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*The Development of Mimetic Desire towards Latent Conflict in the
Work of Katherine Mansfield*

*Vývoj mimetické touhy směrem k latentnímu konfliktu v díle
Katherine Mansfieldové*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Thesis abstract

Using Aristotelian notion of imitative behaviour and René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, several stories by Katherine Mansfield are analysed in order to demonstrate the development of mimetic desire together with its implications. The analysis follows the negative aspects of mimesis: the problems it causes in relationships, as well as the positive aspects including the self-knowledge. Since Mansfield's stories do not correspond fully to Girard's theory, the analysis explores a specific way of dealing with mimetic desire: keeping the conflict latent.

At first, the stories about childhood offer an insight into Aristotelian concept of mimesis – imitative behaviour being a natural and pleasing human activity that is best observed in children's plays. The stories show how children choose their models, how they comprehend the world that surrounds them, especially the interpersonal and social codes, and how important is imagination in their mimetic activities. The analysis proceeds from natural imitation to the origins of mimetic desire, focusing on two modes of mediation and on the process of realization of one's own self-authenticity.

The search for self-authenticity is possible due to external or internal mediation of desire. The transition from one type to the other is explained by the analyses of the stories with adults who are mostly married. The shift goes often unnoticed and results in an unpleasant surprise for the subjects. These stories reveal the human propensity to eliminate the rivalry, to avoid conflicts and to keep them latent despite the tension. What is more, the latent conflict that is procrastinated on purpose can become pathological.

The last part of the analysis, which employs stories about elderly people, is about losing models or appearing to be one. The difference from the previous mimesis is that the definite model is supplanted by an indefinite model of the fullness of being. Some of the characters believe in reaching the fullness, but are disillusioned; some are chained by routine; some understand that it is unattainable; and one, a narcissist, deceives himself by pretending to achieve the fullness of being.

The above mentioned stages in the development of mimetic desire prove that the representation of the unity of the particular and the universal is possible into a certain extent. The extent is limited by the possibility to articulate the attitude to the ontological element of mimesis, which is not easy. Katherine Mansfield nevertheless achieves to capture the ways of people whose aim is to reach it, the frustrations that accompany such attempts and the failures that are inevitable when searching for the ontological fullness.

Abstrakt

Pomocí Aristotelova konceptu imitačního chování a teorie mimetické touhy, ražené René Girardem, lze analyzovat některé povídky Katherine Mansfield. Analýza popisuje nejen vývoj mimetické touhy, společně s jejími implikacemi, ale odhaluje i její negativní a pozitivní charakteristiky. Negativními aspekty jsou myšleny komplikace, které mimetická touha vnáší do vztahů; mezi pozitivní stránky patří sebepoznání. Analýza povídek však nesleduje Girardovu teorii ve všech jejích fázích, odhaluje naopak specifický způsob, jak se do určité míry vypořádat s mimetickou touhou bez násilí: konflikty utajovat.

Argumentace je nejprve zaměřena na Aristotelovo chápání mimize jako imitačního chování, jež je přirozenou a příjemnou součástí lidského projevu. Nejlépe ji lze pozorovat u dětí. Povídky ukazují, podle čeho si děti vybírají své modely, jak prostřednictvím mimize rozumí okolnímu světu, zejména společenským a mezilidským pravidlům, a jak je pro dětskou mimize důležitá představivost. Analýza se vyvíjí od popisu přirozené mimize k prvním známkám mimetické touhy. Zaměřena je především na dva typy jejího zprostředkování a na postupné uvědomování si vlastní autenticity.

Autenticitu může člověk hledat dvěma způsoby, které Girard nazývá zprostředkováními. Rozlišuje vnitřní a vnější zprostředkování. Přejít od jednoho zprostředkování k druhému je nenadálý, často si ho subjekt ani nevšimne a odhalení pro něj přichází jako nepříjemné překvapení. Nejčastějšími a nejpřirozenějšími reakcemi jsou: zbavit se rivala, vyhnout se konfliktu, ale především předstírat, že žádný konflikt neexistuje. Skrývání a vyhýbání se konfliktu příliš dlouho může být pozdější příčinou patologického chování.

Poslední část analýzy se věnuje povídkám, jejichž protagonisty jsou starší lidé. Ti buď své mimetické modely ztrácejí, nebo se sami zdají být vytouženými modely. Na rozdíl od předchozích povídek však nemají určitý mimetický model, ale těžko definovatelný model ontologické plnosti bytí. Některé z postav věří, že ho lze dosáhnout, jiné jsou zase příliš spoutány zaběhaným pořádkem, než aby se o to pokusily. Mnozí chápou, že se ontologické plnosti nedá dosáhnout, a jedna z postav dokonce podléhá sebeklamu, že ji ztělesňuje.

Zmíněná stadia ve vývoji mimetické touhy dokazují, že je, do určité míry, možné zobrazit sjednocení všeobecnosti s jednotlivostmi. Míra, do jaké je to možné, je dána schopností vyjádřit postoj člověka k ontologické dimenzi mimize. A to není jednoduché. Katherine Mansfieldové se nicméně daří zachytit způsoby, jimiž se lidé snaží dosáhnout ontologické plnosti, a skvěle vystihuje i jejich frustraci, která snažení doprovází. V neposlední řadě vykresluje také selhání, jež je nevyhnutelné v případě dosahování ontologické plnosti bytí – a právě vylíčení stavu vědomí vlastního neúspěchu dodává jejím povídkám na pronikavosti.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The concept of mimesis has been accompanying literary studies since antiquity. Plato's ambivalent but prevailingly negative attitude to mimesis in art was opposed by Aristotle in *Poetics* in which the role of mimesis is systematically described and explained. Aristotle argues that universal instinct makes people engage in mimetic activity. This is best observed in children's "imitating and fictionalising behaviour."¹ What is more, human beings take pleasure in the products of mimesis. The understanding of mimetic activity can be further limited to a process of learning and understanding, which is both natural and pleasing. Thus the application of such concept of mimesis on literature leads to the definition of its role: to satisfy the natural necessity for understanding the human world in a pleasing way. In philosophy, mimesis becomes a tool for epistemology and at the same time Aristotle's definition gives it an "ontological dimension"² as well. In addition, the Aristotelian concept of mimesis in art has become not only the object of study for philosophers, but also for literary theorists and critics. One of the literary critics who works with mimetic theory in an innovative way is René Girard.

Mimetic theory is not the only field René Girard approaches differently. It is, more importantly, literary criticism. Robert Doran explains that Girard understands any imaginative or narrative text to be critical "in the sense that the best of these contain profound insights into the human conditions."³ Doran suggests that Girard's approach to literature can be called structural because according to Girard "the literary work reveals significant structures or forms of human comportment, which can be considered on a par with any of the human sciences."⁴ This approach is, on the one hand, based on his mimetic reading of literary texts (that looks back on the early criticism of antiquity) and, on the other hand, his approach reflects, according to Doran, the influence of Derrida's deconstruction. By emphasising the mimetic aspect of his reading, the structural level of Girard's engagement with literary texts is often called "mimetic theory," and because he focuses on desire, it is called "theory of mimetic desire." In his theory, Girard challenges traditional belief in the individuality of

¹ Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (London: Duckworth, 1987) 79.

² Vlastimil Zuska, *Mimésis—fikce—distance k estetice XX. Století* (Praha: Triton, 2002) 13.

³ Robert Doran, "Introduction," in *Mimesis and Theory: Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953—2000*, by René Girard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) xiv.

⁴ Doran xiv.

desires, excluding biological needs. According to him, people do not desire spontaneously, but their desire always depends on the desire of another person. In other words, a person imitates what Girard calls “the Other’s desire.”⁵ The theory of mimetic desire thus questions and explores individuality and the autonomous self. Girard expands and explains his theory in his critical writing on significant literary works in order to redefine the role of literature.

