

Chapter 12

Economic Women: Money and (Im)mobility in Selected Stories by Katherine Mansfield

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Mansfield and the Economic Woman

Regenia Gagnier's comment that late Victorian literature 'represents the everyday economic life between the genders' as 'refracted through the discourses of technology, machinery and economic operations' applies equally to modernist writing of the early twentieth century, especially before England's social structure was ruptured by the devastation of the Great War.¹ In Katherine Mansfield's stories the effects of modernity in the forms of 'economic events that shaped the contemporary world',² then, are crucial touchstones for the changing subjectivities and self-other relations of her characters. To read her work through an economic lens informed by twenty-first century consumer discourses and the ideology of global capitalism, is to become aware of the marketplace as a powerful, animating force that intersects with and destabilises her characters in unpredictable ways, shaping her modernist response to money conceived as the basis of economic and social power.

The activities of financial transaction and management – expenditure, savings, and cash flow – in domestic and public commercial marketplaces help define the various economic women of Mansfield's cosmopolitan stories. The term 'Economic Woman' points to a liminal, multiply defined figure as Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport argue, who, in contrast to the singular dominance of 'Economic Man' in the new spaces of production and trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has been overlooked and ignored by economists and cultural historians of that era, or else confined to the private, domestic sphere by fiction writers such as Dickens.³ In Mansfield's writing the concept applies to women represented in terms of motherhood, childrearing and domesticity to but more specifically to

types like the consumer, worker, the idle rich, unemployed or vagrant, who reveal uncertain structures of selfhood and fluctuating perceptions of others when engaged in financial transactions. The multi-dimensionality of the term 'Economic Woman' also reflects the proliferating images of women and the availability of new economic roles under early twentieth-century capitalism.

The individualism of Mansfield's economic women, however, is usually at odds with the demands of the market economy: they are challenged or compromised by trading forces which arouse unexpected intimacies or divisions, financial dilemmas, and moral confusions. Whether enjoying the privileges of wealth or, at the other extreme, being financially disadvantaged due to penury, insolvency or debt, they find that monetary interactions disrupt their expectations, test their identities, or trigger a desire for the new. Responding with transitions of consciousness, imagined alternative identities and expansive dreams, they tell new narratives about themselves: stories or fantasies that often seem to be substitutes for developing self-knowledge or willingness to change. Inevitably, though, traditional distinctions of class are reinforced and despite the possibilities of social mobility that the modern world seemingly promises, Mansfield's heroines usually remain trapped in existing class structures.

On the other hand, new types of female economic independence were emerging in the early twentieth century, as women began to produce wealth and take financial control, seeing this as 'key to a new kind of freedom'. As Virginia Woolf commented: 'Of the two – the vote and the money – the money I own, seemed infinitely more important'.⁴ Such economic expansion began to undermine patriarchy and unsettle class distinctions, and Mansfield's stories also hint at the levelling effects of modernisation with its promise of social change. They confirm what Fredric Jameson claims is crucial about modernity, that artists were concerned with 'how modern people feel about themselves with the producers and

consumers, and how they feel either producing the products or living among them'.⁵

Although she was not an explicitly political writer, as Sydney Janet Kaplan points out, and did not subscribe directly to any feminist agenda, Mansfield was concerned with female victimisation and discrimination in the marketplace and indirectly advocated social change.⁶

Mansfield's own financial vicissitudes were a vital source of writing that sharply observed the different impacts of insolvency or wealth on character. This is particularly true of her early time in London from September 1908 when she struggled to live within her means and was adjusting to a more frugal existence; her father's annual allowance covered her rent and subsistence but did not allow for the luxuries and extravagant gestures that she had been brought up to consider normal. During this period she was finding her way in the London literary marketplace, eking out her income by taking up professional invitations to perform and entertain, raiding her talent for impersonation and acting by telling stories, verse recitations, playing bit parts as a walk-on actor, or performing in the touring Moody-Manners Opera Company; indeed, as Katie Jones points out, discovering the market's potential, and especially the fashion for live recital performance, helped shape her literary production.⁷ As a colonial outsider, Mansfield's social mobility and professional fluidity, both in London and while travelling on the Continent, are features of this turbulent phase of her life. These undoubtedly gave her insights into the types of economic dependency that caused women's feelings of frustration and entrapment and encouraged her critique of class and gender, evident in her 1908 notebook comment about women, that 'We are firmly held in the self-fashioned chains of slavery'.⁸

