

Essay E

'Spring Pictures' by Katherine Mansfield is a palette of various human hardships everyone has to face throughout life. The colours painting the narration are quite gloomy and dark with a single slight shade of hope, which does not quite lighten up the atmosphere for being distant and unreachable to the characters of the story.

The first one of distinct problems the author portrays is how hopelessly and uselessly the world is engulfed by materialism. Three sentences at the beginning create an image of poetic beauty thanks to the choice of the vocabulary; the drops of rain described as soft and warm and compared to 'melted stars' convey the author's belief in the magical beauty of the world, which is drastically contrasted by the revelation of the person trying to sell the flowers. Every unit in 'caws the old hag in the gutter' contains negative connotation and shatters the previous picture with the repulsive reality. The author's compares the flowers the woman is selling with 'faded cauliflowers', the epithets used to describe the city street and obvious resentment towards piled goods described as 'soiled' lace and 'dirty' imply the nastiness and pointlessness of all the materialistic values these people try to sell in order to buy other wares of equal irrelevance. 'Dreamy and vacant looking' people who are waging their so-called businesses do so without any enthusiasm, which shows that they themselves are well-aware of how useless their occupation is, taking the precious time and leaving them hollow and unambitious, just empty shells carrying out the familiar and comfortable algorithm, steadily securing their survival. Perhaps some of them are even content with that state of affairs. Those of them, who have the concepts of life and existence mixed up.

Then the attention is drawn to the orchestra striking up a melody and a man starts advertising it violently. He tries to attract an audience by claiming the songstresses to be 'famous and second to none', they are to present their new songs! But despite the entry being free, no one seems to show any interest towards the performance. Why is that? Music is, undoubtedly, one of the brightest and the most vivid expressions of emotions, able to evoke the loftiest and the purest feelings of human soul, such as hope. And the music described in the story is just a fake, mimicking true art. They are nothing new, they are not a fresh aspiration of a human soul, they are but a one more attempt to make money. That, while continuing to expand on the previous idea, also introduce a new one. People, who have either lost hope for the better or have never had it in the first place, substitute it with a counterfeit as vacuous as they are. Moreover, the author emphasizes how mundane that 'art' is by describing the looks of musicians - 'the violinist's bitten', 'far too long cuffs of the flute player', the bunion on the pianist's big toe. These trivial flaws are mentioned not in order to make fun of them but to point out

that they are not transformed or perfected by their music, however beautiful and 'proud' it may be, because it's not a reflection of their souls but a cheap farce.

The second part of the story is opened by the narrator talking to herself, which is a quite curious way of storytelling. That oh-so-familiar struggle with your own true thoughts shows that the woman is trying to convince herself to leave the hope she's clinging to so desperately. The syntactical structure full of short simple sentences and the fast broken pace of the narrative create an air of restlessness. Interrogative sentences she targets at none other than herself reveal her feeling somewhat confused and lost. She's waiting anxiously for something, unable to stop hoping. It turns out that she is looking forward to receiving a letter from someone. Someone whose absence makes her feel out of place, desperate and alone. And exactly that is one more theme of the story. Loneliness. Loneliness of every person on that street, trying to get by and not paying each other any attention. Loneliness of the woman, longing to receive that letter, cradling the last string of hope she has. Hope is the light, giving people the power to push further. But in case that hope never happens to be justified, it turns into a massive destructive force, gradually washing away at the person's soul, bit by bit exhausting the most patient of stoics. And the woman in that story is thoroughly tired of being disappointed by getting the reply 'Nothing, mademoiselle'.

Suddenly, the narrative changes from first person to third person. The reader is presented by an image of spectacular scenery. It's a major contrast to all the previous grey and faded reality with insignificant highlights of beauty. It's as if from that point the character opened her eyes for the first time, seeing how wonderful the world around is, but it doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't matter to the point of her indifferently describing herself in third person. Now that she has decided to leave that last string of hope she has been grasping 'in vain', she feels distant, as if it is not herself but someone shackled by struggles she does not understand anymore. The fact that she is called a 'blur, <...> melting into the stones and the shadows' emphasizes the idea of her detaching from herself. There are two possible interpretations of the last sentence 'And then she is gone': she either leaves her past and the person she has been yearning to hear from behind or she decides to end her life, unable to move on and crushed by her loneliness.

That story contains many manifestations of states of despair a human being can reach. Be it the dull emptiness or the agony of loneliness, it hurts the soul all the same. The author expresses her sadness over the cruelty of life and pities the ordinary people, who are mere hostages of fate.