Since the work of Katherine Mansfield offers several stories where the Aristotelian concept of mimesis is obvious, and several in which part of the mechanism of mimetic desire, as described by Girard, can be discerned, her work may serve as a very good illustration of the mimetic development. Her stories however go beyond the mechanism of mimetic desire; they show mimesis in its complexity, usually using for this purpose family relationships. The stories, written from perspective of children, adults and old people, allow the reader to study the development of mimesis from the Aristotelian imitation towards the beginnings of mimetic desire. The triangle of mimetic desire where A desires B because C desires it is found in her stories about childhood in New Zealand. The scheme becomes gradually different and limited to a complex of lines that run between the subject and the model. In the scheme, the object that played its role in the initiation of mimetic desire loses its central position and is instead replaced by the desire of a model that is called “the mediator of desire.” The mediator usually represents the authority for the subject.

The role of a model depends on the type of mediation. In externally mediated desire, there is a sufficient space between the subject and the mediator. As a result, the imitation does not degenerate into emulation nor does it turn into rivalry or conflict. The development from emulation to imitation of mimetic desire is illustrated in the stories with children as protagonists where the external mediation most often takes form of explicit veneration or admiration. In contrast to it, internally mediated desire has the subject and the model in such proximity that they are liable to create competitive relationship which can culminate in a violent conflict. Internally mediated desire, the most common and natural in family and society, is described in Mansfield’s stories, too. Nevertheless, the stories focus on the tension and the latency of the potential or existing conflict. The rivalry between the characters never reaches to open conflict, the tension increases together with comprehension of the desire.

Additionally, the whole concept of mimetic desire is based on the complex attitude of an individual to society which produces its own mimetic models so that it could influence people. Mansfield depicts characters who attempt to extricate themselves from the social roles

⁵ Doran xv.

that are imposed on them, to liberate themselves from their authorities and to gain self-authenticity. One way to achieve it, according to Girard and shown by Mansfield, is to choose a model in the group of peers or family whom the subject considers to be on the top of the mimetic structure, or in other words, in whom “the subject detects ontological sufficiency.”⁶ The characters, who deny authority in order to gain self-sufficiency or autonomy within family or society, become more entangled in the “chains of mimesis.”⁷ If they imitate well, they can become autonomous in their desire and also make themselves the model for the others because they have reached their own ontological uniqueness. In addition to natural development of mimetic desire towards ontological self-sufficiency, there is a lot of tension resulting from inability to reach it either by denying mimesis or staying chained by the mimesis of someone else. In the stories where the main protagonists are solitary and often elderly people the tension leads in most cases to internal conflicts, in which case the conflict focuses on the difference between the Self and the Other.

Approaching Mansfield’s work through the mimetic theory reveals the critical quality of writing that Girard has sought mainly in novels. Her stories illustrate the mimetic activities of children and young people who try to establish their place in the family or society. Further, it shows the importance of mimetic desire in the development of personality towards self-sufficiency, autonomy and authenticity. Ultimately, her stories reveal the problems mimetic desire brings and which Girard sees as central issues of literature and human sciences, namely the inability of fulfilling the desire together with the conflicts it causes in the society. Mansfield, however, does not explore the path that leads from conflicts to violence; she prefers to show the most common problems and crises in human relationships. Her observation is that people usually try to avoid open conflicts. Also, her last stories may be affected by her decision to “write simply, fully, freely, from my heart.”⁸ In the view of that the reader may find the cause of their poignancy, which is typical for most of her stories and which reaches its climax in the last few stories. It is her own desire to achieve fulfilment by the depiction of characters who constantly fail in fulfilling it.

The three argumentative chapters are divided according to the type of mimetic desire as defined by Girard. The first argumentative chapter deals with the development of mimesis from the mimetic behaviour, which Aristotle defines in *Poetics*, to the workings of mimetic

⁶ Chris Fleming, *René Girard: Violence and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004) 24.

⁷ Doran xvi.

⁸ In the letter from Nov. 3, 1921. Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006) 317.

desire. The imitative behaviour, observed in children, is analysed in the stories where the central characters are children or adolescents. The chapter also explains the difference between externally and internally mediated desires and further concentrates on external mediation together with its implications in the development of self-authenticity. The second argumentative chapter shows the transition from external mediation of desire to internal mediation. And because the internal mediation leads naturally to conflict, the chapter deals with its possibility in the stories mostly about married people. Since many of the conflicts in Mansfield's stories are latent, the chapter explains why it is so and into what those conflicts can turn. The last argumentative chapter is devoted to the case in which the characters lose their mimetic models, to the metaphysical dimension of their desires and to the distinction between the Self and the Other. The stories analyzed there have as their main characters old people who face solitude and are forced to come to terms with the impossibility of fulfilling their life desires outside the mimetic mechanism.

Chapter 2: Imitative Behaviour and Externally Mediated Desire

2.1 From Imitation to Mimetic Desire

One of the advantages of studying mimesis, the role of mimetic desire and its development in the work of Katherine Mansfield is the large representation of children and young people who are engaged in mimetic activity. Moreover, some of the younger characters together with their family authorities appear in several of them so that it is possible to follow the individual formation of mimetic desire. These are the stories that take place in the New Zealand of Mansfield's childhood: "Prelude," "At the Bay," "The Doll's House" and "The Garden-Party." The first two stories illustrate the origins and function of mimesis in a family structure, the differences and similarities in the triangle of mimetic desire between children and adults and, finally, the potential for a conflict that can arise from desiring the same if two persons share the same space. This is defined by Girard as internally mediated desire: "Internal mediation requires a mediator who is historically accessible to the subject like a friend or a rival."⁹ Similarly, the mechanism of externally mediated desire, which "requires a mediator who is not immediately available,"¹⁰ can be explained on the story "The Doll's House." The story also shows how close externally and internally mediated desire can come and how important is to be different in the development of mimetic model. At last, the theme of difference, dependence on models and search for balance in mimetic dependence is explored in the analysis of "The Garden Party."

The first short story about childhood in New Zealand and at the same time the first story in the collection *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) is "Prelude." The Burnell children Isabel, Kezia and Lotty are portrayed together with their mimetic models Linda, Stanley, Beryl and Mrs Fairfield in twelve pictures that describe the moving and settling down of their household. To be more precise, there are two sets of children in the family: Isabel, Kezia and Lotty are children of Linda and Stanley Burnell; Beryl and Linda are daughters of Mrs Fairfield. Stanley has a special position being the only male figure. He is respected as the highest authority in the

⁹ Michael Payne, *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 222.

¹⁰ Payne 222.

family hierarchy but his ways are regarded by the women as childish. Therefore, the only person who cannot be accounted among children is Mrs Fairfield who stands on the top of the mimetic structure. The mimetic structure of the family is: the children have mimetic models in their mother, grandmother and aunt; Linda's and Beryl's mimetic model is their mother. Stanley Burnell stands near the mimetic importance of Mrs Fairfield, but outside of the female mimetic triangle. The complexity of relationships in the family can be deciphered by the help of the mimetic theory: on the one hand, it reveals the positive effect of mimesis as described by Aristotle; on the other hand, it explores the roots of problems mimetic desire generates in family ties and explains its role as a causative agent in interpersonal tensions.

Aristotle's definition of mimesis says that "there is man's natural propensity, from childhood onwards, to engage in mimetic activity"¹¹ and that "mimetic activity comes naturally to us."¹² His observation about centrality of mimesis in human development is proven at the beginning of "Prelude." Isabel makes herself appear older by travelling with the women and later by being allowed to eat meat whereas Kezia and Lottie are left behind. Lottie cries but Kezia struggles not to cry, tries to be less a child than she actually is and thus imitates adult behaviour. Particularly, mimesis as natural activity is displayed in children's plays and all three girls take pleasure in it. That is best depicted in part eight of the story that describes the girl's activity before they are disturbed by their cousins:

'Good morning, Mrs Jones.'