Mansfield's problems with and management of her financial resources at a time when she was positioning herself artistically in a cosmopolitan milieu, frames the reading that follows of five stories in terms of the marketplace, its consumer culture, employment practices and the mechanisms of trade. I argue that, rather than showing the 'deep and

fundamental hostility' to the market when treated as a site that facilitates, promotes, and profits from modernisation,⁹ Mansfield draws on this milieu to explore the conscious and unconscious drives of her characters who are caught up in its values and ideology. The trading place is a locale of self-reference and identity as they undertake everyday work, or seek new horizons through dream or fantasy without any prospect of material improvement or social change. Although this was an era when women began to take control of capital and acquire purchasing power, the problematic encounters of her heroines with systems of trade, debt and financial exchange expose their helplessness, economic dependence, susceptibility to exploitation, and self-delusion.

All financial transactions occur as a product of human interaction, exchange and relationships. On the other hand, as David Graeber explains – as state and market are intertwined, not opposed – it is possible to reduce all human relationships to exchange, as if our ties to society can be imagined in terms of a business deal.¹⁰ This interchangeability between the individual and the business world emerges in Mansfield's depictions of transactions involving labour, buying and selling, and non-payment or debt, in ways that emphasise female vulnerability. The capitalist market (and its ideology) is a disempowering overarching structure often associated with 'Economic Man', a 'conscious, knowing, unified, and rational subject' who 'desires to possess wealth';¹¹ it privileges profit and accumulation and is indifferent to human feelings. As Jameson observes, critiquing the market:

Market ideology assures us that human beings make a mess of it when they try and control their destinies [...] and that we are fortunate in possessing an interpersonal mechanism – the market – which can substitute for human hubris and planning and replace human decisions altogether.¹²

To read Mansfield's stories through the optic of this 'interpersonal mechanism' that reduces decision-making and self-agency, is to see financial operations functioning as both catalyst of feelings, motivations and aspirations, and as a check on them.

Financial and class inequalities are filtered through the prism of work and the labour contract in 'Life of Ma Parker' (1921); through consumerism and seller/buyer relations in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' (1908) and 'A Cup of Tea' (1922); and through the burden of debt as catalyst of fluctuating sexual mores in 'The Swing of the Pendulum' (1911) and 'Pictures' (1921). Mansfield draws on a range of literary models for these different types of individualism: the conventions of nineteenth-century realism and tropes from the romantics and aesthetes for working-class characters in 'Life of Ma Parker' and 'A Cup of Tea',¹³ the popular romance plot and modes of consumer fantasy¹⁴ for lower-middle or upper-class characters in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' and 'A Cup of Tea'. By contrast, echoes from T. S. Eliot's poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and use of the techniques of silent cinema appear in 'Pictures' which, like 'The Swing of the Pendulum', draws on the practices of acting and impersonation for the various improvisations of its destitute heroine. All five stories address the dilemmas of women operating as consumers, sellers, or traders in various domestic and public marketplaces, who suddenly find themselves in disorienting, destabilising situations.

'Life of Ma Parker' and Domestic Labour

Mansfield's most radical attack on the discriminations of gender and class as enacted in the realm of domestic labour can be found in 'Life of Ma Parker', a story in which existing inequalities appear in the female worker's personal suffering due to a life of misery and victimisation, and her employer's patronising attitude towards her. Unlike the feudal servant whose duty and labour implied relations of loyalty and trust with their owner, Ma Parker's relationship with the middle-class 'literary gentleman' is based on the 'cash nexus'.¹⁵ Financial exchange means that their relationship resembles that of master and slave, because, according to Graeber, it is in principle impersonal: 'Whether you've been sold or you have

simply rented yourself out, the moment money changes hands, who you are supposed to be is unimportant'.¹⁶ This is made painfully clear in the story's conclusion after Ma Parker has been paid by her employer: the imprisoning mismatch between her role, her individual subjectivity, and even who she could be, is reflected in her traumatised feelings of meaninglessness when she dares to question her place in the world.

