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Victimization or self-inflicted hurt: Double narrative movements in Katherine Mansfield's *The Little Governess*

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The paper aims to study the double narrative movements in Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Little Governess" which has received limited critical attention because of its seemingly simple plot. Most of the previous interpretations concentrate on the victimization of the little governess by patriarchal forces. But the study of Mansfield's subtle stylistic choices, together with intertextual comparison and the connection with the author's personal life, reveals that behind the 'overt plot' there exists a 'covert progression' in which another countervailing theme springs out: the victimization of the little governess by her class prejudice. By laying bare the heroine as a girl who is victimized by her distinct class consciousness, this essay exposes Mansfield's criticism of the deep-rooted class division

Keywords: *covert progression, overt plot, victimization, class prejudice*

1. Introduction

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), a New Zealand-born English master of short stories, writes "The Little Governess" in 1915. Since its publication, this short story has received two kinds of summary from critics. On the one hand, Tomalin (2009, 156) thinks it is a story about "the vulnerability and terror of a young girl who falls into the hands of an apparently benevolent old gentleman". And similarly, Kaplan (1991, 389) regards it as a story that "focuses on vulnerability of women in a world dominated by male power". On the other hand, Hankin (1983, 99) contends that "the real theme of the work is childhood: not chronological childhood, but the unnatural prolongation of emotional childhood in an adult woman". Be it the victimization of the little governess in a patriarchal society or "emotional childhood in an adult woman", these themes are all based on the overt plot development of this short story. Yet, under the plot-line, there exists a paralleling undercurrent that

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revolves around the victimization of the little governess by her class prejudice. The subtle undercurrent is designated by Professor Dan Shen as 'covert progression' in 2013. Covert progression, together with the overt plot, constitutes 'double narrative movements'.

Compared with Mansfield's other short stories such as "The Fly," "A Cup of Tea," etc., "The Little Governess" has not received much attention from critics. Up until now, only three articles focus on this story in western countries. Banerjee (2020, 105) delves into the mind of the sexual predator whose "intentions and ulterior motives are slowly revealed". Villanueva makes an interesting comparative study between "The Little Governess" and "Little Red Riding Hood", arguing that the former demythologizes the latter's motif (5). Whereas Fetters (2016, 166) elaborates on how Mansfield presents the victimization of the little governess through "aligning the gender-marked colours of pink and blue with varying levels of male and female space and with varying levels of safety and danger".

From the literature review, we can see that there is no scholar paying attention to the covert progression which is essential for us to get a full picture of the thematic meaning of Mansfield's short story. Therefore, this paper, through the integration of stylistic analysis, intertextual comparison, and the consideration of the author's life experience, aims to analyze the double narrative movements in Mansfield's "The Little Governess" and see how the theme of victimization of the little governess by patriarchal forces gets subverted by the theme of victimization of the little governess by her class prejudice.

2. Beginning of double narrative movements

In her book *Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions Behind Overt Plots*, Professor Shen (2014, 1) defines covert progression as "an undercurrent running throughout the prose text". She claims that "in addition to the overt plot development, there is frequently a covert textual progression which develops important countervailing or supplementary themes that are crucial to the proper understanding of the implied author's rhetorical design" (Shen 2014, 145). Mansfield's "The Little Governess" is a case in point. Behind the plot development where the little governess is victimized by the male powers, namely the porter, the old man, and the waiter, there exists a covert progression that secretly unifies various stylistic choices which appear digressive to the main line of action. This undercurrent forms an overall irony against the little governess who falls prey to the old man, a sexual predator, just because of her strong sense of class distinction and prejudice. As for the concept of 'prejudice', social psychologist James Jones

(1997, 10), in a revision of his earlier book, defines it as "a *positive or negative* attitude, judgement or feeling about a person that is generalized from attitudes or beliefs held about the group to which the person belongs" (italics added).

When Professor Shen makes a distinction between covert progression and other types of covert meaning, she points out that covert progression is quite different and has several distinct features, one of which is that it is "a *continuous* undercurrent running from the beginning to the end of the narrative" (Shen 2014, 9, italic original). Therefore, this analysis of the double narrative movements of Mansfield's "The Little Governess" will be divided into three parts, which respectively center on the beginning, the middle, and the end of this short story.