'Oh, good morning, Mrs Smith. I'm so glad to see you. Have you brought your children?'

'Yes, I've brought both my twins. I have had another baby since I saw you last, but she came so suddenly that I haven't had time to make her any clothes, yet. So I left her...How is your husband?'

'Oh, he is very well, thank you. At least he had a nawful cold but Queen Victoria — she's my godmother, you know — sent him a case of pineapples and that cured it immediately. Is that your new servant?'

'Yes, her name's Gwen. I've only had her two days. Oh, Gwen, this is my friend, Mrs Smith.'

'Good morning, Mrs Smith. Dinner won't be ready for about ten minutes.'

¹¹ Halliwell 34.

¹² Halliwell 34.

‘I don’t think you ought to introduce me to the servant. I think I ought to just begin talking to her.’¹³

The passage shows that children are excellent observers of adults, mainly of their behaviour and speech concerning social codes. They learn through imitation of their models, but the passage also reveals into what extent they understand basic rules of society so as to be able to reproduce them and how important is imagination in their reproduction of reality. Fleming makes clear Girard’s opinion of the centrality of imagination in mimetic desire, which, at the same time, describes the background of children’s imitative behaviour: “desire is in large part an *act of the imagination*, involving fascinations with objects and figures that possess not only use values, but *symbolic* values as well.”¹⁴

The symbolic values differ according to the particular choice of a mimetic model, which gives an insight into the development of individual personalities. Isabel, the eldest, distinguishes herself from her younger sisters because she has certain authority over them. All the same, she must ostensibly imitate adults in order to get closer to her mimetic model, her mother, and to become mimetic model for her sisters. Lottie, the youngest, is happy to be able to imitate any authority, especially her siblings. Kezia differs from them due to her sensitivity and imagination. What is more, her mimetic model is her grandmother and that is why her sister Isabel is unsuccessful in commanding her or her mimetic desire. Kezia has chosen the highest model in the structure, her grandmother being the model of her mother and aunt.

The significance of characteristic differences that result from different mimetic models is best observed in the second short story about the Burnells – the first short story of *The Garden-Party and Other Stories* (1922), “At the Bay.” There is an episode in which the youngest girl has problems to imitate the skill of climbing over fences her sisters possess. Isabel wants to leave her behind, which resembles the attitude of Linda Burnell leaving her youngest daughters at the beginning of “Prelude,” but Kezia disregards her sister’s authority since her mimetic model’s qualities patience and kindness. Consequently, Kezia’s reaction to Isabel’s proposal is this: “But Kezia couldn’t leave Lottie all by herself. She ran back to her. By this time Lottie was very red in the face and breathing heavily.”¹⁵

¹³ Mansfield 28.

¹⁴ Fleming 11.

¹⁵ Mansfield 172.

In other words, the influence of mimesis children are unconscious of becomes partly clear to Linda Burnell and Beryl Fairfax. Linda considers the lack of energy in her and the lack of interest in domestic affairs as her weakness and desires to have the energy either of her husband or of her mother. Since her husband cannot be her mimetic model, the only suitable and natural model is her mother whom Linda consciously admires. In addition, Linda needs her mother around not only to organise the household but because of her unconscious desire for her mother's tranquil acceptance of life. In contrast to this, her sister Beryl is more like her mother without realizing it – she is energetic, a good organizer, and by being critical of her mother, she unconsciously expresses the desire to attract her mother's attention. What Beryl, on the other hand, realizes keenly is her desire to have what her sister has: husband, i.e. a household of her own where she could be independent of the authority of her sister and her mother.

As a result, Beryl resembles Kezia on the level of dependence: her nearest authority is her sister Linda, but she is at the same time an authority for the girls. The same applies to Kezia: her closest authority is her sister Isabel and she is herself an authority for her younger sister. Yet, Kezia achieves greater independence than her aunt Beryl, even though unconsciously. Kezia does not have any need to patronize, nor is she under the influence of the mimesis of her older sister because her mimetic model is her grandmother who is at the top of the mimetic structure. Mrs Fairfax's desire is most probably what Girard calls “‘metaphysical desire’, where no specific object is aimed at, but rather an indeterminate but insistent yearning for the fullness of ‘being’.”¹⁶ In contrast to Kezia, Beryl likes to be patronizing and rebels against the dependence on her sister and her mother. While Kezia gains independence through mimesis of her grandmother, her aunt is trapped between the conscious desire of her sister's position and the unconscious mimesis of her mother's position in the mimetic structure. Both desires lead to the explanation of the relationship with her brother-in-law.

Stanley Burnell is the only male character in the family who influences the mimetic structure in a different way. He represents the unquestionable authority for his daughters. It seems that Mrs Fairfield accepts the same attitude towards Stanley's authority as her grandchildren. Beryl bears his authority unwillingly and she lets him know about it while Linda shows respect but performs it as a routine task. Stanley's desire is the acknowledgment of his family. Nonetheless, he gains recognition of his authority only from Beryl with whom he clashes in the mimetic desire of authority and independence. Beryl is the only potential

¹⁶ Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004) 22.

candidate to compete with him. His daughters do not count since they are only children, his mother in law is wise enough to be left out and his wife, the only person he depends on, does not care. Linda and her mother are thus connected by their avoidance of mimetic competitiveness. They stay out of what seems as internally mediated desire between Stanley and Beryl.

The existence of rivalry, which is usually the outcome of internally mediated desire, is in this case highly potential because of different gender roles. Beryl is conscious of the power her sister has over her husband, but she is unable to imitate her. Although she desires her sister's independence that is provided by the dependence on a man, she rebels against Stanley's authority. Stanley does not regard Beryl as a rival. She is a woman dependent on him materially. The tension between them arises from Beryl's mimesis of Stanley's central role in the family hierarchy, demonstrated in Stanley's absence from home and by her fantasies about being admired. All the same, her mimetic desire can never be directly confronted with Stanley's natural male desire for authority (based on the social models) and independence; at least in this family, where he is out of reach of the female mimetic triangle. His family being based on authority and hierarchy, he rather resembles a model in the concept of externally mediated desire of traditional societies. In Girard's words:

In such societies, mediation is itself a function of hierarchy, and thus there is little possibility for mediators and imitators to become rivals or otherwise come into conflict with one another. ... External mediation most often takes the form of explicit veneration or admiration.¹⁷

Mediation of such kind is in the family structure an organizing element that suppresses the potential for conflicts.

2.2 From External Mediation to Self-authenticity

The best text for the analysis of externally mediated desire is the last short story Mansfield wrote about the Burnell children, "The Doll's House." The doll's house itself as a replica of a real house represents an imitation of a desired symbol in the world of adults. In the world of

¹⁷ Doran xvi.

children, it is a desired object as well as a symbol of prosperity. Such objects are apt to become the focus of mimetic desire. The mimetic desire which is concentrated on one object usually leads to mimetic rivalry; Girard refers to this type of desire as “acquisitive” mimesis”¹⁸ or, in other words, “desire [that] is centred on a specific object (the child’s toy, for example).”¹⁹ At first, there is a tension between the sisters themselves. It is a mark of internal mediation of their desire. No conflict can arise from this rivalry since the sisters know the rules of hierarchy: “Lottie and Kezia knew too well the powers that went with being eldest.”²⁰ Even though Kezia is unable to conform to the rules of the hierarchy, breaks them and ventilates her observation about the little house, Isabel pays almost no attention to her sister’s transgression because all her schoolmates’ desires concentrate on her. The focus of so many desires on one object through one person results in this story in imitation of adult behaviour. It is Isabel, who acquiring the symbolic value of the object, imitates the principles of ostracism and is thus the model for her schoolmates.

