



“THE DIGNITY OF DEATH”: DEATH IN KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S “THE GARDEN PARTY” AND DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE'S “ODOUR OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS”

“ÖLÜMÜN YÜCELİĞİ”: KATHERINE MANSFIELD'İN “BAHÇE PARTİSİ” VE DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE'İN “KRİZANTEM KOKUSU” ADLI ÖYKÜLERİNDE ÖLÜM

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore how the dead body is employed as a structural device in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and David Herbert Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" in order to create a climactic revelation whereby the female characters gain awareness and a new understanding into the realities and illusions of their life, their social positions and the essence of human nature. This paper also argues that the dead body functions to unveil that the female protagonists are oppressed within the confines of feminine roles prescribed by the patriarchal and class-based society and thus, stripped of their essence.

Öz

Bu makale, Katherine Mansfield'in "Bahçe Partisi" ve D.H. Lawrence'ın "Krizantem Kokusu" adlı öykülerinde, kadın karakterlerin hayatlarının gerçeklerine ve yanılsamalarına, toplumsal durumlarına ve insan doğasının özüne yeni bir anlayış ve farkındalık kazanmalarını sağlayan aydınlanma anlarını vurgulamak için, ölü beden hikaye yapısı içerisinde nasıl kullanıldığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu makale ayrıca ölü beden, kadın karakterlerin ataerkil ve sınıf bazlı toplum tarafından belirlenen cinsiyet rolleri yüzünden baskılanmasını ve böylelikle, kendi benliklerinden kopmalarını açığa çıkardığını vurgulamaktadır.

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Introduction

The long-standing friendship between Katherine Mansfield and David Herbert Lawrence, spoiled by the personal frictions, and their interacting yet critical literary stances have been an issue of interest for their biographers and critics. Some scholars maintain that Lawrence based some characters on Mansfield in his short stories including "The Border Line" (1924) and "Jimmy and the Desperate Woman" (1924) and in his novels such as *Mother and Daughter* (1929), *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920). Some state that Mansfield's short stories offer a direct criticism against Lawrence's ideas of gender and love. Carol Siegel concisely summarizes the nature of their relationship: "To Mansfield, Lawrence was a rival with whom she was compelled to struggle and a powerful thinker whose dangerous philosophy she must refute" (299). Mansfield, sharing the same self-consciousness with Woolf, has a deep

interest in reflecting “*the oppressive construction of femaleness*” and, accordingly, both develop the aesthetic values and theories to form feminine style of writing, which attempts to go beyond the features of writing associated with “*male arrogance and egotism*”, “*aesthetic sterility and didacticism*” and “*the material, the visible, and the phallic*” (Morgan 16). In this respect, Mansfield perpetually “*castigates her contemporaries for their “peculiar male dominance” and for committing the artistic “sin” of didacticism. In contrast to Chekhov, for example, whom Mansfield praises for teaching her “to put the question,” Lawrence “begs the question” when “he gets on to the subject of maleness*” (16-17). Virginia Woolf also criticizes Lawrence for “*a lack of decorum in treating sexual matters*” and for his accentuating of sex (Siegel 295).

Depending upon Mansfield’s critique of Lawrence’s fiction in terms of masculinity, the critics highlight their polarized treatment of gender and sex in their literary works. Mansfield and Lawrence are depicted as the opponents who engage in the sex war. However, this view has been challenged by some critics. In contrast to the general view that Lawrence’s fiction reinforces the values of female subordination, Gilbert argues that Lawrence’s narration does not reflect any sense of authoritativeness on “*the patriarchal modes*” and “*tradition*” (xii). Gilbert states:

Even at his most overtly masculinist, I sensed that Lawrence did not quite fit into what I’d call the “patriarchal modes” ... He didn’t pontificate about “tradition”. He didn’t lecture about “law” or “form”. Scrupulous artist though he was, he didn’t have grandiose and authoritative authorial intentions. (xii)

The reason that lies behind Lawrence’s rejection of the traditional values is that just like Katherine Mansfield, as a traveller and radical, Lawrence incessantly struggles to break free with the socially-imposed roles and the hierarchy (Gilbert xvi). Lawrence and Mansfield’s desire to search beyond “*the veil of domesticated social roles*” finds its expression in their literary works (Reid 150). Carol Siegel states that fiction of Lawrence and Mansfield is concerned with “*the failure of language to connect men and women and the female to escape from constricting social roles*” (310). Susan Reid maintains that Lawrence and Mansfield’s literary works frequently criticize “*the separate spheres of women and men imposed by the obligations of child-bearing and economic endeavour*” (149). As the son of the coal miner, Lawrence, who never disclaimed his working-class background even when he was married to a bourgeois woman, portrays the oppressed wives of the coal miners more than the upper-class women (Gilbert xvi). Indeed, Sandra Gilbert states that the narrative discourse in his literary works focuses on “*female primacy, male secondariness*” as traceable in *Sons*

and Lovers, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* where the construction of male characters prioritize feminine issues in multiplied ways (xvii). On that note, it is noteworthy to argue that rejecting the socially-constructed gender roles, fiction of Mansfield and Lawrence foregrounds the difficulties and oppression that the female characters encounter due to the imposition of patriarchal conceptions of femaleness and class division. This is specifically prominent in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and D. H. Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums" where Mansfield and Lawrence employ the dead body which functions as a catalyst to lead the female characters to reflect upon their experiences of the restrictive feminine roles determined by class-based norms of society.

