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| **KM** | **“Pictures” (1919),**  **by Katherine Mansfield (1888 – 1923)**  **CORRECTION** |

**Katherine Mansfield.**

* Born in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1888 and died in Fontainebleau in 1923
* Came to London for the latter part of her education, and could not settle back in Wellington society (was appalled at the way the Maori people were treated + grew tired of the kiwi way of life), left in 1908 for Europe, never to return.
* First stories published in *The New Age*, a socialist magazine. She became a regular contributor.
* 1911: first book published, titled *In a German Pension*.
* 1912: began to write for *Rhythm*, edited by John Middleton Murry, whom she ultimately married.
* Usually associated with the modernist movement, and actually closely associated with the Bloomsbury group (a group of writers and intellectuals living and working near Bloomsbury, London). She was friends with D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf.
* 1918: published her short story “Prelude” and developed a taste for this form. Unfortunately, she contracted tuberculosis in 1917, and died 6 years later, leaving collections of short stories, some published posthumously.

**“Pictures”**

Very short short story = Ada Moss, heroine, whom we understand is a contralto singer, but is desperate for a part in a movie. Penniless, she lives a Bohemian life, and goes from failure to failure, despite the fact that the play on focalization allows for a multiplicity of realities to emerge (her delusion vs. reality).

Here, beginning of the story: reader knows nothing about her = a heroin or anti-heroin? A scene that should help us decide, but still leaves us unsure.

* As the text toys with points of view and seems to hesitate between a harsh realism and escapism into a more beautiful, fantasy world, we are left to wonder what the realest “picture” (cf title) is.
* To what extent does this text, through the portrayal of Ada Moss, both mock and rehabilitate delusion?

1. **Waking up in a grim reality.**

* Cf characterized by its heaviness “black iron bedstead”. Onomastics: “Miss” = unmarried (one of the stakes in the novel) / Ada = palindrome => absurd condition / “Moss” = morbid stasis… confirmed by her position “lay” (+ ominous?). Ominous title as well = “Pictures” // Picture of Dorian Gray (K. Mansfield a great reader of Wilde => pic-tuer).
* Omniscient narrator that immediately adopts Ada’s point of view (literally” view” = “staring up”) = from zero focalization to internal one.
* Clues to Bohemian life: feeds on fried potatoes + smell of soot + “so cold” (intensive) = Dickensian life.
* Nostalgia “in the old days”; negative portrait = depicted by what she’s not (reader-investigator gradually understands degree of denial = 11 ‘It’s not as if I was skinny-I’m just the same full figure as I used to be” => euphemism). // “the letter you’d been expecting” =>
* Failed actress, even in front of her landlady who is not taken in
* Cruelty “My lady” = italics = antiphrasis => she is no lady (can’t pay for her rent). From beginning to end of the scene => character worse off.

1. **The temptation of escapism: derealisation and delusion.**

* “soot and face powder” = oxymoron? A text whose modus operandi makes us switch back and forth from tragedy to comedy (tragicomic, but hesitation… A tragicomedy is a tragedy that ends well = ominous (prostitution or love at the end?) => little touches to create a blurry, general image. Impressionnistic technique => reader at-a-loss, can’t find clear bearings / Impressionistic also because it reads like perceptions prevail, in a reality that is depicted by its fragments.
* “back” = “like a sheet of ice” => comparison => gradually entering an alternate reality where poetry is possible.
* Dreams // theatre (“pageant”) => something childish in her flight of fancy, because elike children, dreams of what she needs (not desire) => childish pr of view throughout. Almost grotesque = “shepherded by an enormous, white, uncut ham” (mock-heroic: Biblicul undertones of “shepherded” but applied to “ham”).
* Denial = “disappeared under the bedclothes”.
* “in bounced the landlady” = theatrical, coup de theatre // like a film? A ridiculous “Jack-in-the-box” (cf “bounce”) => comical, arrives right after “ham”. She’s a stock character (periphrasis “the landlady”, nagging landlady // Roald Dahl’s short story), cartoonesque (her eyes “popped”; cf childish outlook on the scene); almost like a puppet, a ventriloquist (cf quotes other people’s words in direct speech; occupies the space to drown her guilt at asking for her rent?).
* Brings in a letter = *deus ex machina*. At this stage = genre of this short story? Letter = *topos* of romance?

=> but this escapism fails as well = a text in which a dreamy character receives a reality check = still, does it completely condemn and mock delusion?

1. **The reader-judge/philosopher = is delusion as a necessary evil? The structure of fiction.**

* Hard to condemn of completely mock Ada (which would lead us to identify with Mrs Pine), but hard not to understand Mrs Pine’s materialistic concerns => a moral dilemma. Reader placed in such an uncomfortable position: if comical, set in a harsh reality; if depressing, always a moment of comic relief, and can’t help smiling.

(R. Char: “Au plus fort de l'orage, il y a toujours un oiseau pour nous rassurer. C'est l'oiseau inconnu, il chante avant de s'envoler).

* For ex: politeness => varnish of conventions, semblance that through the narrator’s or Mrs Pine’s point of view is “far too friendly” (25) => politeness and civility as a necessary evil? What living in society implies. All the guilt that goes with it (cf lengthy justification Mrs Pine gives to get her rent).
* In this world where what we’re being “told” seems to be constantly questionable, the Written Word holds a special value, *mis en abyme* here in the form of the letter. For the reader-investigator-judge, it becomes evidence that Ada has failed what is probably not her first audition = harsh reality check => the sender didn’t bother to write full sentences (again tragi-comic: “backwash” = ironic onomastics = backlash / but style is a clue to the fact that such letters are sent by the dozens, just like Ada is one among many applicants) = reader-investigator.
* The letter is also called “evidence” by Mrs Pine = can rely on it, provides safe moorings for her. But Mrs Pine is *mise en abyme* = in a Shakespearian reversal => beyond the reality described => truth. Is our position like Mrs Pine’s? Are we also deluded by the written word? What is the status of such “evidence”?
* Modernist beginning but with a distance, with a twist, since the text allows space for fiction. Derealisation of the characters = no “stream of consciousness” by which we completely embrace the character’s thoughts as if they were actual people.
* A text that can be read as a lesson in seeing => impressionist insofar as it “asserts the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding” // Like Marlow in HofDarkness => presentation of how much we **cannot** know.
* Text that can be read as a lesson in reading, that places a mirror in front of the reader (“All the world is but a stage” = theatrical and slightly melancholy, just like Jaques in As You Like It) => lesson in hermeneutics = questions the status of lies (necessary relief to escape a grim reality), reality and fiction (are we also escaping by reading fiction, a short story?), and truth (Lacan: “la vérité a structure de fiction” => fiction might be truer than reality).