The imitation of adult behaviour is directed at two sisters, the Kelveys, who are social outcasts in the school the Burnell children attend. They are consequently the subjects in the structure of externally mediated desire. They are the only ones not invited to see the doll’s house and are even forbidden to come near the Burnell’s house or to talk to the girls. Their situation corresponds to the definition of Chris Fleming who thus explains Girard’s theory:

External mediation occurs when there is a sufficient space between the subject-who-desires and their mediator or model such that they do not become rivals for the same desired object; it is when, as Girard puts it, ‘the distance is sufficient to eliminate any contact between the two spheres of *possibilities* of which the mediator and the subject occupy the respective centres.’²¹

Apart from their central role in externally mediated desire, the Kelveys are victims of their schoolmates’ behaviour which copies the social structure of adults: the attitude of girls towards the outcasts originates in the observation of their teachers’ approach to the sisters, their parents’ opinions and the children’s inclination to be mean to different peers. The Kelveys’ difference is emphasised by them being the only ones who are not allowed to see the

¹⁸ Kirwan 22.

¹⁹ Kirwan 22.

²⁰ Mansfield 320.

²¹ Fleming 17.

desired object. Their desire must be therefore stronger than that of the others due to the social restrictions. When the other girls enjoy humiliating the sisters, they are in fact enjoying the demonstration of being able to get near the desired object. The amount of energy the girls spend on the oral attack reveals the weakness of their desire – its dependence on the two sisters.

In contrast to them, Kezia, who understands the exceptionality of the two girls in the mimetic structure and who is least bound by the imitations of social restrictions of adults, transgresses again. She invites the Kelveys to have a look at the doll's house. She is not aware that her actions are independent of the desires of other girls for whom the importance of the object depends on the condition that the Kelveys cannot see it. It makes her different from others, but in opposite way than the Kelveys – she becomes a model of mimetic desire. Unlike her sister, her value is not based on the symbolic value of an object but on an action. Mansfield shows at the end of the story that the only thing the Kelveys wanted to see was the lamp mentioned by Kezia at the beginning.

And Isabel's voice, so very proud, went on telling. The carpet made a great sensation, but so did the beds with real bedclothes, and the stove with an oven door.

When she finished Kezia broke in. 'You've forgotten the lamp, Isabel.'²²

Kezia's desire to find a way round Isabel's authority leads to the creation of a particular desired object behind which stands the symbolic difference of Kezia's personality. That is what the Kelveys admire. The meaning of the lamp changes from an interesting detail to the symbol of mimetic desire. It is desire to be able to break rules on the basis of courage and enthusiasm. At the same time, it reveals the feedback of mimetic desire – imagination. Imagination is a force significant not only for children, but also for adults. The best examples are Beryl's fantasies in the New Zealand stories and daydreaming of a young girl in the short story called "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (1908). Imagination of adults mainly helps to differentiate between those who have an inclination for metaphysical desire and those who have not.

Problems of adolescence caused by having a different mimetic desire than a model are depicted in "The Garden-Party." The story illustrates a movement towards the clash between

²² Mansfield 322.

unconscious mimesis and conscious mimetic desire. The main character of this story, Laura Sheridan, wants to be perceived as matured when she is given adult tasks in organizing the party. Although she imitates her model as best she can, the imitation often fails, as this excerpt, in which she is ordered to show the workmen the place for the marquee, shows:

‘Good morning,’ she said, copying her mother’s voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, ‘Oh – er – have you come – is it about the marquee?’²³

Her imitation is unsuccessful because she is insecure as most of her peers, but also because she has childish opinions about social difference. Precisely this difference from her model that emerges in crucial moments of the story is the most important. It causes her several problems. The first moment when she has a chance to escape the mimesis of her mother comes with her outburst of sympathy for the dead workman and with her wish to stop the party. Unfortunately, as Kezia is distracted by earrings from the sympathy she feels for the dead duck in “Prelude,” so is Laura diverted from her wish by her mother’s hat in which she looks well. The continuing distraction confirms the mimetic influence of her mother. Laura imitates the desire of her mother to have the party at all costs, which weakens her own desire. She is later even ashamed to be put in connection with the moment of her independence of her mother’s desires. She feels she acted childishly: “‘Oh, mother!’ Laura didn’t want to be teased about it.”²⁴ Nevertheless, Laura’s mother uses the opportunity of her child’s difference and sends her to the dead man’s family.

When Laura enters the milieu of lower social class, she feels the inappropriateness of her following the advice of others. First, she realizes the foolishness of imitating her mother and acting like an adult in the situation difficult even for a grown-up. Second, her shame for wearing the hat comes from blaming herself to have been distracted earlier that day from her sympathetic feeling for the dead man’s family. The background of her shame is more complex: Laura has been imitating her mother’s desire all day; she has become equally superficial as her model and enjoyed herself at the party. Moreover, she has felt as an adult except for the few moments when her personality has betrayed her own desires. Since she is aware of the difference existing between her and others, she is ashamed to have been

²³ Mansfield 198.

²⁴ Mansfield 207.

misguided by the natural mimesis. The moment of revelation that she has childishly insisted on being the same as her family while she could act independently strikes her when she faces the dead man: the tranquillity of the dead body sharply contrasts with the triviality of the party she embodies in the situation.

Besides this, there is a question why her mother decides to send Laura to the poor family. It cannot be only the pragmatic reason of having too many sandwiches left or the social obligation. Even though it seems that it is Laura who is all the time under the mimetic influence of her mother, it is in the end her mother who succumbs to the desire of her daughter. Girard explains such dynamics of mimetic desire in the following way:

There are only those who dominate and those who are dominated. Since the meaning of the relationship rests neither on brute force nor on any form of external constraint, it can never achieve stability; it is played and replayed in the terms of relationships that the onlooker could well believe to be without any significance.²⁵

What is more, Laura's desire has a metaphysical element in her developing mimetic desire: it is rooted in the sympathy with others and concerns existential topic while her mother's desire is only materialistic. The attempt of Laura's mother to imitate her daughter's desire is unsuccessful because it is an imitation without any genuine concern. That is why its failure is such a shock for Laura: it is a fiasco of her extended idea that her mother puts into action. Laura pays for the unconscious mimesis of her mother in the moment she has brought on herself by being a model of a higher desire. Luckily for her, she is able to understand the importance of her own different desire, making thus a step towards adulthood, though in opposite direction from her mother. The mimetic conflict is in this story internalized. The desire to be adult, to be accepted among them clashes with the higher desire that expresses itself in the development of a different personality from the one the subject imitates. Despite all the problems, Laura emerges at the end of her inner conflict closer to her true self-identity.

In conclusion, the stories about childhood and adolescence that have something in common with Mansfield's own up-bringing reflect the role mimesis has in real life. "Prelude" shows the Aristotelian mimesis on the children's behaviour. The mimesis becomes more complex where

²⁵ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 305.

the whole family is concerned, mainly if the mimesis is based on the hierarchy of authorities. The story also reveals the origins of mimetic desire together with its direction towards the highest goal, which is the fullness of being. The stories suggest by depicting the interpersonal tensions the possibility of rivalry in the case when several characters desire the same thing. While the rivalry in “Prelude” is only potential, although Beryl and Stanley are in the situation that could be classified as internally mediated desire, the real but hidden rivalry exists in “The Doll’s House” due to the existence of a desired symbol. Neither the internally mediated desire nor the externally mediated desire in this story leads to any conflict. The first one is restricted by the rules of family hierarchy and the second one by the social distance. The tension that is felt in the story results in mimetic behaviour on the side of majority that enjoys expressing it and in creating a more valid mimetic model in the character of Kezia. The inner conflict of Laura in “The Garden-Party” indicates the development of semi-conscious mimesis towards realization that for an adolescent it is essential to find the balance between an authentic mimetic desire and mimesis of a natural model.