Ma Parker is a rare study in modernist fiction of the interiority of the working-class labourer,¹⁷ and Mansfield exposes the discrepancy between the stereotyped expectations of the workplace and Ma Parker's subjectivity by juxtaposing discourses of education and social privilege, associated with her employer, with those of her personal sacrifice and suffering.¹⁸ Mother of thirteen children, she is a working-class contrast to the upper-middle-class householders of Mansfield's fiction, such as the grandmothers – Mrs Fairfield in 'Prelude' and the 'old woman' in 'New Dresses' – who are associated with mothering roles and household management within the home, and whose contribution to society is in the form of 'modes of service' that prioritise the needs of others, especially the girl-child.¹⁹ The literary gentleman (ironically named because his actions undermine the behaviour implied by this title) treats his charlady as a dispensable servant appropriate to his privileged bachelor lifestyle: "'You simply dirty everything you've got, get a hag in once a week to clean up, and the thing's done'".²⁰

Ma Parker contradicts such stereotyping in her concern that her employer has 'no-one to look after him',²¹ and in her overwhelming grief at the death of her grandson, who with his mother Ethel are the only family members she has left. Mansfield represents her state of mind at this ultimate loss through an embedded first-person narrative, her *bildung*. This is a sub-category of the life story in its detailing of 'the injuries of industrialisation'²² and is marked by the recurring phrase, 'I've had a hard life'.²³ She dwells on the cruelty she has suffered at the hands of past employers, her husband's death-inducing job as a baker, the disease which

carried off seven of her children while those who survived all left home, apart from Ethel, Lennie's mother. The implication of this narrative act is reinforced by the final image of Ma Parker as alienated and isolated now that she has lost almost all those she loved. She is defined primarily by her role in the workplace, and so sees herself as no more than an object whose labour power – her only commodity or selling point – is part of a socialised system into which she has been inscribed, and to which she is dispensable.

Mansfield's critique draws on Edwardian stereotypes of the working class which emphasise its marginality and high mortality by associating their lives with death and mourning. The literary gentleman looks upon Ma Parker as one of 'these people [who] set such store by funerals [...]'. "I hope the funeral went off all right".²⁴ By contrast, Ma Parker's desolation at the loss of her beloved grandson interrupts her work as memories flood back, distracting her from her present tasks and diminishing her capacity to make decisions. Characteristically defining herself through the needs of others, and now left only with memories of him, she is even more exposed than previously to the indifference and impersonality of the class system.

Mansfield reinforces these class disparities by introducing two financial transactions, represented as contrasting dialogues in tone, diction and voice, that stress the differences between Ma Parker's domestic and working relationships. Her formal exchange with the literary gentleman marked by 'Sir'²⁵ emphasises the master/servant hierarchy, according to Graeber: 'you are capable of understanding orders and doing what you are told'.²⁶ Her employer's half-crown payment left in the tray of the inkstand symbolises their social distance, while any hint of mutual trust in their business arrangement is undermined by his insinuation that Ma Parker has pilfered the last teaspoon of cocoa in the tin. By contrast, the flashback between Ma Parker and Lennie, 'Gran's boy', is a dramatic recreation in a

working-class accent of intimacy and playful barter: she readily gives him money as a token of her unconditional love, with only the gift of himself in exchange:

‘Gran, gi’ us a penny!’ he coaxed.
‘Be off with you; Gran ain’t got no pennies.’
‘Yes, you ‘ave.’
‘No, I ain’t.’
‘Yes you ‘ave. Gi’ us one!’
Already she was feeling for the old, squashed, black leather purse.
‘Well, what’ll you give your gran?’
He gave a shy little laugh and pressed closer. She felt his eyelid quivering against her cheek.
‘I ain’t got nothing,’ he murmured. . . .²⁷

Here Mansfield exploits the symbolic parallels between money and love as forms of exchange and stresses the mutuality of affection in the ‘unequal’ negotiation. The shock of losing Lennie, her emotional touchstone, is repeated in Ma Parker’s second shock, encapsulated in the story’s ending after her housework is completed and payment received. Mansfield implies that the two exchanges are inextricably linked in implying abandonment, for Ma Parker now has no sense of a place in the world, either literally or psychically, ‘where she could have her cry out – at last?’²⁸