The female protagonists, Laura in "The Garden Party" and Elizabeth in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" are positioned in "[t]he world of everydayness which involves man in its structure and requires the performance of certain social functions, the adaption of expected modes of behaviour" (Kubasiewicz 54). They unquestioningly accept the views and behaviours of the others and act in accordance with the accepted values of the society in which they live. They perform the roles imposed on them by society to such an extent that they become disconnected from the truth of their situations and allow others define their social position. Concordantly, they turn into passive and acquiescing implementers of the conventions of the society. In order for the characters to discover how they are imprisoned in their roles, they experience extreme situations that provide an opportunity to question the socially accepted values and customs and to escape from the determined codes of conduct and manner. For both writers, the confrontation with the momentous occasion is provided by the body which "may sometimes act as a catalyst for a new way of living, the conduit for awakening into a different world" (Reid 156). Mansfield in "The Garden Party" and Lawrence in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" foreground the dead male body to dramatize the traumatic experiences of the female characters whose confrontation with death leads to their realization that their life is dominated by the undertones of self-alienation, and emotional and spiritual deprivation. They become aware that their unquestioning attitudes towards the dictations of social norms and the class differences blind them to their essential being, as well as to the truth about their position and the ephemerality and immanence of the material world they live in. On that line, this study offers an examination of how death operates in the fictional world of Mansfield and Lawrence's short stories with an emphasis on the fact that the presence of the dead body prompts the female characters to express their dissatisfaction with the feminine roles enforced by the class-based society.

In relation to how death is represented in literature, Joseph Carroll maintains that while the fictionalization of death provides an insight into its nature which remains still inexplicable and intriguing, it also articulates the subjective experience of the feelings and thoughts that arise out of the existence and awareness of death (138). Death is an unavoidable biological phenomenon which “*excites the human imagination*” to imagine something that is infinitude, unknown and unimaginable and incites a sense of wonder as to “*the meaning and value of a life*” (Carroll 137). Given that the awareness of death stimulates the human imagination to retrieve the lived past, produce the feelings and thoughts in relation to the deceased one, and project the future life with its absence, it is noteworthy to state that responses to death take various forms. Death may engender fear, sadness, pity, avoidance and uncertainty at emotional level and can be associated with a desire to refrain from pain, “*an anticipation of encountering some sublime mystery or renewing ties with lost loved ones, a willingness to sacrifice oneself for some greater good, an increased appreciation for life in all its brevity, cold detachment bordering on indifference, or simple acceptance because death is part of the natural process of life*” (Carroll 143). In line with what has been stated concerning death, it is worth noting that while death is used to create the feelings of fear, sadness, pain and pity in Mansfield’s “The Garden Party” and Lawrence’s “Odour of Chrysanthemums”, it also brings to life the social restraints to which the female characters are subjected and their existential angst concerning the validity of life.

Outi Hakola and Sari Kivistö, in the introductory part of *Death in Literature*, underline some crucial points concerning the functions of death within the narrative structure of literary works. They state that death has “*narrative power*” with its efficiency of changing the state from being to non-being, from activity to passivity, influencing both the characters and the flow of the story as well (x). Death can be utilised to unfold the plot or develop multi-layered storylines yet, it is more widely used “*as closure to emphasize its meaning and importance*” (x). Individual death that comes at the final stage offers an ending to the storylines and restores the chaos or the disorder. Through resolving anxieties and problems, it can also offer a kind of revelation and discovery. Expanding upon this view, it can be argued that the transition from life to death provides narrative closure in Mansfield’s “The Garden Party” and Lawrence’s “Odour of Chrysanthemums”, creating a climactic revelation of the conflicts that operate on social and existential levels. At the crux of the short stories of both writers lies the juxtaposition of life with death, so the narration takes a gradual turn to the peak point where the characters’ encounter with the dead body

so profoundly influences them that they attain a new point of view towards their lives and their positions in the society. The female protagonists in both short stories arise from their lethargic situation into a state of realization to weigh up their lives in a patriarchal class-based society that is both stifling and suffocating and they ponder over the transience of life. Through their newly-acquired line of vision, the characters grasp the depth of reality and the illusion, life and death, materiality and spirituality. In this respect, it is noteworthy to state that the construction of death mimics the reality of life experience and creates moments of anagnorisis which occur after death. Death that comes at the end within the slow pace of the storylines also mimics the shortness of life, and thus, contributes much to the structural consistency with thematic undercurrent of the futility of life. This paper, therefore, intends to explore how death is structured in the short stories of Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence to reconceptualise the truth in relation to the social and economic position of women in a class-based society. It also examines how death functions as a tool to underline temporariness and shortness of life.

The Dead Body in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party"

Published in 1922, Mansfield's story collection, *The Garden Party and the Other Stories*, where modernist narrative techniques are skilfully implemented, proves to be the work of Mansfield's maturity as a writer with her writing dexterity, iconoclastic narrative style and her absolute economy of words. In her desire to problematize the class issues, Katherine Mansfield in "The Garden Party" portrays a character from the upper class who takes a journey into the world of the working class to find out the futility of class differences. Confined in a luxurious upper class garden isolated from the world around Sheridan family, the little girl Laura Sheridan, the central character, is grown up unaware of the working-class environment. Throughout the short story, Laura is put under certain tests to go beyond the invisible wall between the upper class and the working class, thus, becomes the reconciler between these two clashing worlds. To make Laura's experience more poignant, the realities of the external world in the short story are presented to the readers from the perspective of Laura Sheridan with a specific focus on her inner feelings and private world.

Crucial to the structure of the short story is the clash between the upper-class world and the working-class world. At the beginning of the short story, it is underlined that Sheridans' house is situated on a hill. The garden party creates a festive scene of consumption with good food and drink, smart dresses and beautiful

and expensive flowers. The setting of the working-class men contradicts with the world of the upper-class:

That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road run between them. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys. (957).