Chapter 3: Internally Mediated Desire and Latent Conflict

3.1 From Externally to Internally Mediated Desire

The previous chapter has dealt with the origins of mimetic desire, its structure, mechanism and possible complications it brings to a group of peers or to a family. The stories that illustrate the terms of Girard's theory have been chosen to show the advantages of externally mediated desire. The main advantage, in the case of a good model, is that he/she engages an imitator in the activity that should lead the imitator to either higher knowledge or self-knowledge. In "The Garden-Party," the realization of that principle is partial. It is incomplete due to an inadequate model and also due to the internalization of the conflict. While the internalization of the conflict is rare in the case of internally mediated desire, in which the imitator and the model are in close proximity, inappropriately chosen models occur frequently. The contact between a model and its imitator usually results in rivalry. In Mansfield's stories, the rivalry often exists under the surface of the narration, its indicator being the sense of tension. The realization of having a rival is a poignant discovery that forces the characters to re-evaluate their priorities. Moreover, every discovery contains the potential for conflict, but even this potential is never explicit in the stories because the characters try to avoid it at all costs.

It is in the stories "A Cup of Tea" from *The Doves' Nest* (1923), "Bliss" from *Bliss and Other Stories*, "Marriage à la Mode" from *The Garden-Party and Other Stories* and "Poison" from *Something Childish and Other Stories* (1924) that the characters undergo a stage of revelation about their position in the structure of mimetic desire. What seems to be for the most part of the stories the positive influence of external mediation is identified as rivalry of its internally mediated variation, which is accepted negatively. Similarly to "The Garden-Party," most of the characters have to re-evaluate their relationships or their position in the society, whether it is their conformity or their opposition to its rules. Only this time, the protagonists are not children but young adults, most of them married, so that their mimetic desire gets entangled with their materialistic and sexual needs.²⁶ Although they are adults,

²⁶ Girard explains that it is necessary to distinguish between desires and "urges, needs": "V první řadě musíme odlišit touhu od chuti. Chuť na jídlo nebo na sex ještě není touha. Je to biologická záležitost, která se stává touhou napodobením jistého vzoru, a přítomnost tohoto vzoru je rozhodující prvek mé teorie." René Girard, *O*

many of them are compared to children because there is something childish about their nature which makes them vulnerable to the mechanism of rivalry. Above the conflict between simple and mimetic rivalry lies the rivalry between mimetic desires themselves.

To begin with, the best example of how external mediation turns into internal mediation, which is inevitably followed by rivalry, is the short story "A Cup of Tea." To understand the shift, it is crucial to describe the main character precisely. The central character, Rosemary Fell, lacks nothing except for beauty. She seems however not to realize that, being satisfied with everything. Her life is filled with shopping, a handsome husband and a boy, meetings with artists and travelling. Her desires are as superficial and materialistic as is her style of living. There is neither a significant mimetic model nor any rival within the scope of people she surrounds herself with that could match up with her on the social level. Or at least, it seems so at the opening of the story. What is more, Rosemary is so full of herself that she is condescending in a naive way: she approaches everything and everyone exclusively in the connection with her person. She preoccupies herself with what effect her personality has on others, but instead of waiting for real reactions, she supplies other people's opinions with her own. As a consequence of the flaws in her character, she unconsciously creates her own rival. It happens while she is hesitating whether to buy an expensive box or not. A girl of her age asks her for money. More precisely, the girl acts according to her biological desire and asks for money "the price of a cup of tea."²⁷ Rosemary's indecision is resolved in a minute: the expensive box is exchanged for the object worth a cup of tea.

Rosemary's desire basically does not change: her desire for an object is transferred to another and more interesting object in the shape of the poor girl. The inspiration to act like that, however, comes from a mimetic model of Dostoyevsky. Her externally mediated desire is shaped probably by an episode from one of Dostoyevsky's short stories; her aim is to have the same experience as his characters. Her enthusiasm about Dostoyevsky's work presumably comes from her meetings with the artists whose stance to Dostoyevsky might reflect the Modernist praise of his work: "a prophet whose work pierced the veil of phenomenal world to give the reader a rare glimpse of mystical truths."²⁸ Such object of mimetic desire competes with materialistic desire: Rosemary wants to behave as nobly as one of Dostoyevsky's

přívodu kultury:hovory s Pierpaolem Antonellem a Joãem Cezarem de Castro Rocha, trans. Pavla Doležalová (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008) 47.

²⁷ Mansfield 334.

²⁸ Peter Kaye, *Dostoevsky & English Modernism, 1900-1930* (Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 157.

characters, but she would also like to exhibit the girl to her advantage. It is obvious from the way she refers to her that the girl is nothing more than an object, a coin from the street: “I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She’s a real pick-up.”²⁹ The problem is that the object she wants to exhibit is a human being and as such it starts to influence Rosemary’s perception right from the beginning:

The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other in the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all these things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the rich little girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.³⁰

As the excerpt illustrates, apart from the comparison of Rosemary to a little girl, the social distance, as she observes, pleases her. The focus of the narration is on the social difference between the women. Accordingly, their desire must differ, too. Rosemary’s desire is a mixture of mimetic and materialistic desire while the poor girl’s mimetic desire comes as second to her biological need. The two of them are therefore divided both socially and also by priorities. Nevertheless, by bringing the girl to her house, by feeding her and making her comfortable, Rosemary crosses the line that divides them spatially, thus minimizing the social gap. Her plans to improve the girl’s status would blur the difference between them even more. In other words, Rosemary resembles Higgins in *Pygmalion* with his objectifying of Eliza, but her situation is in some aspects similar to Emma Woodhouse’s. She even makes, like Emma, the same mistake: creates a possible rival by behaving as a spoiled child.

The act of creating a rival by internal mediation is confirmed by the comment of Rosemary’s husband about the girl’s looks. Notwithstanding the girl’s background, her beauty makes her the actual rival of Rosemary’s. The object of rivalry is her husband’s attention. The moment Rosemary realizes the consequences of her actions, she, of course, behaves in order to eliminate the rival she has created. That is not difficult since the social difference can be easily restored. The rivalry of sexual attraction is restored back to external mediation by sending the girl back on the street. Rosemary’s position is secured, but she desires to be as “pretty” as the

²⁹ Mansfield 337.

³⁰ Mansfield 335.

girl. The story explains the paradox of mimetic desire: Rosemary appears to be the desired mimetic model that impresses other people including the girl. Her realization of other people's desires enhances the desire of her own. Since her desires concern exclusively objects, the danger of higher desire appears along with the girl's revealed desirability. The girl's beauty becomes at once the hidden desire of Rosemary's. Consequently, the girl and Rosemary exchange their places on the mimetic scale. What is more important, her object of desire being also her husband's attention, the girl embodies both objects of Rosemary's desires. These two desires compete with the mimetic desire derived from Dostoyevsky, but because Rosemary is superficial, materialistic and self-centred, the mimetic desire modelled on her understanding of the Russian author is discarded swiftly, particularly when the fundamentals of Dostoyevsky's relationships become clear. Kirwan comments on Dostoyevsky in connection with mimetic desire: "When we come to Dostoyevsky, we are in a seething universe of bitter antagonisms."³¹ Rosemary experiences the feelings of Dostoyevsky's characters through the short-lived rivalry, though differently than she imagined.

3.2 From the Realization of Rivalry to Latent Conflict

In contrast to "A Cup of Tea," the concept of internal mediation in "Bliss" is complicated by the search for self-expression and authority. The story opens with Bertha Young's expectation of "something...divine to happen."³² At the same time, the central character questions the social restrictions that are put on young married women. From the beginning of the story then, Bertha is concerned with two crucial mimetic desires: the desire for free self-expression and the desire of meeting "something" metaphysical. To comprehend her stance on the desires, it is worth mentioning that Bertha is compared to a little girl, a comparison that appears already in "A Cup of Tea" and which is made the central theme in "The Doll's House." The comparison appears in the situation when Bertha does not dare to oppose her employee in the question of security of her own child: "She stood watching them, her hands by her side, like the poor little girl in front of the rich little girl with the doll."³³ Not only does it describe her characteristic feature, but it also reveals her deficiency she in fact desires: lack of authority. In addition, it

³¹ Michael Kirwan, *Philosophy and Theology: Girard and Theology* (London: Continuum, 2009) 24.

