

## Essay A

### The analysis of the short story "Spring pictures" by Katherine Mansfield

In the short story by Katherine Mansfield "Spring pictures" the author reflects on the problem of the loss of hope and the struggle against sorrow. Through the text she shows us the emotional state of the narrator and her rough steps of accepting a new heartbreaking reality. It is worth mentioning that the story was written in 1915, the year of her younger brother's death during the First World War and her short affair with a French writer Francis Carco. I presume that the story is a projection of Mansfield's feelings: her grief, despair and confusion.

The story is divided into three logical parts. The first part serves as an exposition; it represents the setting and the general atmosphere. It is the longest piece as it is supposed to be the most important part of the story. The exposition makes us feel the tone of the work, the pace of narration and puts the reader into the character's shoes. Such an effect is reached due to the first-person narration where the narrator is a witness of the events. We see the whole picture through the protagonist's eyes. She describes an afternoon in a poor region somewhere in France. The tone of this paragraph is sad and ironic. From the very beginning the author draws our attention to the weather conditions by one short sentence "*It is raining*". Generally, rain is associated with some tragic events or gloomy mood. Consequently, the nature is a reflection of the narrator's inner world. Such a phenomenon is called psychologic parallelism. Moreover, here rain may foreshadow some tragic events, though in the paragraph we see a beautiful and poetic simile "*melted stars*". Why does the author use such an exquisite expression? I would like to draw attention to the word "*melted*": it points out that stars exist to make wishes and their melting may symbolize hopelessness. Therefore, even this pleasantly sounding simile has a negative and sad connotation.

Such expressive means as epithets, contrasts, similes and emotionally coloured words strengthen the atmosphere of sadness and loneliness. Thus, some filthy pieces of lace are used to "*charm and entice you*". The whole part of the story is full of attributes with negative connotation: *bad, sickly* smell. A bunch of lilies is brilliantly compared with "*faded cauliflowers*". Lily is white as well as cauliflower. However, the petals of the first plant are smooth and beautiful, as well as young lady's skin. On the contrary, cauliflower looks like a wrinkled face of an elderly person; to strengthen the contrast between these two plants the author uses an epithet "*faded*". This simile creates an off-putting impression of an old lady who looks even older than she is and also conveys confused feelings of the protagonist due to rapid contrast between lilies and cauliflowers. The phrase "*cows the old hag*" gives us an image of an unpleasant elderly sick woman whose voice sounds creaky. Later on, her exclamations are described as warbling, that is why I can see a great deal of irony expressed in a rough contrast.

However, this irony has shades of pity. The old lady goes as a leitmotiv through this part. Her only words are advertisements of the flowers she tries to sell. A special attention is drawn to violets, as all three phrases about them are different. If we resort to flower language, we will find out that this plant symbolizes modesty. That is to say, it may be a metaphor describing poor people in the suburbs or the inability of the main character to struggle against something. Each of the phrases starts with the word "*here*". This anaphora emphasizes the lady's desire to draw people's attention. It is sort of a cry for help. The "old hag" is one of the two characters who are described in more detail. The other is a man advertising a music shop. He is dressed in ridiculously bright clothes and the author uses this image to show a light of hope and happiness in the kingdom of darkness. The author's intension to demonstrate the indifference of the

people and their lack of desire to change anything is expressed in rhetoric questions with an air of despair (Who is ever going to buy anything here ...?; Why should they?) and the repetition of the negative pronoun *nobody*. These interrogative questions also constitute the inner speech of the main character.

The second part also represents the first-person narration with the only difference that here she is a protagonist. The piece combines the description of the events and the inner speech. Due to this combination and the relatively small size of the extract, the pace of the narration accelerates. Therefore, the segment contains both the rising action and the climax of the whole story. The tone of this part, more optimistic at the beginning, contradicts the pessimistic mood at the end. The gradation of the events goes as following: at first, we see the major character address Hope in her inner speech. This is an example of personalization. Hope is represented as an invisible and, at the same time, annoying neighbour of the protagonist. A rough contrast in the direct address "*Hope, you misery...*" is an oxymoron. It expresses the main character's tiredness of awaiting good news. For her it seems easier to give up and to vanish in despair. Another simile "*huge bed big as a field and as cold and unsheltered*" is a symbol of a lonely and abandoned woman because for her alone this bed seems too large. The mention of "*a hammer tapping*" and "*a door swings open and shuts*" creates a sound effect of a heart rhythm or a working clock. The idea of unstoppable time is also illustrated by the repetition of the word "*faded*". It makes us understand that everything will end one day.

If in the first part the narrator's mood matched the gloomy setting, here it contrasts the calm, sunny and pleasant day. Rhetoric questions show that the character is at a loss. She is obviously tired of waiting for the situation to change for the better. That is why she begs Hope to leave her. Though when a glimpse of good news appears, her heart starts beating faster. This leads us to the climax when she is thrown down to the earth again. That is why the change in the syntactical structure is not accidental: the sentences become a reflection of the protagonist's confused feelings. They become shorter and lose any detail: "*Shut the door. Stand in the little passage a moment. Listen — listen for her hated twanging.*" All the feelings of the character are concentrated in the last sentence "*In vain*".

The last part of the story is different from the previous two. The narration is written in the third person and we do not know who the new narrator is. At the same time, the woman described in the third person may be the major character. From the side view we see that she is completely broken. It becomes evident when the narrator speaks about her behavior and gestures. Her inner grief is expressed by her actions: slow and smooth in the beginning and more rapid, hysterical and repetitive closer to the end. The woman's appearance demonstrates her loss of hope. Her clothes are described in monochrome shades in contrast with the bright colours of the sunset. The sunset itself shows the author's intension to draw a parallel with the end of some important step in the woman's life.

The story bursts with colours: violet, yellow, gold, tangerine (orange) and lilac. Then again, they support the image of a sunset as a symbol of the end. Among these bright spots we see a dark "*blur*" of the woman who does not fit into the surroundings.

To conclude, I would like to say that this story is short but quite emotional. It makes us sympathize with the main character and, because of the open ending, lets us guess what will happen to her. Will she get absorbed in her sorrow or will she accept it and live further? I believe that even though the woman might have given up hope, hope has not left the woman. In the last sentences we see a sign of a better future. It is "*new leaves*" because the action takes place in spring, according to the title. This season is associated with the revival of nature and symbolizes rebirth. This woman will recover from her grief, no matter how long it should take. Still, her heart will shine one day like the sun which rises after a long and dark night.