Before we start the beginning part, it's quite necessary to present the summaries of the double narrative movements of this story. Its overt plot can be summarized as follows: A British little governess travels alone at night to her employer's home in Munich. She first meets a rather rude porter who snatches her dress basket and asks for a franc. The governess refuses to pay because she thinks it is a trick. Later she finds that the same porter ushers an old man into her carriage. With the company of this "grandfather-like" old man, the governess feels safe. And more importantly, she feels indebted to him because he buys her a basket of strawberries when she cannot afford them. With a "grateful baby heart", she consents to visit the city with him. However, she finally discovers that the old man is a sexual predator. What's worse, the little governess misses her appointment with her employer, over which the waiter in the hotel gloats.

Behind the overt plot, there is a hidden covert narrative progression that goes like this: The little governess, full of class prejudice, always judges a person through his occupation and class status. When the little governess meets the porter who takes away her dress basket, she thinks he is a horrible robber and refuses to pay him a franc. When she looks at the old man, she deduces from his attire and behavior that he is a German Colonel or a General and has a harmonious time with him. When she sees his name card and finds that he has a title, the little governess has one-hundred-percent confidence in him. Ironically, the old man whom she regards as a decent man of importance turns out to be a truly horrible sexual predator. What's worse, her cold and arrogant attitude toward the waiter in the hotel results in his revenge. So she gets double hurt in the end just because of her class prejudice.

As the two above-mentioned summaries indicate, the plot development focuses on the victimization of the little governess by the male characters, namely the porter, the old man, and the waiter, whereas the covert progression concentrates on the fundamental cause for the victimization of the little governess, which is her strong sense of class distinction and prejudice.

With the general idea about the double narrative movements in Mansfield's "The Little Governess", we now can move on to specifically discuss how Mansfield takes advantage of subtle stylistic patterning to weave two parallel narrative movements in this short story. Let's first look at the little governess's interaction with the porter in the relatively beginning part of the short story.

> Then a man in a black leather cap came forward and *touched her on the arm*. "Where for, Miss?" He spoke English – he must be a guard or a stationmaster with a cap like that. She had scarcely answered when *he pounced on her dress-basket*. "This way," he shouted, in a *rude*, determined voice, and elbowing his way he strode past the people. "But I don't want a porter." What a horrible man! "I don't want a porter. I want to carry it myself." She had to run to keep up with him, and her anger, far stronger than she, ran before her and snatched the bag out of the wretch's hand. *He paid no attention at all*, but swung on down the long dark platform, and across a railway line. "He is a robber." She was sure he was a robber… (Mansfield 2006, 52, italics added)

In the plot development, the italicized words become conspicuous. We can see that the porter, a representative of the patriarchal society, can touch the little governess and even take away the little governess's luggage without her agreement. Besides, he is indifferent to her plea of carrying her dress-basket by herself. And scholars regard it as one aspect of the victimization of the little governess in the patriarchal society. "Boarding the train in France she falls prey to an insolent porter who imposes his services on her" (Kaščáková 2011, 192). In the plot development, we can see the little governess is bullied by the porter who is the first representative of patriarchal society in this short story. But if we open our minds to a textual undercurrent, we may see a very different picture:

> Then a man in a black leather cap came forward and touched her on the arm. "Where for, Miss?" He spoke English – **he must be a guard or a stationmaster with a cap like that**. She had scarcely answered when he pounced on her dress-basket. "This way," he shouted, in a rude, determined voice, and elbowing his way he strode past the people. "**But I don't want a porter.**" **What a horrible man!** "**I don't want a porter.** I want to carry it myself." She had to run to keep up with him, and her anger, far stronger than she, ran before her and snatched the bag out of **the wretch's** hand. He paid no attention at all, but swung on down the long dark platform, and across a railway line. "**He is a robber**." **She was sure he was a robber**… (Mansfield 2006, 52, boldface added)

From these boldfaced words and sentences, we can see that Mansfield fabulously utilizes different forms of speech presentation to introduce the little governess's judgments on the porter based on his attire and social class.

In light of speech presentation, linguists Leech and Short (2007, 277) divided it into direct speech, indirect speech, free direct speech, free indirect speech, and narrative report of speech act[2]. In the covert progression of this short story, Mansfield first uses free indirect speech to present the little governess's deduction regarding the man's identity: "he must be a guard or a stationmaster with a cap like that." Based on the "black leather cap", the little governess initially deduces that this man is "a guard or a stationmaster". But when he "pounced on her dress-basket" without her consent and shows her the way, she now knows and speaks out that he is "a porter", which is presented in the form of free direct speech. Moreover, she puts another label on him, namely "a horrible man". We should notice that Mansfield presents the little governess's inner thinking - What a horrible man! - in the form of free direct or indirect speech without quotation marks. Its being sandwiched between two sentences that have quotation marks will mislead readers to regard it as a comment from the narrator. But the exclamation mark signifies that it is the character's inner speech (Leech and Short 2007, 266). In other words, this single sentence will be misread as a commentary from the narrator for those readers who only focus on the overt plot. But for readers who notice the covert progression, they know it is a judgment from the little governess who tends to think people are horrible just based on their social status or behavior or outlook as we will see more clearly in later discussion.