The description of the two worlds is very significant to unveil the great differences between the two classes' standards of living and to understand the social circles in which Laura is brought up and educated. Within the boundaries of the garden, Laura experiences the process where she attains the attitudes and manners of her class by giving orders to the working men and servants, arranging the flowers and using the language of the upper class and adopting proper manners. In this process, Laura imitates her mother by copying her voice and her manner and accepting her mother's beliefs and thought. This demonstrates that Mrs. Sheridan, the powerful representative of the upper-class values, indoctrinates her daughter into embracing the values and ideology of her own social class. Considering the education Mrs. Sheridan has given to Laura about the ideological norms of her class, it is tempting to suggest that Mrs. Sheridan was educated in the same way and thus, internalizes and upholds the values and norms of the upper class. Under the influence of the impositions of her class, Laura cannot reject the settled views of her class concerning class distinctions and assert her own values and put them into practice. This situation leads Laura to waver between her learned social self and her real self, which can be traced in the scenes where she is torn between following the restrictive social customs of her class and rejecting the internalized notions of class divisions to embrace her own ideas and belief and act freely.

Laura's experimentation with the working-class world is signalled by her understanding of social class defined by the values and conventions of her family. Laura's first confrontation with the lower-class world occurs when she establishes a relationship with the workmen who will put up the marquee for the garden party. Laura's meeting with the working men is underlined by her feeling of embarrassment

caused by her duplication of the voice of her mother. Laura's mimicking her mother's voice underlines the fact that Laura acts in accordance with the values imposed upon her by her mother. Laura's relationship with the workmen demonstrates that class distinctions fade away since Laura regards the working men as equal. Laura says, "*They looked impressive*" and the smile of the working men makes Laura think "*How very nice workmen were!*" (952). The congeniality of the workmen is reflected through the language of the working class, a situation which can be traced at the moment when they call each other "*matey*" (953). This intense moment of experience is interrupted by her evaluation of the language of the working men; when one of the workmen offers a place to set up the marquee, "*Laura's upbringing made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye*" (952). At this moment, her reaction to the linguistic preference of the workman demonstrates that she judges the vulgarity of the other class in accordance with the linguistic patterns of the upper class, that is, she is still embracing the linguistic structures she has learnt from her family. Laura is also impressed by the intense warmth of the aesthetic moment where one of the workmen enjoys caring the lavender for its smell: "*Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like these*" (953). Deeply moved by the friendliness and candid smiles of the workmen, Laura feels like "*a work-girl*", thinking that "*[i]t's all fault, ..., of these absurd class distinctions. Well, for her part, she didn't feel them*" (953). Laura's intercourse with the workmen is not acceptable within the spheres of the upper-class world since her interaction remains incomplete when she is called back to the upper-class world through a voice asking her to take a telephone call. Even the temporary process of her direct involvement with the working-class world is vital in that Laura, though she does not completely leave aside her prejudices, starts to develop an understanding towards people from the lower class. In that sense, it is important to state that her initiation to get knowledge gives her a sense of her "*unlearned essence*" which is untouched and unspoilt by the social norms and conventions (Kaya 56).

The ideological mores of the upper-class society internalized by Laura's family, especially her mother shape her ideas and beliefs and thus, influencing her perception of the events and thus, her attitude and behaviour. Laura learns from Godber's man that a young carter, Scott, living in the little cottages below, dies in an accident. Shaken tremendously with the news of death, Laura does not have the heart to continue the party and asks her family to cancel it for the reason that continuing

the party will make them heartless towards their neighbour whose house is close enough for the sound of the band to be heard. Yet her family members are dumbfounded to find her idea ridiculous, absurd and extravagant on the grounds that stopping the band just because of the death of a lower-class man will destroy the enjoyment of others. Her family members strongly resist her; her sister claims that *“If you are going to stop a band playing every time some one has an accident, you’ll lead a very strenuous life”* and furthers that *“[y]ou won’t bring a drunken man back to life by being sentimental”* (957). When Laura goes to her mother’s room to tell the news, she firstly asks whether it happened in the garden and she takes a deep breath when she learns that it did not, a situation that demonstrates the death of the carter does not matter for her. Since cancelling a party is *“outside Mrs. Sheridan’s cultural repertoire, made up of the ideology and practices of the genteel bourgeoisie to which she has full participatory access”*, she tries to take Laura’s attention away from the death (Kaya 56). Later, upon Laura’s insistence to stop the party, Mrs. Sheridan loses her patience: *“You are being very absurd, Laura... [p]eople like that don’t expect sacrifices from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody’s enjoyment as you’re doing now”* (958). Mrs. Sheridan’s manner underlines the fact that pleasure is more important than anything -even death, and the workers do not expect anything from the upper class since they solve out their problems on their own. Mrs. Sheridan’s statement is a clear indication of the fact that she prioritizes the expectations and ideology of her class and also her expression testifies to how incorrectly she educates Laura concerning class structures. On that note, it is worth noting that Mrs. Sheridan uses events that almost destroy the party to *“move her daughter from a mildly rebellious adolescence to a young-womanhood that does not question the status quo”* (Atkinson 54). Wearing the hat that her mother gave to distract her, Laura leaves the room, stating that she does not understand.

In her bedroom, when Laura sees her image in *“her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon”* she thinks that her mother is right (958). Her mother’s hat has such a profound impact upon her that the sight of the dead body of the carter that dominates her thoughts seems blurred and meaningless: *“Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper”* (958). Upon seeing Laurie, she remembers the accident and wants to tell it to him since *“[i]f Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right”* (958). Yet, she avoids mentioning it as soon as Laurie praises her appearance in her hat: *“My word, Laura; You do look stunning, ... What an absolutely topping hat!”* (958).