³² Mansfield 70.

³³ Mansfield 70.

shows the rule of any desire: what is lacked most is most desired. Bertha is therefore depicted as a kind of a child; her enthusiasm may be compared to Laura's in "The Garden-Party." As a childish figure, she needs a mimetic model. Unluckily, she chooses a woman called Pearl Fulton, symbolized by the moon, who is one of the guests of the upcoming dinner.

The symbol of the moon plays an important role in the symbolism of the mimetic relationship between the two women. The distance between Bertha, who is symbolized by the pear tree in blossom, and Miss Fulton seems to represent externally mediated desire. Since all the objects and people presented in the story are employed mostly to create a seeming effect, the symbolism might be for an effect as well. If Rosemary Fell's mimetic desire is shaped by Dostoyevsky, Bertha's is drawn on Chekhov. Similarly to Rosemary, she admires and tries to imitate Chekhov's characters, but in her own limited way. She desires of life what Chekhov formulated into the statement about people in general: "They eat, drink, flirt, talk nonsense."³⁴ It is the simplicity of Chekhov's images that appeals to Bertha, to be more specific, it is the appearance of things. That is why she gives such an importance to the static image of the pear tree and the moon. The passage in which the image of the moon and the pear tree is in juxtaposition with the two women watching it mirrors the relationship of the two women:

And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed — almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.³⁵

The slight connection between the pear tree and the moon, stressed in the story several times by the word moonlight, becomes in this image abridged by the pear tree reaching towards the moon. Bertha's desire to be in the vicinity of "something" perfect, i.e. divine, made her to befriend Pearl Fulton, whose name itself stresses the abstract desired values, symbolized by the adjectives associated with pearls and the moon.

³⁴ Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Introduction," in *The Cherry Orchard*, by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, trans. S.M. Carnicke (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010) xvii. Quoted in D. Gorodetskii, "Iz vospominanii ob A. P. Chekhove" [Reminiscences of A. P. Chekhov] in *Chekhov i teatr* [Chekhov and the Theatre], ed. E.D. Surkov (Moscow: Isskustvo, 1961), 208–209.

³⁵ Mansfield 77.

Since the story is based on appearances, it is no wonder that what appears to be external mediation is in fact internal mediation. Therefore, although their dresses and appearance are in accordance with the symbolism, the interpretation of the symbolism based solely on them might be misleading. It is possible that Miss Fulton is symbolized by the pear tree while Bertha, the cold moon, is being in danger to be eclipsed by the growing shadow of Miss Fulton. More probably, the symbolism changes as the story proceeds. In any case, it is Bertha who chooses unconsciously her model. As Girard says:

All imitators select models whom they regard superior. In “internal mediation,” models and imitators are equal in every respect except one: the superior achievement of the one, which motivates the imitation of the other. This means, of course, that the models are successful *at their imitators’ expense*.³⁶

The interchangeability of the symbolism of the women is clarified by the excerpt that explains the nature of internally mediated desire. The model and the imitator resemble one another, but it is due to the imitator’s endeavour. Through Bertha’s eyes the resemblance is perfect:

Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands?³⁷

Bertha’s illusion has roots in her misinterpretation of images which is based in the belief in the seeming. She therefore misses the vital difference between them: Bertha’s childishness is being defeated by the other’s female qualities. Furthermore, the mistake is more fatal and described by her misunderstanding of Chekhov. Radical changes await her under the calm appearance of things. Chekhov’s sentence summarizes Bertha’s position: “People eat they dinner, just eat their dinner, yet at the same time their happiness is taking shape and their lives

³⁶ Girard, *Mimesis and Theory* 240.

³⁷ Mansfield 77.

are being smashed.”³⁸ Similarly to Rosemary’s model, Bertha’s approach to reality confirms the fact that it is dangerous to imitate appearance of things without understanding their depth.

Bertha’s desire to resemble Miss Fulton is an unconscious desire for her husband. The sexual desire that lies hidden for a long time is suddenly revealed to Bertha, still unconscious of the rivalry. The desire goes deeper than sexuality, revealing the main desire of Bertha’s. One that also concerns her husband: “to get in touch with him for a moment,”³⁹ to convey to him her feeling of utmost happiness, the bliss. Ironically enough, instead of reaching to any of her mimetic desires, Bertha is left with an acknowledged rivalry between her and Miss Fulton, in which the object of desire is her husband, or precisely, her husband’s sexual desire. The triangle shows that before she finds out that the desired object is shared by her and Miss Fulton, her desire is unconsciously shaped by Miss Fulton’s desire. She is therefore, without knowing or acknowledging it, contradicting her opinions about social restrictions and what is demanded from married women. She, in reality, desires to have the same grown up female qualities as Miss Fulton, to be able to attract desires of others. Her problem is that her desires and behaviour cancel each other out. The result of this resembles Laura’s outcome: she becomes aware of following blindly the wrong mimetic model; the model that appears to embody the qualities Bertha lacks is also the model that at the same time attracts her husband’s attention. As Girard puts it:

Defeat in any kind of competition is disagreeable for reasons that go beyond the material losses that may be incurred. When we imitate successful rivals, we explicitly acknowledge what we would prefer to deny – their superiority. The urge to imitate is very strong, since it opens up possibilities of bettering the competition. But the urge *not* to imitate is also very strong. The only thing that the losers can deny winners is the homage of their imitation.⁴⁰

Before the discovery, Bertha is divided between the unconscious urge to imitate and the semi-conscious urge not to imitate, demonstrated by her naive opinions. As a consequence, Bertha’s disillusionment is inevitable. She has to re-evaluate her mimetic desire to be able to compete with the newly discovered rival.

³⁸ Carnicke xvii. Spoken words from 1889, trans. Gordon McVay in *Chekhov’s Three Sisters* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995) 42.

³⁹ Mansfield 71.

⁴⁰ Girard, *Mimesis and Theory* 240.

If “A Cup of Tea” is about desiring the new while keeping things unchanged and “Bliss” about things seemingly peaceful that are in fact being changed, “Marriage à la Mode” is about a man desiring things before they have changed. William, an ordinary man, compares in his mind the current state of his marriage with the past. He gave up his feeling of fullness of being in order to enable his wife to seek her fullness of being. William has done it because his wife reminds him of his childhood happiness. Similarly to the characters mentioned above, he is compared to a boy:

When he had been a little boy, it was his delight to run into the garden after a shower of rain and shake the rose bush over him. Isabel was that rose bush, petal-soft, sparkling and cool. And he was still that little boy. But there was no running into the garden now, no laughing and shaking. The dull, persistent gnawing in his breast started again.⁴¹

The ironic description of the reversed positions in the marriage in which the husband’s meekness is almost pitiable demonstrates the different outcome between an unselfish desire and the desire that follows the search for authenticity. On the one hand, the husband acts according to the rules of society: he takes financial care of his family and is concerned about their welfare. On the other hand, he chooses the way opposite to a male role expected from him by the same society and loses his authority in the family by his own decision. A comparison can be drawn between his loss of authority and that of Reginald Peacock’s in “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day.” Reginald Peacock’s son and wife are tired by his constant demands for attention and praise of his patriarchal authority; he is dissatisfied with them, comparing them to his mimetic model of an aristocratic family, and, as a result of that, loses their concern for him. William, on the other hand, despite his apparent submission, is able to maintain the destabilizing events owing to his faithfulness to mimetic desire. The desire of fullness of being might not be his own, but he believes that through his wife’s fullness of being he may experience the freshness of childhood again.