When the little governess fails to snatch back her luggage from the 'wretch', she thinks "[h]e is a robber". And the narrator further claims that "[s]he was sure he was a robber". This repetition seems redundant in the overt plot. But it is a crucial hint for covert progression. The narrator tells us that the little governess is 'sure' about her judgment. But actually, the man is not a 'robber', which means the protagonist makes a wrong judgment. Through this repetition, coupled with other words and sentences marked by boldface in the quotation, Mansfield subtly demonstrates that in this short snippet the little governess makes judgments on the porter four times ('a guard or a stationmaster,' 'a porter,' 'a horrible man,' and 'a robber'). Be they correct or incorrect, these judgments reflect that the little governess has strong consciousness of class division.

[2] Leech and Short distinguish speech presentation from thought presentation. Whereas Professor Shen thinks it's unnecessary to make such a distinction (2009, 287-288). This essay adopts Professor Shen's opinion and in this paper speech refers to both verbal speech and inner speech.

With the preconception about the porter whom she believes is 'a horrible man' and 'a robber', the little governess refuses to pay a franc to him because she thinks he plays a trick. Mansfield who is adept at presenting her characters' psychology through free indirect speech, once again presents the governess's inner speech in such form: "A franc! Did he imagine that she was going to give him a franc for playing a trick like that just because she was a girl and travelling alone at night? Never, never!" (Mansfield 2006, 52). The little governess's inner speech is her justification for refusal to pay the porter a franc. We may agree more or less with her, but we should not neglect that the porter indeed helps her and shows her to the train she is going to embark on. Without him leading the way, the little governess has no idea where she is going to take the train, which is pointed out when she disembarks the evening boat: "she moved forward with the sleepy flock, all knowing where to go to and what to do except her" (Mansfield 51). Instead of showing her gratitude for his showing the way, the little governess insists that he plays a trick and "decides to punish him … by paying him much less than his usual fee" (Kašcáková 2011, 192). And Hankin (1983, 98-99) thinks the little governess treats the porter with a "hostile attitude" and she acts "like a spoilt child in her refusal to pay the porter [a franc]". Likewise, Wilson (2015, 232) regards the little governess's refusal to pay a franc as a kind of "mishandling of the insolent male porter".

Even though these critics notice that it's inappropriate for the little governess to refuse to pay the porter a franc, they fail to point out the connection between the little governess's refusal, her prejudice, and her tragic ending. The little governess thinks the porter is a 'horrible man', a 'robber' who plays a trick on her, thus she refuses to pay him one franc. To revenge, the porter ushers an old man into her carriage on purpose and tears off the label – 'dames seules'. In other words, it's her prejudice against the porter that leads him to bring a potential sexual predator to her. This subtle causal relationship is digressive in the overt plot but important in the covert progression. Only when we dig out such a connection can we fully appreciate Mansfield's dexterous arrangement.

From the above analysis, we can see that in the plot development, the little governess is bullied by the insolent porter. While in the overt progression, we can observe that Mansfield writes more about the little governess's inner speech which reveals the protagonist's strong sense of class prejudice. Her strong class consciousness leads to the grave disaster she will encounter at the end of the short story. Unless we open our minds to the undercurrent behind the plot, we may be hard put to discover the covert progression which reveals the victimization of the little governess by her prejudice. And only when we discover the double narrative movements can we avoid getting a false picture of the thematic significance, a

partial judgment of the characters, and an incorrect understanding of the aesthetic values of the narrative (Shen 2014, 26; Shen 2015, 434; Shen 2017, 143).

