his world; she belongs to his family, she becomes his other ‘half’” (454). For example, Mrs. Fairfield is known by her husband’s name, Mr. Fairfield, furthermore, she is also identified as a grandmother and a mother. In doing so, it is apparent that Linda is struggling between the reality and the illusion under the patriarchal gaze. When we further explore the previous plot, Linda’s mental state is more explicit:

Now her arms were hardly wide enough to hold it and she dropped it into her apron. It had become a baby naked head and a gaping bird-mouth, opening and shutting. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 15)

From the explicit meaning, it can be inferred that Linda is suffering hysteria and imagining it (the bird) as a naked baby, which is exactly why the overt movement seemingly leads readers to psychoanalytical reading. Despite the overt progression orients toward Linda’s mental disorder, it is not so difficult to uncover the hidden progression when we follow Linda’s train of thought:

I shall go on having children and Stanley will go on making money and the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 30) Insofar as the text, Linda’s illusion implies her fear of childbearing. Afterwards, the fear retains in Linda’s inner reality and becomes a trauma that is torturing Linda. In regard of trauma, the overt plot still leads to psychiatric reading as Winnicott advances that the use of an object “involve[s] the nature and the behaviour of the object”, and the object “must necessarily be real in the sense of being part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections” (*The Use of Object* 712). In accordance with the theory, there are double implied meanings. Firstly, the object not only refers to a physical object but often concerns with an invisible one, including reminiscence, trauma. Secondly, the “shared reality” indicates that the object, whether the physical or the invisible, should be partially sensed as well as existed or happened in the past. In this respect, the fear of childbearing that is led by continuous childbearing did exist. As a matter of fact, Linda has had three daughters but no son. Social and familial expectation for a boy forces Linda to continue to bear babies, which imposes great pressure on Linda’s mental health so much so that she unconsciously reflects the fear of childbearing into her dream and imagine the bird as a child. The image (or object), as Clare Hanson clarifies, is “in relation to the unconscious” (*Re-reading the Short Story* 26). Hanson also quotes Lacanian thought to argue that “the image, as mental/visual manifestation, acts as a metaphor for-as substitute for- a repressed signifier” (*Re-reading the Short Story* 26). Subsequently, Hanson makes a conclusion that “[f]antasy points to a thing which do / may exist beyond the known real-the fantastic is not just an inversion of reality, that is, but works on the margins of reality, on the ‘dangerous edge’ of the unknown” (*Re-reading the Short Story* 26). Being supported by Hanson and Winnicott, it can be argued that Linda’s fantasy should be originated from the phallogocentric conventions though it is seemingly represented as psychological suffering. When the psychological suffering is engaged with the current sociohistorical context, childbirth is viewed as a public affair, but not merely a private affair as Beauvoir declares that “[s]he must give children to the community” (452). Beauvoir’s statement indicates that the community requires married women to abandon “the wish for individuality” (Gunsteren 132), which is another requirement from the male-dominated society for the married women. Namely, Linda is asked to continue to bear a boy, being gazed at by the phallogocentric world.

As regards the relationship between community and individuality, Linda is forced to abandon her wish for individuality and continue a boy for the family and the community. Heather Murray (1990) argues for Linda’s plight as he states that the community expects Linda to sacrifice her wish for individuality, but she is unwilling to make the sacrifice although her husband and children eat up her physical vitality (51). Moreover, Toby Silverman Zinman (1978) resonates with the childbirth fear and contends that “[s]ince Linda Burnell feels herself to be the victim of, among other things, childbearing, the dream is an expression of her fear, her feeling of betrayal and her defeat” (462). It is not an exaggeration to say that childbearing is not a choice but a basic task for a married woman to complete so much so that Linda has to sacrifice her wish. Concurrently, the childbearing is represented as traumatic memory in Linda’s inner world. Consequently, Gunsteren (1990) points out that “[i]n [...] ‘Prelude’ [...] a critical attitude can be found in Linda’s combined hatred for her husband and her family and her fear of childbirth” (132). In terms of the aftermath of the childbirth fear, Mary Burgon (1978) further argues for it, and she regards it as a problem that not only involves sexuality but also “a problem with existence

itself' (404). In this respect, we need to turn our head to Linda's husband, Stanley. As mentioned earlier, the fear of childbearing is oriented toward psychiatric reading. As a matter of fact, however, Linda's fear of sexuality also contributes to her hysteria as it reads:

There were times when he was frightening-really frightening-when she just had not screamed at the top of her voice: 'You are killing me.' And at those times she had longed to say the most coarse, hateful things. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 38,39)

In doing so, the fear of childbirth and sexuality inflict Linda so deeply that she wants to alienate herself from motherhood. Kate Fullbrook responds to Linda's alienation from motherhood as she agrees that "Linda is a victim of the myth of motherhood [...] She is caught by a culture that offers such nonsense to women as the whole of reality and then laughs at them for believing it" (80). From Fullbrook's criticism, it can be further interpreted from another level as the cultural ideology is significant for the "real author" to depict the image of a character. Shen also emphasizes that the sociohistorical context is significantly important to do the rhetorical study of fictional narrative (16). Therefore, when the overt progression in "Prelude" is bound up with social context, the implicit progression subverts the overt meaning. In other words, the overt plot should be more an issue of social convention or even gender crisis rather than psychiatry. Basically, the overt psychiatric reading offers a vital insight into the subversive impulses, complicating readers response to the short story.

Apart from the sociohistorical context, Shen also sheds a good deal of light on the significance of "biographical information". She thinks that "The rhetorical study of fictional narrative is in general marked by the preclusion of sociohistorical context of creation, especially the biographical information of the "real author" (16). According to Mansfield's journal, she wrote on 25th June 1907, "but money, money is what I need, and do not possess" (Journal 1962 16). Subsequently, addressing to her husband, Murry, on New Year's Day of 1915, Mansfield wrote that "[f]or this year I have two wishes: to write, to make money. Consider. With money we could go away as we liked, have a room in London, be as free as we liked, and independent and proud with nobodies. It is only poverty that holds us do tightly" (Journal 1954 64). On the one hand, it can be deduced that Mansfield may have been obsessed by financial plight for a long time. While, on the other hand, it can be surmised that the financial plight may make great contributions to the ambiguous writing that inadvertently conceals her anger for the reality as well as makes her writing cater to patriarchal norms. Suffice to say that Mansfield may be acknowledged as a commercial writer. Jenny McDonnell confirms this, and she perceives Mansfield's as a commercial writer in Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace: At the of the Public. McDonnell thinks that Mansfield "locates her stories in the commercial and publication contexts in which they were produced and emphasizing the ways in which she actively sought to earn a living by writing" (4). In addition, Clair Tomalin also suggests that Mansfield "saw herself as a professional, writing for money, always trying to learn from the work of other writers, aware of her own limitations and dissatisfied with her own best efforts" (214). In doing so, Mansfield, as a female modern writer, manages to embed her wish into her writing as Beryl in "Prelude" also has a wish and fancies that "if only she had money of her own" (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 14). This writing style, in a sense, makes her get the payment and mystically conveys her wish to refrain from financial plight, being an "independent" writer. The relationship between money and writing easily leads to Virgin Woolf's well-known statement, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write" (4). It is acknowledged by Woolf that money and space are strikingly important for a "pure" female writer to compose. However, being thwarted by the financial constraints, Mansfield fails to be an independent writer. Her writing is need of catering to the commercial market. Thereupon, she has to employ an elusive way to get payment as well as vent her anxiety.