Though Laura is at first oscillating between what she feels internally and the social conventions of her class, she does not reconcile the idea of the party with death and obeys what her mother wants her to do as is foreshadowed through her wearing of her mother's hat and appreciating herself in front of the mirror. In this respect, the hat symbolizes the privileges and snobbery of her class. Moreover, her mother's placing the hat on her head means that she, in metaphorical sense, injects in her daughter the restrictions of her class from which Laura cannot escape since she is not powerful enough to resist her mother and others.

The fact that Laura experiences enlightenment concerning the truth of class structures and the reality of life is intensified with her reaction towards the manner of her family and her encounter with the countenance of the dead body at the last stage, which will be explored in more detail below. After the party is over, the family members come together for the coffee. When the father mentions the tragic end of the carter, Mrs. Sheridan tells him that she is aware of the accident and it nearly spoils their party since Laura shows insistence to delay the party. Partly because she wants to get rid of the leftover or partly because she wants to compensate for her heartless attitude, Mrs. Sheridan decides to send a basket full of good food with Laura, who hesitates to take it to the grieving woman: *"But, mother, do you think it's a good idea?"* (959). At this moment, as we are told, Laura seems different from the other family members since she starts to question the manner of her mother: *"To take the scraps from their party. Would the poor woman really like that?"* (959).

Unable to stand against her mother's insistence, Laura takes the full basket and starts her journey from the bright, glittering and prosperous world to the gloomy, dark, inanimate and abysmal world of the working class. While crossing the broad road, symbol of the huge disparity between two classes and of the transition from life to death as well, Laura notices how shiny her dress is and she greatly regrets coming to this place with such a resplendent cloth. Laura becomes nervous and wants *"[t]o be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women's shawls even"* (960). Once entering into the house, she confronts a completely different world which is stricken by death, poverty and grief. She sees the dead man's wife who is overwhelmed by grief and sadness as can be understood from her terrible look with *"her face, puffed up, red, swollen eyes and swollen lips"* (961). Laura desires to leave the house immediately yet she is driven away to the room where the dead body has been lying. Feeling fear, Laura looks at the lying dead body *"sleeping so soundly, so*

deeply... so remote, so peaceful" that he has transcended beyond the physical world (961):

He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed, they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy... happy... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content. (961)*

Laura, facing the dead body, cries and apologizes for wearing her hat: "*Forgive my hat*" (961). Stepping out of the house, she meets Laurie at the corner of the lane, and when Laurie asks her if it is awful or not, Laura, not finding the suitable words to express her experience, stammers "*Isn't life*" (962). Though she cannot clearly express what she means her brother quite understands and asks "*Isn't it, darling?*" (962).

There has been no consensus among the critics as to what Laura has learned from her experience of seeing the dead body and what Laurie understands from her truncated question. The ambiguous ending of the story has generated controversy among the critics of "The Garden Party" concerning the manifestation of Laura's psychological and intellectual regeneration triggered by her encounter with the dead body of the carter. Warren Walker maintains that the ending of the story "*leaves readers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a vague sense that the story does not*

* Some critics examined "The Garden Party" within the context of war by highlighting that though the story does not directly make any references to the war, the figment of the sight of the dead body stems from Mansfield's painful sense of loss. The touching scene of Laura's vision of the dead body becomes more poignant when it unveils Mansfield's grief at the loss of her brother, Leslie, who died in a grenade training accident in 1915. Laura's surveillance gaze over the dead body renders it neutral and aestheticized since this body creates an image of beauty, peacefulness, wholeness and stillness in contrast to the disfigured and mutilated casualty, which "assuage the anxieties that the war raises-not merely for Mansfield, but for an entire society- about the vulnerability of the male body to violence" (Darrohn 520). In this respect, the story can be read as "a private memorialisation of her brother" and she finds comfort and consolation in the fictional construction of the dead body which creates peacefulness, calmness and happiness (Edwards 5). For an extensive analysis of how the war is related to the dead body in the story, see Stephen Edwards's "Katherine Mansfield and the Trauma of War: Death, Memory and Forgetting in "An Indiscreet Journey", "The Garden Party", "At the Bay", "Six Years After" and "The Fly" and Christine Darrohn's "BlownTo Bits": Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden-Party" And The Great War".

somehow realize its potential" (354). Laura's inexpressibility of her experiences at the end of the story has been interpreted in the way that she cannot break free with the norms and prejudices of her class, largely because she will return to her old world where the hegemony of the upper-class conventions which determines the propriety of language and social roles still persists to impede her from expressing her newly-acquired vision of life and class structures. Christine Darrohn maintains that in "The Garden Party", Mansfield *"tries to imagine a moment when class and gender divisions cease to matter"* but *"ultimately she cannot sustain this hopeful vision"* (516). Whether Laura rejects the socially accepted norms remains unanswered since the story does not provide any clues; however, as William Atkinson states, it is clear that Laura attains awareness of her condition though *"the narrative voice does not validate her conclusions"* (54-55). To accept that Laura's subsiding into silence demonstrates her incomprehensibility of the experience would be to disregard or downplay the significance of her previous experience with the working-class world. Laura experiments with the simplicity, sincerity and spontaneity of the working-class to despise *"absurd class distinctions"* and the *"stupid conventions"* of her class (Mansfield 953) and questions the propriety of the manners of the upper-class as is traced in the cases of cancelation of the party and the delivery of the food to the poor household. Admittedly, the way that Laura perceives and appreciates the dead body and responses to its magnitude is directly related to her previous experiences with the working men in the garden.