3. Middle of double narrative movements

In the middle part of the short story, the little governess meets the old man who shares the same carriage with her. As for their interaction, scholars who merely pay attention to the overt plot can only notice the old man's scheme and contend that he traps the little governess step by step (Lynley 2020; Banerjee 2020, 105). Whereas in the covert progression, Mansfield discloses that the reason why the little governess falls into the old man's trap is the little governess's tendency to judge people based on attire and social class. To better illustrate the little governess's prejudice, we should first look at the little governess's observation of the old man in the two paragraphs quoted below:

> For a moment or two big tears brimmed her eyes and through them she saw the old man unwinding **a scarf** from his neck and untying the flaps of his **Jaeger cap**. He looked very old. Ninety at least. He had a white moustache and **big gold-rimmed spectacles** …. A **nice face** – and **charming**… (Mansfield 54, boldface added)
>
> Careful to see that he was not looking she peeped at him through her long lashes… He was a German. Something in the army, she supposed – **a Colonel or a General** – once, of course, not now; …. He wore **a pearl pin** stuck in **his black tie** and **a ring with a dark red stone** on his little finger; the tip of **a white silk handkerchief** showed in the pocket of **his double-breasted jacket**. Somehow, altogether, he was really **nice** to look at. Most old men were so **horrid**. She couldn't bear them doddery – or they had a disgusting cough or something. But **not having a beard** – that made all the difference… (Mansfield 2006, 54, boldface added)

As indicated by such phrases as 'she saw' and 'she peeped at him', Mansfield introduces the old man's dressing from the perspective of the little governess. Following the title character's point of view, we can see that the old man wears 'a scarf,' 'a Jaeger cap,' and a pair of 'big gold-rimmed spectacles'. We can also know how the little governess thinks of her companion: she thinks he has a 'nice face' and he is charming. Just as social psychologist Rupert Brown (2010, 4) points out that, "logically, prejudice can take both positive and negative forms", we can say

that in this short story the little governess who casts negative prejudice on the porter exerts positive prejudice on the old man.

Based on her observation of his attire and appearance, the little governess even supposes the old man is 'a Colonel or a General'. According to Encyclopedia Britannica,

> colonel [is] the highest field-grade officer, ranking just below the general officer grades in most armies or below brigadier in the British services. A colonel was traditionally the commanding officer of a regiment or brigade.… When not exercising command of a regiment, group, or equivalent formation, a colonel is generally placed in a senior staff or administrative post.

From this definition, we can know that a colonel is of high social status. And the old man whom the little governess believes to be a colonel wins her respect and admiration. After making the assumption, the little governess further observes that the old man wears 'a pearl pin,' a 'black tie,' 'a ring with a dark red stone,' and a 'double-breasted jacket' with 'a white silk handkerchief'. Once again, the little governess assumes that the old man is 'nice', 'really nice to look at'. It should be observed that Mansfield arranges the little governess to repeat that the old man is 'nice'. What deserves our attention is that the two repetitions are equally based on the old man's dressing. The repetition makes us sense how shallow the little governess is and how naïve it is for her to judge people based on their outlook and social status.

The reason why the little governess makes a judgment on people based on their attire and social status is probably that compared with the man, the little governess only wears "dark ugly clothes" (Mansfield 2006, 55). One thing needs to be pointed out here regarding the comparison between the little governess's and the old man's dressing: In the eyes of the little governess whose clothes are monotonously 'dark', the old man's clothes are more colorful. She notices that his spectacles are 'gold-rimmed', his tie is 'black', his ring is set with a 'dark red' stone, and his silk handkerchief is 'white'. The sharp contrast in this part helps us notice the covert progression which reveals their different social status. The little governess's 'dark ugly clothes' indicate that she is shabby and probably from a poor family. Whereas, the old man's colorful and decent dressing, in the eyes of the little governess, signifies that he is a man of importance and she can have confidence in him. Mainly through the subtle manipulation of focalization or point of view, Mansfield creates a continuous undercurrent that indicates the little governess's strong sense of social ranking and her tendency to judge people based on their dress and social class.

With the belief that the old man is 'a Colonel or a General', the little governess behaves in a shy and girlish manner in her interaction with him. The little governess answers his question, "blushing a deep pink colour that spread slowly over her cheeks" (Mansfield 2006, 54). "She smiled prettily handing back the papers" (Mansfield 2006, 55). "[S]he dimpled at him as though he were an old accepted friend" (Mansfield 2006, 57). Furthermore, since she regards him as her grandfather, she takes everything he offers to her. She looks through his newspaper and accepts the strawberries he buys for her. At last, she consents to visit Munich with him. When the little governess eats ice cream, Mansfield mentions that the little governess's "grateful baby heart glowed with love for the fairy grandfather" (Mansfield 2006, 60). What is special is that the narrator comments that the little governess's heart is a baby heart, which can be regarded as the emphasis of the little governess's innocence and naivety or inexperience in the overt plot. But in the covert progression, it becomes tinged with the implied author's irony. Such irony can be more conspicuous when we relate "The Little Governess" with "The Bliss" (1918), a well-known short story by Mansfield. In "The Bliss", the protagonist Bertha "almost could have wept with child-like pleasure" when her husband praises the soufflé made by her (Mansfield 2006, 152). Both Bertha and the little governess behave like children when praised or offered something by others. Before we make any comments on the little governess's or Bertha's childish behavior, let's first see how Mansfield presents children's reactions in a similar situation.