This failed catharsis reflects Ma Parker’s entrapment in her role and the overlap between the expectations of servitude and her selfless prioritising of others, magnified by her misery at her grandson’s death. Her essential aloneness suggests that this doubling of finality, by death and payment, is experienced as a form of individual annihilation. Once she leaves the house she is like a social outcast, isolated and anonymous: “‘What have I done?’” is her cry of futility.²⁹ The mechanical repetition of routine has suppressed her emotions and denied the release she craves; furthermore, crying ‘after all these years’ would only reinforce the imprisoning status quo, for she fears ‘she’d find herself in the lockup, like as not’.³⁰ Ma Parker’s negative epiphany and placelessness underline her alienation and radical objectification as a result of being commodified in the economy of work – a ‘cipher’ in a bigger system of exchange.³¹

Consumer Fantasies: ‘The Tiredness of Rosabel’ and ‘A Cup of Tea’

In contrast to Ma Parker’s cry of existential despair, representing the betrayal of all her class, is the lower-middle-class economic woman, the shop girl, in ‘The Tiredness of Rosabel’, who uses fantasy to overcome the ignominy of her class. Mansfield dwells on the buyer/seller relationship as enacted in the gilded, class-conscious milieu of an upper-class milliner’s establishment in central London. Working in a genteel trade, her heroine is somewhere between working-class and lower-middle-class and ‘subject to [the] unarticulated possibility of social transformation’.³² The story consists of Rosabel’s reflection in the private space of her lodgings in Richmond Road on the day’s events; her encounter with her customers, a wealthy young couple, culminating in an erotic fantasy about herself and the young man.³³ Masculine preference, taste and financial control set in motion a transfer of identity from customer to sales girl. The rich husband, Harry, tells his wife she must have ‘a black hat with a feather that goes right round it’, and then when Rosabel at her client’s request models the hat he has selected for her, the wife says, ‘it suits you, beautifully’.³⁴ This codes Rosabel as romantically desirable; yet class sensitivities militate against any easy acceptance of this compliment, and her anger and then studied indifference to Harry’s ‘tinge of insolence, of familiarity’, ‘as he leant over her as she made out the bill’, indicate her resistance to being co-opted and commodified into their systems of value and aesthetics. But in her later recreation of the event, this very moment of commodification – ‘as he counted the money into her hand – “Ever been painted?” he said’³⁵ – is transformed into a new narrative with Rosabel at the centre: the intimate act of money changing hands is the springboard for romantic longing, and Rosabel’s desire for the touch of those hands opens up a realm of fantasy and romance:

Rosabel suddenly pushed the hair back from her face; her forehead was hot . . . if those slim hands could rest one moment! The luck of that girl!

Suppose they changed places. Rosabel would drive home with him. Of course they were in love with each other, but not engaged – very nearly, and she would say – ‘I won’t be one moment’.³⁶

Mansfield’s focus on the subjective, interior world of the shop girl also involves a retreat from the capitalist ideology of finance and marketing, represented by the hoarding which she sees on her bus journey from Oxford Circus to Richmond Road. Advertising proclaims the message of modernisation, of new efficiencies to replace human labour as the commercial world calls its mass consumers indiscriminately. Rosabel’s distaste for technology and marketing is associated with the stark realities of her journey home: her ‘horribly wet’ feet, and the ‘black, greasy mud’ on the hem of her skirt and petticoat, both connotations of the daily grind of the poor.³⁷ New inventions appeal only when they might lift her above this, as in her wish for an elevator or escalator – ‘a lift’ or ‘an electric staircase like the one at Earl’s Court’ – to save the walk up four flights of stairs to her room.³⁸ But seen from the Atlas bus, advertisements for new labour-saving devices are dismissed as worn out and irrelevant: ‘How many times had she read [...] “Sapolio Saves Time, Saves Labour?”’³⁹

Rosabel’s criticism of her surroundings extends to the working-class practices of reading as she disdainfully observes her neighbour on the bus reading *Anna Lombard*, a popular sensational novel by a New Woman writer, ‘mouthing the words in a way that Rosabel detested, licking her first finger and thumb each time that she turned the page’. But the phrases of seduction that she vicariously glimpses, a ‘hot, voluptuous night, a band playing, and a girl with lovely, white shoulders’,⁴⁰ are appropriated to her daydream of a whirlwind romance and happy-ever-after marriage to ‘Prince’ Harry. Kate Fullbrook comments on the contagious power of such images from popular romance in controlling the female consciousness as if an opiate of the masses.⁴¹ But in the everyday world of commerce, finance, and the retail markets of Oxford Street, popular romance is derided by the modernist, elitist Rosabel as an inferior form of diversion in contrast to her invented fantasia. In literary

terms Mansfield develops such images away from the provenance of mass fiction through the superior gaze of Rosabel, as she overcomes her claustrophobia due to the surrounding afflictions of poverty, squalor and damp weather, by redeploying them in her own romantic plot.