When going down to the lane where the dead body lies, Laura feels herself free for the first time to control her actions and use language since she is away from the social restrictions. Her transition from the extravagant and boisterous garden – the Garden of Eden- to the lane- the underworld- ridden with misery, pain, disease and poverty enables her to perceive the dead body and attribute a meaning to its existence. With her inspecting gaze, Laura neutralises death by *"transforming it into benign sleep"* which metaphorically connotes peacefulness, beauty and neutrality (Atkinson 59). The world of the dead as peaceful, beautiful and neutral lies in contrast to the world of the garden which symbolizes the quick, incessant and buoyant life with its social hierarchy and customs. Following the garden party comes *"the most restful moment when a working class man is defined not by any commodity but rather by "the insight into life that he seems to embody"* (Darrohn 524). The dead carter would hardly be concerned with the garden parties, the baskets of food, lace frocks which symbolize the huge gap between the working-class and the upper-class. In this way, through the neutrality of the dead body, which is immune to the requirements of the

materialistic world, it is highlighted that class distinction that prevails the world of the living soul does mean nothing and thereby, class distinctions are repudiated. In this respect, it is tempting to suggest that Laura, who observes that the dead body is far from being a materialistic entity with its disconnection from the materialistic inclinations of the society, gains insight about the insignificance of class division. In this way, it can be argued that Laura's confrontation with the dead body dramatizes the validation of the tacit inferences in relation to the absurdity of class divisions which Laura draws from her previous experimentation with the working-class men during the preparations of the garden party.

The fact that Laura realizes the true nature of the social class hierarchy is featured in the scene where she apologizes for wearing the gaudy hat before the sleeping carter. Throughout the short story, Laura has been identified with the hat as the appreciation of the guests of the garden party indicates: "*Darling Laura, how well you look!*", "*What a becoming hat, child!*" and "*Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look so striking*" (959). The hat, the symbol of the social norms, turns into an undesirable object, a situation which demonstrates that she rejects all the things that constitute her social position: social hierarchy, authority and the socially accepted roles.

The moment Laura finds her way to step out of the house of the dead, she meets Laurie at the corner of the lane, the junction point of the two different classes- the line-which divides the two worlds. This line brings forth the different linguistic structures of the two classes that shape their relationships. When Laura and Laurie were little children, they were not allowed to go to the lane partly because they would catch illness partly because the language used there was "*revolting*" (957). Only when they grow up do they prowl through the lane since they think that someone must go anywhere. The fact that Laura and Laurie meet at this point indicates that Laura is torn between the different linguistic structures of the two worlds. With a focus on her new understanding of the negation of class structures, it can be argued that she will avoid adopting the language used by her family, which as stated earlier, she employs in the previous scene of the garden party to evaluate whether the language of the working man is appropriate or not. Her lapse into silence may be arguably read as "*an act of self-censorship*" which enables her not to revert to "*the upper-class linguistic paradigm that her family embraces*" (Severn 2). In this respect, as Severn points out, the state of her abstaining from speech is "*an act of resistance, a refusal to continue with those forms which have shaped her life and consciousness to that point*" (9).

The ending of the story does not indicate how she leads her life or whether she will become successful to reject the enforced notions of class yet it is clear that what she experiences makes her understand the meaning of life: it is too short and meaningless. What Laura makes sense of her experiences about the futility and temporariness of life is indeed not unheard within the confined walls of the Sheridans' garden since it resonates with the short yet meaningful words of the song sung by Meg:

This life is Wee-ary
 A Tear – a Sigh.
 A Love that Chan-ges,
 This Life is Wee-ary,
 A Tear – a Sigh,
 A Love that Chan-ges,
 And then... Good-bye! (955).

This song reminds us of Samuel Beckett's short play *Breath* which concisely offers the three phases of life –birth, growth and death- through the anonymous voice taking a deep breath which gradually dies away and thus, undergirding the shortness and temporariness of life. In the same way, the song highlights the quintessence of life full of misery, pain, beauties and love- the things that Laura herself internalises after her ordeal with the existence of the dead body itself. From this vantage point, in Laura's case, her exposure to death is nothing less than awaking from the dreamy world to a sudden sensation of recognition into what death and life really are. Her experiencing death, the ultimate equalizer, is a step into adulthood where she comes to understand that there exist no class distinctions.

Death in David Herbert Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums"

Coming from the working-class background as the son of a coal miner, D. H. Lawrence is mostly concerned with the class issues with much emphasis on miserable conditions of the low-class community in his novels and short stories as is also seen in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party". Lawrence's short stories by and large present, with an acutely realistic description and use of dialect, a vivid portrayal of psychology of characters "urgently seeking self-realization, but that self-realization is possible only in relation to a fully recognized other, a separate, independent other capable of granting recognition to the self" (Schapiro 55). This kind of self-knowledge can be traced in Lawrence's renowned short story "Odour of

Chrysanthemums” where Elizabeth, married to a drunken miner with two children, who holds onto the life in an economically stifling environment, gets a deeper understanding into her relationship with her husband upon seeing the dead body of her husband. Intertwined into the issues of industrialisation, alienation and class division is the tragedy of the family caused by the presence of death which exposes the detrimental effects of industrialisation upon the working-class people and the failure of the marriage of the two couples who are heretofore estranged from each other. Lawrence explores the troubles of the working class by focalizing death since the death of his mother in 1910 inspires his increasing recognition of the dignity of death (Stovel 61) and the effect of his central experience finds its way into the textual structures of his play, short story and novel, *The Windowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, “Odour of Chrysanthemums” and *Sons and Lovers* (Stovel 59). Indeed, the short story and the play are based on the real-life experiences of Lawrence’s Aunt Polly and Uncle James. James Lawrence, a miner, died in a mining accident in a similar way that Lawrence described in his play and short story (Stovel 73). Though the play and the short story carry autobiographical undertones, Lawrence’s perspective mainly embraces “*the dignity of death*” which provides purification for the husband while leading the wife to question the reasons for the failure of their marriage (Stovel 73-74).