Under Mansfield's pen, small children tend to regard people as very kind even though the other party just behaves very normally. To name a few, the little girl Matilda in "The Wind Blows" (1915) thinks her music teacher Mr. Bullen "speak[s] so kindly – so awfully kindly – and as though they had known each other for years and years and knew everything about each other" (Mansfield 2006, 77), which is presented in the form of free indirect speech. Now let's see what the teacher says to Matilda: "'Let's have a little of the old master,' he says" (Mansfield 2006, 77). The narrator uses direct speech to introduce the teacher's words, without any comments, which makes a striking contrast with the girl who thinks the teacher speaks "so kindly – so awfully kindly". The sharp contrast between the narrator of sense and Matilda of sensibility outstands the child's naïve thinking and incorrect judgment.

It must be pointed out that the little governess's conducts are remarkably similar to that of Matilda. The little governess "dimpled at him[the old man] as though he were an old accepted friend" (Mansfield 2006, 57) and when she eats the strawberries he buys for her she "felt she had known him for years" (Mansfield 2006, 58). This similarity expresses the implied author's irony to the little governess

who is a governess-to-be but behaves like a child or worse like a baby who cannot make the right judgments. Hankin (1983, 99) also claims that '[t]he irony which overlays the story is obvious. One with so much to learn as the little governess has no business to be starting out as a teacher".

If the old man's seemingly decent behavior and nice dressing make the little governess regards him as a grandfather whom she can trust, then the old man's name card lets her off all guard. When the little governess hesitates and wonders if it is wrong for her to consent to the old man's invitation to visit Munich, the old man gives her his name card which says "Herr Regierungsrat" and the little governess thinks that "He had a title! Well, it was *bound* to be all right!" (Mansfield 2006, 58, italic original) Here, the two exclamation marks signify that these are the little governess's inner thoughts, which are presented in the form of free indirect speech (the original text doesn't have quotation marks). What's more, we should pay attention to the word "bound" which has been italicized by Mansfield. For one thing, like the aforementioned "[s]he was sure he was a robber", the italicized 'bound' means the little governess now has one-hundred-percent confidence in the old man since he has a 'title'. Mundeja (2021, 140) also thinks that "[t]he little governess weaves her way through foreignness by measuring the experiential against the textual. When she learns he has a title, she reads it as incontrovertible evidence of his probity. That the class element plays a role in her assessment is an implication decidedly present".

For another, the italicized 'bound' also forms a striking contrast to the "twist ending" (McDonnell 2010, 84) in which the little governess finds her judgment of the old man is wrong. Such being the case, it's fair to claim that in the covert progression the little governess's tragic ending is to some extent attributable to her blind trust in social status. Through this 'twist ending', Mansfield also expresses her condemnation of the little governess. Just as Hankin (1983, 100) claims,

> For as she wrote it, Katherine Mansfield appeared to spare no one: neither her protagonist, nor herself, nor her readers. Indeed, in this punishment of the little governess one is tempted to see the author's vicarious self-castigation for her own folly in misconstruing the honeyed words of Carco. He had been no more the 'fairy' grandfather, come to relieve her suffering with Murry, than the old man in the story. Content to explore the condition of fantasy-living in 'Something Childish', she unmistakably condemns it here.

Hankin relates the short story to Mansfield's personal life. When Mansfield wrote this short story in 1915, she spent that year shifting between John Middleton Murry's flat in London and Francis Carco's flat in Paris (Lynley 2020; Alpers 1982, 408-409). At that time, her relationship with Murry is not stable and she wants to

find passion in Carco. Mansfield's biographer Anthony Alpers (1982, 174), in *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, claims that "[t]he years with Jack[John] which Katherine now called their 'three-year idyll' seemed over, and she wanted a life that was to be 'more natural to that which I suppose I am'." So Mansfield goes to stays with Carco for 4 days. But just as Murry predicts that Mansfield will come back disillusioned (Alpers 1982, 171), she finally realized that it's foolish for her to misconstrue 'the honeyed words of Carco'. Therefore, it's reasonable to contend that Mansfield probably projects her self-castigation on the little governess who also misconstrues the old man's intention.