4. Ambiguous Writing in Covert Progression

In the light of the ambiguity, Mansfield applies the capital letters-THEY in Chapter five in "Prelude". From the overt plot, the explicit meaning of 'THEY' may point to the 'birds' in her dream as Linda "dreamed about birds last night" (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 18). Nonetheless, when it shifts from the dream to Linda's inner consciousness, the vague word is crystallized as the "sly" man:

Sometimes, when she had fallen asleep in the daytime, she woke and could not lift a finger, could not even turn her eyes to left or right because THEY were there; sometimes when she went out of a room and left it empty, she knew as she clicked the door to that THEY were filling it. And there were times in the evenings when she was upstairs, perhaps, and everybody else was down, when she could hardly escape from them. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 18)

Following Linda's train of thought, at one level, the transformation of focalization from 'she' to 'THEY' ironically changes Linda's identity—from the gazer to the gazed at (Casertano 102). However, on another level, the implicit meaning of the ambiguous word shifts the "sly" man to the masculine oppressors who are the tyrants of the phallogocentric sovereignty and gazing at Linda. At the same time, the shift exposes Linda's unrestful emotional life and confirms the female's current dilemma. The dilemma refers to the female desire to escape from the reality but are unable to do so as the limitation of finance and cultural convention. Furthermore, the repeated "THEY" further sheds light on the powerful oppression from the outside world. Hence, being gazed at by the outer reality, Linda keeps with Beryl and traps into an unstable psychological state as well. These psychological moments represent female figures as the "downtrodden" women, which is precisely echoed by Gerri Kimber as she summarizes:

Mansfield rarely wavered from the essential tenets expressed in these few sentences, and in one story after another we see her expose the way women are downtrodden and used by men be it their fathers or their husbands—with money, or the lack of it, often a central issue. (47)

Being "downtrodden" female characters, Beryl is constrained by social and familial expectations as well as money, while Linda submits herself to the convention of marriage and childbirth. Simultaneously, the patriarchal society in the early 20th century disparages the "downtrodden" women as inferior civilians, and the male should occupy the central position. Beauvoir responds to this point as she states that a girl is "physically and morally has become inferior boys and incapable of competing with them" (353). As regards the gender issue, Mansfield also implicitly criticizes this via Stanley's monologue:

Isabel and Lottie sat one on either side of the table, Kezia at the bottom— the place at the top was empty. "That's where my boy ought to sit," thought Stanley. (Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* 27)

According to Stanley's monologue, it is obvious that he thinks boys should occupy the top place, while girls should be edged out of the mainstream. At the same time, in virtue of the influence from the Russian writer, Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield adopted the form of the short story which may also contribute to echoing female's edged position. Hanson clarifies the dynamic development of the short story:

I would suggest that the short story has been from its inception a particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression of the ex-centric, alienated vision of women. It is striking, for example to see the way in which the early 'modern' short story, in the form of the psychological sketch was taken over by women writers during the era of the New Women of the 1880s and the 1890s. (*Re-Reading the Short Stories* 3)

Hanson suggests that the short story becomes the priority for female writers to write in the *Fin de Si ècle*. In another book, Hanson further elucidates its development. He defines the short as a literary genre and comments that "both formally and in terms of its traditional content, has always been marginal and fragmented" (*Gender of modernism* 300). As far as Hanson's statement is concerned, the short story turns on its head as well as deviates from the traditional convention of short fiction. As regard the deviation, Hanson continues to expound:

The short story is a form of exclusion and implication its technical working mirror its ideological bias, its tendency towards the expression of that which is marginal or ex-centric to society. (*Gender of Modernism* 300)

It can be deduced that the female modernist who writes short stories may hinge on its marginal position. They skillfully adopt the "edged" literary genre to echo women second-class status in the early 20th century. The marginalization may confirm Mansfield's choice of writing the short stories as she is also a "downtrodden" writer who concedes to the patriarchal norm employing ambiguous writing.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that both ambiguous writing and cultural conventions embodied in the overt fictional narrative. Whereby, the explicit textual movement presents the submissive female and concentrates on the characters' psychological life, leading to the psychiatric reading. However, these psychological moments in daily life unintentionally uncover social convention and gender crisis, which forms the undercurrent that runs with the thematic movement. Coincidentally, the covert progression deals with the main themes of Mansfield's work "the question of life" or "the unpleasantness". Conversely, the main themes precisely respond to the undercurrent behind the seeming psychological reading. Therefore, being deduced from the relationship of the covert and the overt, it can be assumed that the covert progression subverts the overt meaning as the hidden patriarchal oppression runs with the textual

movement, contradicts the seeming psychological reading.

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