In spite of his belief, the problem with his wife is that she is torn between the mimetic model of her husband and the model of authenticity of life, represented by the group of her friends. The rivalry of desires is in this story not between people but between two concepts of mimetic desire. The closing lines of the story implicate a poignant conclusion of the rivalry

⁴¹ Mansfield 252.

because it seems as though the wife does not decide according to the values each concept stands for, but according to the proximity of the models. William, being isolated most of the time from her wife, cannot compete with the “spongers” in the external mediation. The only moments of internal mediation are weekends during which he, as a model, seems weaker than the model of his wife’s friends. At any rate, the internal mediation reveals the tension which is running under the calm surface: it is the wife’s indecision, but especially William’s feelings. Consequently, the potential for the latent conflict to become open may wait behind William’s “dull, persistent gnawing”⁴² which disturbs his composure.

Likewise, the narrator in “Poison,” a short story originally excluded from the *Garden-Party and Other Stories*, is in the position not dissimilar from William’s. He wishes, as William does, to shift events back in time. What is more, he has much in common with Bertha and her feelings. He is blinded, in the way Bertha is, by happiness, but, in contrast to her, his happiness is mingled with anguish. In spite of the seemingly materialistic desire to get married to his lover Beatrice, his desire is based on mimetic desire. More specifically, it is based on the attribute of marriage which he thinks he could exploit:

And of course I agreed, though privately, in the depths of my heart, I would have given my soul to have stood beside her in a large, yes, a large, fashionable church, crammed with people ... Not because I cared for such horrible shows, but because I felt it might possibly perhaps lessen this ghastly feeling of absolute freedom, *her* absolute freedom, of course.⁴³

His desire springs up from the insecurity of a lover. The mimetic model is for him not a person nor an object, but the image of securing someone through the marriage vows. It is based on the traditional idea, but the positives of the idea are due to his purpose distorted.

Unlike Rosemary and Bertha, who saw the positives in their external mediators, he sees and desires the negatives. His desire gradually grows with the suspicion of his lover’s possibility of escaping him. Beatrice’s desire to be free can be deduced from her remarks and seems natural and positive, her mimetic model being freedom. Later, however, another desire, more important, becomes obvious: she tries to “poison” her lover, having been herself poisoned by her two husbands from whom she learnt the art. The desire to poison him enables

⁴² Mansfield 257.

⁴³ Mansfield 572.

her to work on her desire to escape. Therefore, the positive desire of freedom is distorted by her second desire. The truth is that both lovers desire the negative aspects of their mimetic examples more than the positive ones. The conflict between them, based on the two opposite mimetic desires, is foreshadowed by the dynamics of their dialogues. Despite their desire for change in their relationship, their ideas concerning the precise type of change are irreconcilable. The more they avoid the open conflict, the more their latent conflict due to their negativity becomes “venomous.” Beatrice, moreover, seems to imitate her ex-husbands so well that she is probably becoming a mimetic model for her lover.

In summary, the transition from external to internal mediation of mimetic desire is easy and often goes unnoticed, in Girard’s words: “[it] generally goes unrecognized because it hides behind a bewildering diversity of masks.”⁴⁴ What the transition however brings to the characters is the realization of rivalry with its poignant consequences. The stories reveal that the characters act in a childish way, choosing persons on the basis of external mediation of their desire. Further, they make the distance between themselves and the objects or models minimal. At first, having a model so close is accompanied by the positive feelings, but it is because they do not realize that it primarily endangers the stability of their lives. That is why, when they find out their position in the mimetic structure, they must re-evaluate their opinions or behaviour in order to save what they have. Other characters are undecided between several mimetic desires or their mimetic desire is negative. The rivalry exists in all the cases, though in some not between people but between concepts of desire. Regardless of the differences between the characters, the conflict, which is a natural reaction to rivalry in internal mediation, is avoided. Although the characters try to postpone it or to get rid of its signals, the potential for the conflict is present, making thus the conflict latent, or it is pathologically held latent on purpose, as in “Poison.”

⁴⁴ Girard, *Mimesis and Theory* 240.

Chapter 4: Desiring the Ontological Fullness of Being

4.1 From Mimetic Model to the “Death” of Mimetic Model

So far, all the mentioned characters in Mansfield stories have been engaged in externally or internally mediated desire and their relationship has depended on their model. The relationship between the subject and the model is dangerous in the sense that “the inevitable consequences of desire copied from another desire are ‘envy, jealousy, and impotent hatred.’”⁴⁵ The mediators are chosen for their positive qualities, but these qualities can be misleading. The realization of being misguided might be the impulse for the search of self-authenticity or it might be the way to conflict. In the first case, the path to self-authenticity is possible through the internalized conflict. The open conflict, on the other hand, often results, as Girard declares, in violence. Since the characters of Mansfield stories avoid open conflicts, they can either gain self-knowledge through the internalization or they can ignore it in the latent form, which can however become pathological.

Both directions are, in different ways, explored in the stories “Miss Brill,” “The Daughters of the Late Colonel,” “An Ideal Family” and “Life of Ma Parker” from *The Garden-Party and Other Stories*, “The Canary” and “The Fly” from *The Doves’ Nest*. The difference from the previous characters is that these protagonists lose their models for good or their model is the abstract fullness of being. This discrepancy in the mimetic mechanism results in the sharp distinction between the Self and the Other, which are just other terms for the subject and the mediator. Since the characters desire the ontological fullness of being, it is better to employ these terms instead of subject and model. The Other of these stories, moreover, is used to distinguish it from a definite model because it is usually abstract and varies according to the perspective. The subjects do not forget themselves for the Other, as is typical for external and internal mediation, but rather define themselves against it: they notice their difference from others, which makes them the authentic Self and the Other at the same time.

⁴⁵ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1965) 41.

That is why their latent conflict is based on the division between acceptance and denial of their involvement in the mimetic structure. Some of them even try to hide their desire, in a way that Fleming describes as:

... the strategic withdrawal or concealment of desire – effects a projection of self-sufficiency or autonomy that attracts desire of others. Girard calls this attraction to the putative autarky of the other ‘metaphysical desire’ – a fascination with figures that signify a certain fullness of being, a substantiality that the desiring individual feels that they lack.⁴⁶

The semblance of the elderly characters to this type together with their not having a clearly defined model has the effect that they are unable to express their desire and are left in their solitude. The sadness appears after the realization what the implications of the ultimate desire are. Apart from the introspection of the Self, the conscious strategy of attracting the desire of others can turn narcissistic, as in “The Fly” where the main character tries not to succumb to the prevailing attitude to life the people of his age have.

“Miss Brill” is an example of transition from the state in which a subject has an indefinite model to the state in which there is no model. Also, the dialectic between the Self and the Other starts to take shape in this story and is developed in the analysis of the following stories. (There is also certain dialectic between the Self and the Other in the preceding stories, but the protagonists try to blur the distinctions between them – “For Girard, mimetic desire is always an opening towards the Other.”⁴⁷) The mimetic model of Miss Brill is vague: it is not one person but anyone who is filled with life, energy and has company. She satisfies her desire regularly every Sunday when she goes to the park to be near the others. She is aware of the distinction between herself and the others all the time. At one point, however, she perceives the whole situation in a new light:

They were all on the stage. They weren’t only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt

⁴⁶ Fleming 24.