‘A Cup of Tea’ involves similar transformations catalysed by class and gender inequalities, but which in contrast focuses on the impulsive fantasy of an upper-class, idle, wealthy heroine whose anxieties about her looks and confusion over beauty and desire compromise her apparent freedom of action. The action begins in an antique shop in Curzon Street in central London, where Rosemary, a surrogate consumer, is intent on spending her husband’s money. Her hesitation over purchasing an expensive ‘exquisite little enamel box’⁴² the antique dealer wishes to sell her, leads her to channel her desire for possession into her own power game, a seemingly altruistic gesture that offers a more gratifying self-image and the chance to renarrativise her life for her friends: she bestows her munificence upon a young street woman, a vagrant, who solicits her for a cup of tea. But this ‘thrilling’ act of taking a beggar into her home and the fantasy of herself as a ‘fairy godmother’⁴³ ultimately results in a challenge to her self-esteem.

Mansfield here might be satirising written accounts of female philanthropy, women’s efforts to articulate forms of mutually beneficial, ethical exchange that involve female solidarity, for her aptly-named heroine, Rosemary Fell, thought ‘she would do one of those things that she was always reading about or seeing on the stage’ so proving that ‘rich people had hearts, and that women *were* sisters’;⁴⁴ her fanciful invocation of a Dostoevsky novel as precedent for her ‘adventure’ only adds to the satire. For the beggar, a starving girl with the nondescript, non-threatening name of Miss Smith, the familiar romantic tropes of enchantment are used. She magically metamorphoses from the classical ‘femme fragile’ invoking frailty, and vulnerability – ‘thin dark, shadowy [...] with enormous eyes’⁴⁵ – into a

seductive femme fatale after consuming tea, cakes and sandwiches, luring to her Rosemary's husband who finds her 'so astonishingly pretty' with her 'tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes'.⁴⁶ Unlike 'The Tiredness of Rosabel', fantasy implodes in 'A Cup of Tea', and when her husband seemingly implies that he prefers Miss Smith's looks to her own, Rosemary returns the vagrant to the streets with a gift of three pounds to salve her conscience.

Rosemary's rejection of her consumer role when the highly-priced exquisite enamel box seems beyond her means, instead enhancing her self-image by dispensing charity, can only ever be temporary. The marketplace functions as part of a capitalist system that sustains her wealthy lifestyle, and the familiar wheels that guarantee her prosperity and marital security keep turning. The 'adventure' culminates in the reinforcement of her economic dependence, and the restoration of marital equilibrium at a price: her husband agrees to pay for the jewel box that earlier she had considered too expensive. Miss Smith, like Ma Parker and her disposability in the labour system, is no more than a pawn in this renegotiation of the monetary stakes in the marriage by which patriarchal ownership is re-established.

Debt, Doubt and Identity: 'The Swing of the Pendulum' and 'Pictures'

The third type of marketplace encounter concerns the obligations incurred by the non-existent transaction: one that entails a debt. This is usually due to non-payment of rent in Mansfield's stories, as in the plight of the destitute heroines of 'The Swing of the Pendulum' and 'Pictures', stories with some autobiographical content.⁴⁷ Economists and moral philosophers who write on debt, often a modernist byword for living irresponsibly, point out how morally corrupting and damaging it is;⁴⁸ according to Pierre Bourdieu the power asymmetries that characterise the creditor-debtor relationship tend to be viewed from the perspective of creditors so that debtors are exposed to the moral obligations and corollary emotional attachments that inflict 'symbolic violence'.⁴⁹ Yet the reciprocity of debt and the moral case

against creditors are also espoused: Doctor Johnson, for example, points out that the ‘creditor always shares the act and more often shares the guilt of improper trust’ in contracting a debt in the first place ‘in the hope of self-advantage’.⁵⁰