The story revolves around Elizabeth Bates, the main figure of the short story, who has undergone the arduous process that extends from her daily chores, the prolonged case of waiting and searching for her husband and to the arrival of his dead body to their house. While the linear storyline presents one event after another that gradually mounts to the death scene, the focal point of the narrator follows the spatial variability. That is to say, the angle of the narration is not narrowed down to the setting of the Bates’ kitchen and house yet turns to the external space such as the domestic space of Rigley’s house, to the mining district and to the pub. In this way, the narrator presents a detailed portrayal of the working-class environment to highlight the central features of the life conditions of miners and their family lives which are dominated by hardships, poverty, misery, alienation and darkness. The elaborately vivid yet bleak descriptions are preliminary for the fearful scene of death and prompt the readers to accurately understand the dynamics that form the relationships of wife and husband, which will be focused over the course of the analysis.

The beginning of the short story depicts the nature of the working-class district drearily; the fields are *“dreary and forsaken”*, *“the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly”*, the birds *“made off into the dusk that had already crept into the rough dusk”* and the smoke that *“cleaved to the rough grass”* (859). The cottage where Bates family is living is *“three steps down from the cinder track”* and a large vine *“clutched house, as if to claw down the tiled roof”* (859). Near their dwelling house, there are *“some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages”* and the path is covered with *“dishevelled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes”* (859). The depictions of nature demonstrate that nature is exploited and destroyed by the industrialism: *“nature is death-like; grasping for life in its final moments, for living things are depleted and malnourished”* (Yamin 15). While the narrator’s descriptions *“set the tone of bleakness and despair for the story”*, they also highlight *“the mechanical impositions”* on the lives of the characters (15). With the impact of industrialisation, people turn out to be slaves and labour generates indifference and alienation among human beings (15) as can be traced through the movements of the characters at the beginning of the short story. Elizabeth Bates, holding her basket, *“stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black wagons and the hedge”* (859), a situation which connotes to *“human captivity under the machines of industrialism”* (Bağlama 1460). The miners also *“single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home”* (859), a scenery which highlights *“the insignificance and mechanization of the working class people”* (Bağlama 1460). While the mechanical impositions destroy the natural environment, they distort human life by leading to the deterioration of relationship between man and woman as can be traced in the life of Elizabeth Bates, who is *“losing her own nature amid the same destructive forces that killed her husband”* (Yamin 15).

In the first scene of the short story, Elizabeth Bates is portrayed as *“a tall woman of imperious mean, handsome, with definite eyebrows”* (859) who tries hard to cope with the strenuous circumstances to bring up her children, John and Annie. Their life is poverty-stricken as is understood from the clothes of her son, John: *“He was dressed in trousers and waistcoat of cloth that was too thick and hard for the size of the garments. They were evidently cut down for a man’s clothes”* (860). Their world at home is covered with darkness since the house is brightened with the artificial light of coal. When they sit down to tea, John is *“almost lost in the darkness”* and they cannot see clearly their faces (860). Though Elizabeth puts the piece of the coal after another piece, the red fire vanquishes, leaving them in total darkness. The yard surrounding their cottage is ridden with rats. When Elizabeth goes to the house of

Mr. Rigley to learn if he knows where her husband is, what Elizabeth sees there reveals the poor life conditions of his family:

The kitchen needed apology. There were little frocks and trousers and childish undergarments on the squab and on the floor, and a litter of playthings everywhere. On the black American cloth of the table were pieces of bread and cake, crusts, slops, and a teapot with cold tea. (865).

The moment the woman apologizes for the condition of the room, Elizabeth responds: *“Eh, ours is just as bad”* (865). The keenly observing gaze of the narrator visualizes the miserable conditions of the working-class people by using the objective descriptions such as John’s unfitting clothes, the yard invaded by the rats and the domestic interior of Mrs. Rigley’s kitchen.

At the beginning of the short story, it is apparent that Elizabeth is cross with her husband about his not coming home: *“It is scandalous thing as a man can’t even come home to his dinner! ...Past his very door he goes to get to public-house, and here I sit with his dinner waiting for him-”* (860). Elizabeth’s anger piles upon pile since she thinks that her husband goes to the pub to drink instead of coming his home for dinner: *“Eh, what a fool I’ve been, what a fool! And this is what I came here for, to this dirty hole, rats and all, for him to slink past his very door. Twice last week- he’s begun now-”* (863). She tries to suppress her rage when she sits at her rocking chair and starts sewing, a situation underlining that though she is moving forward and back, her position is fixed, and unchanging, a movement which symbolizes her entrapment under the dire straits of her life.

Worried about her husband coming late, Elizabeth asks Mr. Rigley to find out where he is, he helps her to look for Walter at the public house but he cannot find a trace of him and her rage gradually turns into a sense of fear for him. Later, upon seeing that her mother-in-law, an elderly woman in a black bonnet and a black woollen shawl, appears in tears, Elizabeth becomes aware of the tragic accident Walter has had. Her mind is preoccupied with the thoughts and she makes a class-based evaluation of what will happen if he dies or is seriously injured: *“If he was killed – would she be able to manage on the little pension and what she could earn? If he was hurt - they wouldn’t take him to the hospital- how tiresome he would be to nurse!”* (867). Her assessment is a clear indication of how emotionally distanced she is from her husband since he is only the breadwinner for her and also of the poor economic situation in which she is entrapped with no chance of better life conditions.

Walter's mother is mourning, taking Elizabeth's place in the rocking chair: "*Oh, my boy, my boy!*" (868). Her loudly crying is interrupted by Elizabeth who warns her not to waken the children since she "*wouldn't have them down for anything!*" (868). When the mother heard that he was smothered, she wailed aloud and again was hushed by Elizabeth.