Mansfield's condemnation of the little governess in the covert progression can be strengthened if we compare this short story with "The Swing of the Pendulum" (1911), another short story by Mansfield. In the latter, the female protagonist Viola also makes judgments on people based on their dress. Viola notices the stranger wears a greatcoat and "heavy clothes and big buttoned gloves" and he has "beautifully brushed hair" (Mansfield 2006, 21). Based on her observation of this stranger's dressing, Viola believes that he belongs to a wealthy man who can afford everything she wants. But instead of continuously falling into her fancy for the stranger, Viola soon becomes reasonable again and discovers he is stupid and silly. She immediately stops her fancy, avoiding a tragic ending. By contrast, the little governess in our discussion fails to wake up from her fancy to her "grandfather" and cannot avoid an unfortunate ending.

Another thing that reveals the little governess's prejudice needs to be pointed out. The little governess tends to think people are horrible if they are ugly or impolite or have lower social status. For instance, when the porter takes her luggage without asking her opinion first, she thinks he is such "a horrible man" (Mansfield 2006, 52). When she observes the old man, she thinks that "[m]ost old men are so horrid. She couldn't bear them doddery – or they had a disgusting cough or something". She doesn't explain why she thinks old men are 'horrid'. But from what she couldn't bear, we can deduce that what she thinks is 'horrid' is just those old men's daily behavior. Similarly, when she is taken to the gypsy band, she doesn't like it because "such horrible men were there with heads like eggs and cuts on their faces, so she turned her chair and cupped her burning cheeks in her hands and watched her old friend instead" (Mansfield 2006, 59-60). From the quotations, it is quite clear that in the covert progression the little governess has a very superficial and shallow judgment on people.

In the little governess's initial formula, 'horrible' things are equivalent to unhandsome outlooks and impolite behaviors. Whereas people with nice faces are kind, so she turns to watch the old man and regards him as her 'old friend'. Ironically, the last time when she thinks people are horrible is when she is sexually harassed by

the old man. After being kissed by the man, the little governess is disillusioned. “It was a dream! It wasn’t true! It wasn’t the same old man at all. Ah, how horrible!” (Mansfield 2006, 61) Through the series of exclamation points, Mansfield emphasizes the little governess’s astonishment. But at the same time, the exclamatory sentences are tinged with irony. The old man whom the little governess regards as her grandfather turns out to be a molester, a sexual predator. Now she finally comes across the truly horrible man who is like a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

There is another irony that can only be sensed when we notice the covert progression. Professor Shen (2014, 7) contends that ironic covert progression has two distinctive features, one of which is “it is a sustained ironic movement from the beginning to the end of the text, and local elements often become ironic only in relation to other elements in the covert progression”. In light of the little governess’s case, when she claims the old man as a ‘horrible’ man, we cannot sense the deeper ironic meaning from the implied author. But when we relate it with other elements in the covert progression, such as the little governess’s regarding the porter, mostly old men, and the gypsy as horrible people based on their occupation and outlook, we immediately sense the implied author’s deeper irony. The little governess’s initial idea on ‘horrible’ is wrong. She should not judge people as ‘horrible’ based on their social status and appearance because what is truly ‘horrible’ is in disguise, just like the old man who gives her a grave blow at the end. All in all, Mansfield’s subtle stylistic choices lead us to discover the covert progression centering on the little governess’s assessment of people based on social class and appearance. The covert progression is arranged with extraordinary ingenuity, which is aesthetically appealing.

In the overt plot which concentrates on the vulnerability of the little governess and the victimization by patriarchal oppression, the various textual details analyzed in this part seem unimportant and even to some extent irrelevant. But in the ironic covert progression, the trivial details interact to reveal and criticize the victimization of the little governess by her prejudice. The perception of the covert progression establishes a secret communication between the authorial audience and the implied author. The authorial audience commences on perceiving the thematic significance and aesthetic value of what seems to be trivial and irrelevant.

4. End of double narrative movements

At the end of the short story, Mansfield presents the interaction between the little governess and the waiter in the hotel. As for their interaction, some scholars regard

it as one aspect of patriarchal oppression (Fetters 2016, 170). Other scholars hold the view that the reason why the waiter treats the little governess impolitely is that she forgets to pay him the expected tip (Kaščáková 2011, 193; Hankin 1983, 98). These analyses are plausible. But there is still room for interpretation if we open our minds to another narrative progression behind the plot development. We may find that Mansfield goes far beyond denouncing the victimization of the little governess in a patriarchal society or criticizing the foolishness of the little governess. In the covert progression, Mansfield reveals that both the little governess and the waiter have strong prejudice against each other. As Professor Shen (2014, 12) maintains, "the covert progression is characteristically based on very subtle stylistic patterning, which requires conscious and careful exploration of the text". Therefore, in an attempt to better elucidate the characters' prejudice which is hidden in the covert progression, the interaction between the little governess and the waiter is quoted as follows:

> He **dashed down** her dress-basket and pulled up a clattering, dusty blind. Ugh! what an ugly, cold room – what enormous furniture! Fancy spending the day in here! "Is this the room Frau Arnholdt ordered?" asked the little governess. The waiter had **a curious way of staring** as if there was something ***funny*** about her. **He pursed up his lips about to whistle**, and then changed his mind. "*Gewiss*," he said. Well, why didn't he go? Why did he stare so? "*Gehen Sie*," said the little governess, **with frigid English simplicity**. **His little eyes, like currants, nearly popped out of his doughy cheeks.** "*Gehen Sie sofort*" she repeated **icily**. At the door he turned. "And the gentleman," said he, "**shall I show the gentleman upstairs when he comes?**" (Mansfield 2006, 59, boldface added and italics original)

On the side of the waiter, he thinks the little governess is "a sex worker" (Lynley 2020), that's why he "dashed down her dress-basket" instead of putting it down lightly, and later he intends to purse up "his lips about to whistle" and further questions the little governess "shall I show the gentleman upstairs when he comes?" With the preconception that she is a sex worker, the waiter thinks she is inferior to him. Such being the case, he treats her in a different way from the way he treats other clients. For instance, when a new client comes, the waiter "swung the new arrival's box on to his shoulders" (Mansfield 2006, 62). What's more, when the little governess asks him whether the room is booked by her employer, the waiter has "a curious way of staring as if there was something *funny* about her". The reason why the waiter curiously stares at her is that he thinks her a prostitute and it's "*funny*" for her to ask who books this room. Such being the case, we can see that Mansfield italicizes the word "funny" in an attempt to strengthen the

waiter's prejudice against the little governess. And when the little governess in a cold manner commands him to leave, he is very surprised that "[h]is little eyes, like currants, nearly popped out of his doughy cheeks" because, in his view, people of lower social status than him cannot command him whereas she does.

On the side of the little governess, she thinks she is superior to the waiter because she is a client whereas he is a service provider. So she commands him to go away 'with frigid English simplicity' and repeats her command 'icily'. She shows two utterly different attitudes towards the waiter and the old man whom she thinks is 'a Colonel or a General'. Hankin also notices that "[i]n sharp contrast to her treatment of menials who expect gratuities for their service is her happy response to the generosity of the old man" and Hankin (1983, 98) attributes these different attitudes to the little governess's "mistrust[ing]" the waiter who is a stranger, which echoes the words said by the lady in Governess Bureau at the beginning of this short story: "I always tell my girls that it's better to mistrust people at first rather than trust them, and it's safer to suspect people of evil intentions rather than good ones." (Mansfield 2006, 51) It's plausible to say that the little governess mistrusts the stranger, but we should not ignore that in a frigid and cold fashion commanding others to leave is more of an arrogant behavior rather than the conduct of mistrust. Such arrogant behavior squarely stands out the little governess's psychology that she thinks she enjoys higher social status than the waiter.

At the end of this short story, the little governess comes back to the hotel, only to find that her employer has gone, which means she loses her job. In the overt plot, we can see that the waiter takes pleasure in her misfortune, which can be demonstrated in the underlined sentence below:

> "Where is the lady now?" asked the little governess, shuddering so violently that she had to hold her handkerchief up to her mouth. "How should I know?" cried the waiter, and as <u>he swooped past her to pounce upon a new arrival his heart beat so hard against his ribs that he nearly chuckled aloud</u>. "That's it! that's it!" he thought. "That will show her." And as he swung the new arrival's box on to his shoulders – hoop! – as though he were a giant and the box a feather, he minced over again the little governess's words, "*Gehen Sie. Gehen Sie Sofort*. Shall I! Shall I!" he shouted to himself. (Mansfield 2006, 62, underline added and italics original)

Nevertheless, we should observe that, behind the overt plot development centering on the waiter's gloating, we have a covert textual progression focusing on the waiter's pleasure in taking revenge, which can be manifested in the boldfaced word and sentences below:

> "Where is the lady now?" asked the little governess, shuddering so violently that she had to hold her handkerchief up to her mouth. "How should I know?" **cried** the waiter, and as he swooped past her to pounce upon a new arrival his heart beat so hard against his ribs that he nearly chuckled aloud. **"That's it! that's it!"** he thought. **"That will show her."** And as he swung the new arrival's box on to his shoulders – hoop! – as though he were a giant and the box a feather, he minced over again the little governess's words, "***Gehen Sie. Gehen Sie Sofort*. Shall I! Shall I!"** he shouted to himself. (Mansfield 2006, 62, boldface added and italics original)

When the little governess questions the whereabouts of her employer, the waiter 'cried', "How should I know?" The word 'cried' means that he speaks in a loud voice, which further indicates that Mansfield underscores the waiter feels himself is the stronger part. Besides, the rhetorical sentence "How should I know?" has the connotation that "you should not ask me, I am not responsible for that." Compared with a declarative sentence such as "Sorry, I don't know." which is a normal reply any waiter can give, the rhetorical sentence given by the waiter in our discussion is quite unusual, which demonstrates his sense of superiority to some extent. Besides, after he takes the revenge, he has such thoughts: "That's it! that's it!" and "That will show her." Here Mansfield uses direct speech to present the waiter's thoughts. For one thing, the quotation marks make his thoughts much louder and more powerful, which stands out the waiter's pleasure of taking revenge. For another, the repetition also strengthens the waiter's emotion. Furthermore, the waiter repeats the little governess's command "*Gehen Sie. Gehen Sie Sofort*" which means "get out, get out right now" in English. This indicates that he resents the little governess's command and it's hard for him to take the command from a woman whom he believes is a sex worker and is inferior to him. And the repetition of "Shall I!" demonstrates his sense of victory in his revenge against the little governess. From these, we can observe that Mansfield takes advantage of stylistic devices to create a continuous undercurrent that reveals the prejudice between characters of different ranking.

What deserves our delving into is the ending. Instead of ending the short story with the little governess's sadness, Mansfield chooses to conclude it with the waiter's pleasure of taking revenge. So why does Mansfield make such kind of choice? We may find the answer after we go through literary critics Brooks and Warren's discussion of the ending of Ernest Hemingway's short story, "The Killers". Hemingway concludes this story with the conversation between Nick and George from which Nick's epiphany can be seen. Such an ending leads Brooks and Warren

(1971, 195) to believe “it is Nick’s story”, and the theme is “the boy’s discovery of evil”. Their opinion on the theme is quite different from others who think “The Killers” is “the gangsters’ story” and who see “no relevance in the last several pages of the story” (Brooks and Warren 1971, 195). Their different views demonstrate the importance of the ending when we decide the theme of the story. Similarly, when deciding the theme of Mansfield’s “The Little Governess”, we should also consider the function of the ending which leads us to hold the view that by ending the story with the waiter’s pleasure of revenge, Mansfield wants to hint that there is an undercurrent indicating the story is about the characters’ judgment on people based on their career and social status and the victimization of the little governess by the prejudice.

If we take the theme to be the victimization of the little governess by the prejudice which is revealed by the covert progression, several details do find their meaning. To name a few, the waiter’s revenge becomes more meaningful instead of being an indicator of his stinginess. Moreover, we should notice that at the beginning and the middle of the covert progression, Mansfield only demonstrates the little governess’s prejudice against others, whereas, at the end where the little governess continues to embrace prejudice, Mansfield at the same time arranges the waiter to mistake the little governess for a sex worker and exert graver prejudice on her. This arrangement makes the little governess who has strong prejudice become the victim of prejudice from herself and others, which greatly demonstrates Mansfield’s criticism of prejudice.

5. Conclusion

Most of Mansfield’s short stories have double narrative movements. Professor Shen has found such kind of dual narrative dynamics in Mansfield’s “The Singing Lesson,” “The Fly,” “Psychology,” “A Dill Pickle,” “Life of Ma Parker,” and “Revelation”. And “The Little Governess” which is acclaimed as “a very successful story” (Tomalin 2009, 156) is no exception. Through the integration of stylistic analysis, intertextual comparison, and the consideration of the author’s life experience, this essay finds that Mansfield in her short story “The Little Governess” sets up two progressions, one of which is the overt plot focusing on the vulnerability of woman, and victimization of the little governess by patriarchal oppression; the other of which is the covert progression centering on the victimization of the little governess by her prejudice. Mansfield arranges the latter to subvert the former, completely refreshing our understanding of victim and victimizer. More importantly, the two narrative movements form an overall

dramatic irony, implicitly conveying a point - how one's judgment based on social ranking can lead to one's downfall in the patriarchal society. As such, this essay lays bare Mansfield's criticism of class prejudice and social stratification.

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