Mansfield shows affinities with Victorian and other modernist literary interpretations of the moral dynamics of debt, that view such financial disasters tolerantly as ‘misfortunes’ rather than assigning ‘personal culpability’. The ‘disequilibrium of symbolic and emotional investments’ typical of failed contractual relations appears in her heroines’ self-alienation and confusion, psychological collapse and urgent reassessment.⁵¹ For both the impoverished writer Viola in ‘The Swing of the Pendulum’ and the elderly, out-of-work contralto singer Ada Moss in ‘Pictures’, debt incurs initial self-righteous indignation, violent passion and primitive urges; their economic helplessness casts them into a moral limbo of sexual self-commodification as they make themselves available in the heterosexual marketplace.

The stories convey the symbolic degradation imposed by debt through the demeaning language of parasitic vermin and beasts that marks toxic exchanges with landladies who demand payment of the rent: Ada Moss calls hers, Miss Pine, ‘a bad, wicked woman’ and ‘a cockroach’; Viola’s landlady implies her debtor is like lice, ‘sneaking their way into furniture and eating up everything’, while Viola privately condemns her as ‘a dirty pigeon’ and ‘a filthy old beast’.⁵² Both heroines challenge their creditors’ imperious demands and attempt to exert power by rejecting accusations of culpability, so blurring the moral boundaries. But in private their emotional turbulence shows judgement yielding to impulse, a process of self-commodification that involves self-interrogation in the mirror. Destitute, Viola finds poverty is ‘like a huge dream mountain on which her feet were fast rooted’ as she speaks to her ‘tragic reflection: “Money, money, money!”’⁵³ In a series of melodramatic self-reinventions she considers suicide and sudden rescue, then fantasises about living not just debt free but beyond her means by marketing her personal assets and charms as ‘a great courtesan’.⁵⁴

Mansfield introduces an allegory into these emotional dramatisations, of an unknown, handsome stranger appearing at Viola's door, whom she invites into her room. The episode proves that such desire is illusory; the stranger's proposed exchange of sexual favours for money ends in a violently physical contretemps where Viola bites his hand in a vicious rebuff; despite his offer to pay off her debt she forces him out, and awaits the return of her impecunious, absent lover, Casimir, like her a writer, who cannot keep her in the expensive manner she desires.

The life-like vignette 'Pictures', by contrast, points to the enactment of the very contract that Viola so strenuously rejects, so that the rent can be paid. Ada Moss overcomes a similar psychological collapse, transforming her desperation and misery by acting out different roles in public spaces. Recovering from Miss Pine's attack, she comforts her tearful image in the mirror and with a dose of Dutch courage sallies forth, 'a stout woman in blue serge with a bunch of artificial "parmas" at her bosom'.⁵⁵ But her fruitless quest for employment as an actor or singer, doing the rounds of the various casting agencies and studios, indicating her availability to anyone who will hire her, only results in dismissive insults or off-hand disparagement. Miss Moss's vain hopes for recognition of her talents, and of gaining any professional work are finally demolished as she yields to decline to masculine predatory desires in the shape of a little man with a very small hat whom she meets in the Café de Madrid.

Both stories suggest that such acts of self-transformation are ultimately circular and that the status quo will continue. There is no obvious long-term answer to their dilemmas as Viola recognises in considering that if she left Casimir: "where should I go to?" There was nowhere'.⁵⁶ Kate Fullbrook comments that Mansfield's ironic prose is 'a reflection of, and a commentary on, the kinds of false consciousness she diagnoses as classically working in her characters'.⁵⁷ In her appraisal of common responses to poverty and debt, showing women

unconsciously clinging to prevailing ideologies and stereotypes that compromise their sense of self, Mansfield points to the lack of easily available alternatives to the financial protection offered by men; her social critique anticipates the work in this genre of later writers like Jean Rhys, Colette, Francis Carco and others.⁵⁸