The role of Walter's mother is significant in the short story since she provides background information of his son which greatly differs from Elizabeth's perspective. According to his mother, he was a good and happy boy before his marriage:

...he was a good lad, Elizabeth, he was, in his way. I don't know why he got to be such a trouble, I don't. He was a happy lad at home, only full of spirits. But there's no mistake he's been a handful of trouble, he has! I hope the Lord'll spare him to mend his ways. I hope so, I hope so. You've had a sight o' trouble with him, Elizabeth, you have indeed. But he was a jolly enough lad wi' me, he was, I can assure you. I don't know how it is.... (868).

What Walter's mother reveals concerning the nature of her son as a good and happy boy is crucial to understand to what extent the industrialism negatively influences his nature. Though Walter works under the hard conditions, he does not provide a good life for himself and his family. As the descriptions of the house and environment have shown, they have been leading a poverty-stricken life in the mining district. Unable to cope with the limited opportunities and the worsening economic conditions that his class brings to him and his family, Walter loses his zeal for life and is alienated from his family and his life activity. The only thing that Walter does is to go to the public houses where he meets the other workers to drink. In this respect, it can be argued that his alcoholism is a way for him to find comfort in the warm atmosphere of the public houses and thus, to create a false consciousness to escape from the reality of his condition and life. The fact that Walter is alienated from his work can be the reason for his dissatisfaction with his life. With the impact of industrialisation, Walter turns out to be an automaton who is solely valued by his efforts and pertinacity to work under the unbearable conditions, and thus, to ensure the continuity of the system. Thus, he is alienated from his work, his species and his nature as Karl Marx states in the theory of alienation that the estranged labour turns "*[a]n immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man*" (32). The scene where the representative of the mining company expresses his views over the death of Walter underlines the attitude towards the working-class men;

he says in a perplexed and troubled manner: *“It is the most terrible job I’ve ever known. Seems as if it was done o’ purpose. Clean over him, an’ shut ‘im in, like a mouse-trap”* (870). The representative of the mining company avoids taking responsibility for the death of the working-class man by putting the blame on unknown forces rather than inadequate working conditions. The death and injury are common for the industrial system. The representative’s attitude makes it clear that the workers do not have personal values and in a metaphorical sense, they are regarded as ‘machines’ which contribute to the progression of the system. Walter’s death caused by lack of oxygen and the attitudes of the representative of the mining company towards his death revitalise the troubles of the working-class men.

When Walter’s dead body is brought to home by the representatives of the mining company, one of the men breaks the vase of chrysanthemums, which stands for Walter’s death. Throughout the short story, chrysanthemum is used symbolically to refer to the phases of birth, marriage, drunkenness and death: *“It was chrysanthemums when I married him, and chrysanthemums when you were born, and the first time they ever brought him home drunk, he’d got brown chrysanthemums in his button-hole”* (863). On that line, it can be argued that the flower is employed to foreground the situations which reflect the emotional, psychological and existential crisis of the characters. For instance, while giving a birth has positive connotations such as enlivening, life-force, and fertility, a child for the working-class people may represent the burden on economic and psychological levels. The brown chrysanthemums which symbolize *“the life fading away along with the destruction of life as a consequence of corruption”* are used to underline the death of Walter that comes with the perils of industrialisation (Bağlama 1466). Elizabeth’s eagerness to pick up the broken vase and the flowers to remove them though she is unwilling to look at the dead body of her husband can be interpreted as a sign of her desire to get rid of the irreparable consequences of her failed marriage.

When Elizabeth and her mother-in-law strip the dead boy, the feelings of fear and respect arouse in them since the dead body restores into the condition of dignity and integrity: *“She saw him, how inviolable he lay in himself”* (871). Although Elizabeth tires to get some connection with him by listening, she cannot since he is *“impregnable”* (871). While washing his body, they are stricken with a great sense of fear and touching the dead body generates different feelings in each woman. While Walter’s mother feels that her fertility and life –force is denied since *“the lie was given to her womb”* (871), Elizabeth feels *“the utter isolation of the human soul”*, a situation

underlining that she comes to understand the nature of death. Remembering that the child lies in her womb, she feels that this child is *“a weight apart from her”* (871). The ablution of the dead body removes the traces of drink and thus, his misdeeds are obliterated: *“his face showed no traces of drink”* (871) and as his mother observes: *“Not a mark on him, clear and clean and white, beautiful as ever a child was made”* (871). The dead body is purified and dignified since *“he went peaceful, ... peaceful as sleep... He wouldn’t look like this if he hadn’t made his peace”* (872). While looking at the dead man, Elizabeth realizes that *“life with its smoky burning gone from him”* and yet *“left him apart and utterly alien to her”* and she appreciates *“what a stranger he was to her”* (872). In this respect, it is important to note that they are alienated to each other, a situation underlining that they experience the final aspects of estrangement. Through the dead body which reminds Elizabeth of the complete isolation of human soul and seems to her as a stranger, the *“infinite” gulf between life and death is equated with the irreconcilable, hostile separation between husband and wife* (Siegel 305).

Meditating over the dead body, Elizabeth asks the unquestioned questions: *“Who am I? What have I been doing? ... What wrong have I done? What was that I have been living with?”* (872). Through death *“which restored the truth”*, Elizabeth probes into the deep meaning of life and union of two persons who are separated on emotional level (872). In this respect, it can be argued that her dead husband is the other self who functions to be a reflective mirror for her to dig deeper into the true nature of their marriage. Elizabeth comes to realization that even if they live together and have children, for them, marriage is not an emotionally satisfying bond to unite them:

If they met there, in the beyond, they would only be ashamed of what had been before. The children had come, for some mysterious reason, out of both of them. But the children did not unite them. Now he was dead, she knew how eternally he was apart from her, how eternally he had nothing more to do with her. She saw this episode of her life closed. (872).

In that vein, the death, the ultimate master, reveals the distance of the couple which started before the death. While musing over the corpse, Elizabeth, who establishes empathy with her husband, finds out her mistakes in paving the way for the termination of their marriage, that is, her refusal of his identity as a male and of what he is: *“She had denied him what he was- she saw it now. She had refused him as himself. And this had been her life, and his life”* (872). The fact that she accepts

her mistakes in the failure of their marriage can be considered as “*an act in her process of self-realization*” (Kearney 32). It is very significant that her recognition arises out of death, so death can be seen as a stimulus for her to comprehend her nature, relations and environment.

Later, the dead body stirs the feelings of pity and grief in Elizabeth when she thinks about the tragic accident he had: “*What had he suffered? What stretch of horror for this helpless man! She had not been able to help him. He had been cruelly injured, this naked man, this other being, and she could make no reparation*” (872). The other being, her husband, who is estranged from her in this world would be a stranger to her in the next world and the phase of their union is closed completely through his physical absence. Though Elizabeth and Walter are the “*channels through which life had flowed into issue in the children*”, her dead husband has no relation with the children anymore yet she is responsible for them in that she is a mother (872). While for Elizabeth, the death of her husband represents destruction and ending, she sees her children as life-force which gives her energy, impetus and refreshment to submit to life. In this way, Elizabeth attributes a new meaning to her role as a mother and wants to hold onto the life: “*She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame*” (873).

Conclusion

A study of the dead body in both short stories leads the readers to take a critical outlook at how the restrictive social roles of women in a class-based society have an adverse impact on both their lives and their psyche. With direct or indirect references to the culture in which Laura grows up, Mansfield makes it clear that while her family provides her with a comfortable life with money and luxurious garden parties, she is stripped of her true self because of the education that they endow her with. Educated by her mother in accordance with the patriarchally fostered cultural views, Laura is expected to be the epitome of her mother who is raised in a hierarchal society that “*conditioned her to think like men, identify with their world view, not only accept but also internalize their values, and buttress the system that legitimates the interests of the dominant group*” (Kaya 55). In a patriarchal society, just like her mother, she will become the representative of the patriarchal power, the protector, legislator and practitioner of the patriarchal conventions assigned by the society. Having undergone a drastic transformation in her vision of world, Laura, at the end of the story, recognizes insincerity of the upper-class society that shape her beliefs and ideas and starts to question the deep-seated notions of the society. As Carol Siegel keenly

observes, Mansfield “*reveals the power of death to provide her heroine with a transcendent period of escape from the ever-threatening facts of life*” (305). Viewed under a certain light, it is through Laura’s recognition that Mansfield expostulates the hegemony of the society that builds the social barriers that oppress and suppress individuals.

In regard of “*Odour of Chrysanthemums*”, through the existence of death, a severe criticism is raised towards marriage as an institution that puts limitations on women. In the short story, Lawrence constructs Elizabeth as a woman who is burdened under the responsibilities of marriage life with heavy economic problems. Taking a critical perspective to her marriage life, it can be said that Elizabeth and Walter turn out to be mechanized persons within their mechanized relationships deprived of pleasures of life and emotions where they only perform their duties as wife and husband. To put it another way, in the metaphorical sense, they live in a death-in-life situation during their marriage since they are emotionally dead. Though Elizabeth questions the real meaning of marriage and her role as a wife, even after the death of Walter, she does not envisage a different lifestyle rather than following the feminine roles as a mother. This situation demonstrates that she internalizes the feminine roles imposed by the society and thus, cannot resist the social norms that render her passive and submissive.

Strikingly enough, Modiano brings an extensive analysis with an analogy between the discord and disunity between Elizabeth and Walter and alienation in the society deeply affected with detrimental dehumanization concomitant of industrial revolution (44-46). The biggest problem of Elizabeth and Walter’s marriage is their estrangement caused largely by the mechanization of their life that stems from the unbearable life conditions and economic problems. As stated earlier, labour is external to Walter’s nature and discontent with his job, he is estranged from his work. His estrangement from his work extends into every aspect of his life and Walter is alienated from his life activities and his family. In this respect, the underlying reason behind the disintegration of their marriage is related to the industrialism which distorts the nature of human relationships and the connection between reality and illusion and thereby, causing alienation of human being from his environment, his life activity, his family, and his own self at the last stage. In this context, it is worth noting that Lawrence’s story is a sharp critique of the harmful effects of industrialization all over the world.

A comparative reading of the works of Mansfield and Lawrence reveals that death is of utmost importance for the structure of the short story, its climax and the psychological development of characters, thereby, functions as a vehicle to complement the plot and pinpoint the gist of the story. In both short stories, the characters, at the climactic point of the stories, gain an intellectual and spiritual enlightenment so as to open their eyes to the truth of their life and their positions in the society through the presence of death. While the characters at the end of each story reach awareness with regard to their lives, Mansfield and Lawrence make the readers experience “*the entire process of the perception of reality*” with a touch upon “*evocative atmosphere*” along with “*the feelings and sensations which are aroused by an experience*” (Gunsteren 81). Concordantly, the existence of death creates in the readers a strong sense that a class-based society is the very thing that subjugates and weakens individuals and all class differences are fallacious. Elizabeth and Laura are delineated as the victimized characters whose true natures are hidden under the socially generated conventions and norms. When viewed from this aspect, the encounter with death where the protagonists express their intimate feelings with regard to their miserable situations provides readers a deep and accurate understanding into the wretched conditions of women.

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