Conclusion: Trading the Self

Mansfield's stories illustrate Jameson's dictum that the market's 'function is not to encourage and perpetuate freedom [...] but rather to suppress it'.⁵⁹ The perspective of the marketplace reveals the various constraints that disempower Mansfield's economic women. Those who are employed live precariously on subsistence wages, suffering class discrimination that reinforces their subservient status in the workplace; those who lack employment or need not work, come to recognise their absolute dependence on male relationships and protection for survival. Symptomatic of their precarity and marginality to the contemporary world of business and finance are their consumerist preferences for goods and products that are either decorative or minimal, either surplus to need or falling below it: Rosabel's extravagant purchase of a bunch of violets though she desires 'something hot and strong and filling',⁶⁰ Rosemary Fell's exquisite antique box, Ada Moss's wistful hope for a cup of tea while starving for a 'Good Hot Dinner' or a 'Sensible Substantial Breakfast'.⁶¹

All five stories written between 1908 to 1922 offer snapshots of economic women trapped in the class structures into which they have been born. Unaccustomed to financial independence they are unable to make money work for long-term benefits, and their response is to trade some part of themselves or swap their unpalatable circumstances for dreams and fantasies, exchanges as potentially destabilising psychologically as they seem inspiring. Mansfield focuses on how the machinery of the capitalist marketplace with its promise of modernity, catalyses paradigmatic moments of suffering, fear and hope. It challenges

women's identities and intimate desires, whether as consumers, labourers, sellers or debtors, exposing the constraints of class and gender, while intimating a world beyond them.

Nevertheless, Mansfield's semi-buried discourse of the marketplace is marked by a vital new animation of space where transactions are initiated, enacted, and reflected upon. These may be public venues such as the railway station in 'The Little Governess' or the antique shop in 'A Cup of Tea', or private spaces such as the lodging-house bedroom, a site for dream and self-transformation in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel', and subject to invasion and imprisonment in 'The Swing of the Pendulum' and 'Pictures'. Liminal spaces such as doorways, windows and stairwells all assume symbolic significance as locales for transitions of consciousness, as female protagonists question themselves, exhibiting confusion, desperation, and moral ambivalence in pondering the alternatives of greater freedoms or continued entrapment due to the entrenched forces of class and gender. Either inspired, hopeful or desperate, her subjects centre themselves in life narratives or fantasies located in these spaces. Even though, as Dominic Head points out, these stories are usually constructed as a defence against personal loss or lack and so need dismantling, they suggest new realms or alternative possibilities.⁶² In these ways Mansfield exploits the potential of the impersonal marketplace for rethinking and reconfiguring the self while nevertheless acknowledging the cultural constraints that hold women in place.

Mansfield was able to look ahead to a vision where women determined their own destinies, saying 'I feel that I do now realise, dimly, what women in the future will be capable of achieving. They truly, as yet, have never had their chance' – adding that the chains of slavery are 'self fashioned, and must be self removed'.⁶³ Yet her female subjects, caught up in the processes of the marketplace but lacking the skills and self-knowledge to carve out a more independent path in society, spin out their dreams and hopes just at the point when they regress and collapse into the known and familiar.

Notes

¹ Regenia Gagnier, 'Economic Women in Their Time, Our Time and the Future', in *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession*, eds Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp. 219–24 (p. 220).

² Adam Trexler, 'Economic Ideas and British Literature 1900–1930: The Fabian Society, Bloomsbury and *The New Age*', *Literature Compass* 4: 3 (2007), pp. 862–7 (pp. 862–3). They include labour unrest and calls for economic reform.

³ Dalley and Rappoport, 'Introducing Economic Women', in *Economic Women*, pp. 1–21 (pp. 1–2).

⁴ Virginia Woolf, qtd in John Xiros Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 16.

⁵ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 310.

⁶ Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), p. 17. Kate Fullbrook's essay, 'Katherine Mansfield; Subjection and Authority', in *The Fine Instrument: Essays on Katherine Mansfield*, eds Paulette Michel and Michel Dupuis (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), pp. 51–60 (p. 53), argues she was 'looking for a revolution in social consciousness'.

⁷ See Katie Jones's chapter on Mansfield's early engagement with the London literary marketplace.

⁸ CW4, p. 91.

⁹ Jameson, p. 304.

¹⁰ David Graeber, *Debt: The First 500 Years* (London: Melville House, 2011), p. 19.

¹¹Ronald Schleifer, *A Political Economy of Modernism: Literature, Post-Classical Economics, and the Lower Middle-Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 4; Susan Feiner, qtd in Dalley and Rappaport, p. 2.

¹² Jameson, p. 273.

¹³ Charles Ferrall, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Working Classes' in Special Issue, *Katherine Mansfield: Masked and Unmasked, Journal of New Zealand Literature* 32: 2 (2014), pp. 106–20 (p. 117).

¹⁴ Lisa Shapiro Sanders, *Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure and the London Shopgirl 1880–1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006); she defines these as 'absorption or immersion in a particular narrative trajectory' (as in popular romance) and 'the nonnarrative experience of *distraction*' (as in 'variety entertainments'), p. 4.

¹⁵ See Maurizia Boscagli, citing Eric Hobsbawm: 'The Art of Work: Katherine Mansfield's Servant and Perception', in *Re-forming World Literature: Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Short Story*, eds Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2018), pp. 71–92 (p. 72).

¹⁶ Graeber, p. 352.

¹⁷ Ferrall, pp. 107–8, points out the dearth of literary representations of the working class, implying Mansfield is something of an exception.

¹⁸ See Alex Moffett's chapter in this volume discussing the relationship between labour and narrative.

¹⁹ Dalley and Rappoport, p. 2.

²⁰ CW2, p. 293.

²¹ CW2, p. 293.

²² Jeremy Seabrook, *Pauperland: Poverty and the Poor in Britain* (London; Hurst & Co, 2013), p. 157.

²³ CW2, p. 293

²⁴ CW2, p. 292.

²⁵ CW2, p. 295.

²⁶ Graeber, 352.

²⁷ CW2, p. 293.

²⁸ CW2, p. 297.

²⁹ CW2, p. 296

³⁰ CW2, p. 296.

³¹ John Fordham, *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 4.

³² Sanders, p. 29.

³³ Kate Fullbrook, in *Katherine Mansfield* (Brighton; Harvester Press, 1986), p. 37, notes the brilliant placing of Mansfield's parenthetical aside 'at the moment of sexual surrender': ('The real Rosabel, the girl crouched on the floor in the dark, laughed aloud and put her hand up to her hot mouth', CW1, p. 137).

³⁴ CW1, p. 135.

³⁵ CW1, p.135.

³⁶ CW1, pp. 135–6.

³⁷ CW1, p. 133.

³⁸ CW1, p. 134.

³⁹ CW1, p. 133.

⁴⁰ CW1, p. 133.

⁴¹ Fullbrook, *Katherine Mansfield*, pp. 37–8.

⁴² CW2, p. 462.

⁴³ CW2, p. 463.

⁴⁴ CW2, pp. 463–4.

⁴⁵ CW2, p. 465; Barbara Korte, ‘The Femme Fragile: Decline and Fall of a Literary Topos’, *Anglia*, 105. 3/4 (1987), pp. 366–89.

⁴⁶ CW2, p. 466.

⁴⁷ Viola in ‘Swing of the Pendulum’ has parallels with Mansfield’s situation in 1909; the absent lover is a prototype of her lover Garnet Trowell, and the handsome, well-dressed stranger, of George Bowden whom she hastily married then deserted; ‘Pictures’ may draw on her experience as bit actor for the movies. See Jane Stafford, ‘The boyfriends’, in *Katherine Mansfield’s Men*, eds Charles Ferrall and Jane Stafford (Wellington: Katherine Mansfield House and Steele Roberts, 2004), pp. 27–46 (pp. 36–7).

⁴⁸ Nigel Dodd, *The Social Life of Money* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 91.

⁴⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 139–40.

⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, qtd in Margaret Atwood, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 128.

⁵¹ Franco Moretti, qtd in Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 62–3.

⁵² CW1, p. 179; CW2, p. 243.

⁵³ CW1, p. 243.

⁵⁴ CW1, p. 246.

⁵⁵ CW2, p. 180.

⁵⁶ CW2, p. 246.

⁵⁷ Fullbrook, ‘Katherine Mansfield; Subjection and Authority’, p. 55.

⁵⁸ See Ann Herndon Marshall’s chapter on the character of Miss Moss in this volume.

⁵⁹ Jameson, p. 273.

⁶⁰ CW1, p. 133.

⁶¹ CW2, p. 243.

⁶² Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 123.

⁶³ CW4, p. 91.