⁴⁷ Doran, *Mimesis and Theory* xvii.

somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before!⁴⁸

The realistic desire changes to the desire of the imitation of reality, which seems more desirable than the reality itself. It gives her the feeling of satisfaction that she fulfils her desire. Nevertheless, the illusion of the theatre that connects all the people in the park, making it an exciting experience, is destroyed by her overhearing other people's comments on her. The disillusionment is a result of confrontation between the Self and the Other. She suddenly understands that her autonomous Self, seen by her as an active element of the performance, does not resemble the Other she admires, but is just the ordinary and passive Other she despises:

Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and – Miss Brill had often noticed – there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even – even cupboards!⁴⁹

The mean remark of a young couple takes from her the illusion that she will ever be able to reach the vague model of the ontological fullness because she is sentenced by the remark to rethink her relationship between herself and the Other. The Other, being a model, is not only more successful, but it suddenly destroys her faith in individuality. As Andrew O'Shea comments on the process, it happens:

... despite the “peculiarly morbid human tendency to try and maintain a belief in our own originality, our own inherently ‘valuable desires’, while our encounters with others continually threaten to confront us with the ‘reality’ behind all our exploits.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mansfield 270.

⁴⁹ Mansfield 269.

⁵⁰ Andrew O'Shea *Selfhood and Sacrifice: René Girard and Charles Taylor on the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 2010) 58.

The end suggests that without the illusion of the authentic Self, the mimetic model is not needed anymore, leaving Miss Brill with shattered Self out of the mimetic structure as well as out of the desire for life.

The painful revelation that comes as a blow to Miss Brill is postponed by the figures in “The Daughters of the Late Colonel.” Miss Brill and the sisters encounter an ordinary process which is aimed at every unity of Self. As was mentioned above in the comment by O’Shea, no one can avoid the encounter with the Other:

Despite its attempts to stay within itself like a ‘spider in a web’ – intact and complete – the subject is constantly drawn outside by the opinions of others and in his attempts to recover, ends up increasingly more divided.”⁵¹

In the case of Miss Brill, the division is marked by the disillusionment and deprivation of a model. In contrast to her, the old maids, Constantia and Josephine, have the advantage of facing the Others’ influence together. The Other is for a long time their father whose desires they take as their own. A paradoxical situation emerges after their father’s death: the authority of the deceased exists only in their heads. It is due to their habit of staying chained by the inexistent mimetic model that they are treated as children. They are unable to persevere in their opinions neither are they able to formulate their own desires. The conflict is, similarly as in “Miss Brill,” completely internalized. When the reader has chance to find out about their authentic desires by means of Josephine’s stream of consciousness, her articulated sentences are unfinished and interrupted. Despite the sense of their own authenticity, they both ignore the distinction between the Self and the Other.

While Miss Brill concentrates on the Self, overlooking what kind of Other she is, the sisters do not think of their autonomous Selves, being used to think of themselves as the Other of their father. In the final paragraphs, Josephine contemplates the glimpses of her own Self in which she approaches her moments of fullness of being:

There had been this other life, running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them back to get more things on approval, and arranging father’s trays and trying not to annoy father. But it all seemed to have happened in a kind of tunnel. It wasn’t real. It was only

⁵¹ O’Shea 28.

when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now?⁵²

Although her real life seems in comparison to the feeling of ontological fullness a dream, the outcome of the self-knowledge would be too disturbing, so the sisters as if wake up from the dream of their desires to forget the real Selves. By pretending to forget what they wanted, they postpone the conflict between their Selves and the Other, as they postpone everything in their lives – mainly their growing up. The desire of fullness is so vague that it cannot compete with their desire to be left alone, secured in their own world of their father's authority, far away from the unpleasant reality. Although both Miss Brill and the sisters pursue illusory desires, based on the reflections of metaphysical dimension, their directions are opposite: Miss Brill tries to get near to the fullness of being, to have at least an illusionary glimpse of it, while the sisters turn their back to the lost opportunities, a strategy that seems to work for them. All in all, the poignancy of the stories is generated by the difference of the Self and the desirable Other. In the case of the sisters, the difference is a painful subject to them that would reveal the weak autonomy of the Self that was shattered by the dominance of their father

4.2 From Ultimate Desire to Narcissism

None of the elderly women in the two stories discussed above is willing to admit being old; they cling to mimetic models, though these models are vague. Their desires are, unlike in “An Ideal Family” or “Life of Ma Parker,” modelled on people who seem to live more fully than they do. Mr Neave from “An Ideal Family” is introduced as the “old Mr Neave” because it is for the first time that he feels “too old for the spring.”⁵³ His family is considered ideal and represents a mimetic model for many people. Mr Neave however knows that his family is far from ideal and that it is regarded so from the materialistic point of view. The moment of tiredness brings him a confrontation of his former and new desire: the former was modelled on social success; the new one is a desire of intimacy, which would enable him to feel fulfilled. The conflict, apart from being internalized, resembles Josephine's cogitation: his

⁵² Mansfield 228.

⁵³ Mansfield 298.

imagination is for him more real than his real life. His old Self is his mimetic model, therefore unattainable due to its internal existence. In fact, his desire to rest in the dream he makes from his lost past points to Girard's statement: "The ultimate meaning of desire is death ..."⁵⁴ His death would probably initiate the spiritual rebirth of his family, the change he desires in vain because he is kept alive by the responsibility he feels for them economically and by the routine, metaphorically expressed by the climbing of stairs.

Although Mr Neave is rich, surrounded with people who admire him, and has his family around, his loneliness, lack of mimetic model and unreality of fulfilling his utmost desire is the same as of poor Ma Parker's. Their observance of their surroundings mirrors their feeling of "Otherness:"

Out of the smudgy little window you could see an immense expanse of sad-looking sky, and whenever there were clouds they looked very worn, old clouds, frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea.⁵⁵

Their Otherness is the old age emphasised by their concealment of desire, marking thus their metaphysical desirability. If Mr Neave is regarded as a model of happiness and success, Ma Parker is a model of endurance. Life denies both of them the nearness of people they love, the fact pitiable in Ma Parker's life. Their internalized conflict concerns not so much other people as it does the conflicting relationship between the Self and the Other. It is the Self that is sharply aware of its Otherness, fighting against the obstacles on its way to the ultimate desire without dying. They find it impossible to express their deepest grief in this world, as is formulated in "Life of Ma Parker:" "There was nowhere."⁵⁶ They both know that their Otherness, apart from making them a desirable model, alienates them from people. At the same time, they sense that it makes them faithful to their true Selves because they "die to the false self that deceptively seeks approval of others."⁵⁷ The latent conflict is the source of their painful realization that without a fully free expression of the Self their chance to fulfil their desire is minimal. Such a step would, however, demand that they extricate themselves from the mimetic structure, including their central role as the desirable Other. As they do not have any particular models to show them how to proceed, being their own models and knowing

⁵⁴ Girard, Deceit 290.

⁵⁵ Mansfield 245.

⁵⁶ Mansfield 249.

⁵⁷ O'Shea 28.

how illusionary models they are for the others, their ultimate desire is directed at the abstract ontological fullness of being.

Sadness forms background of most of the stories that deal with the old age. It is sadness of the end of human life, kindled by the feeling of loneliness, which is almost an emotional isolation. Those people, who do not have an obvious mimetic model, desire one thing, expressed by the narrator of “The Canary:”

... Company, you see – that was what he was. Perfect company. If you have lived alone you will realise how precious that is. Of course there were my three young men who came in to supper every evening, and sometimes they stayed in the dining-room afterwards reading the paper. But I could not expect them to be interested in the little things that made my day. Why should they be? I was nothing to them.⁵⁸

The old people do not have mimetic models because they are tired of the tensions produced by the mechanism of mimetic desire. As a consequence, they are left in their lonely universe and they search for intimacy outside the human world. The narrator of “The Canary” finds it in a bird. The bird becomes a perfect companion as well as the ideal bird which helps her to overcome the latent conflict between the Other and the Self within her: the desire to be appreciated by her sons as a mimetic model and the desire to achieve perfect understanding as the authentic Self. It is the understanding for not wanting to be part of mimetic mechanism and still be valued that she seeks. To be left out of the mechanism means to explore ontological desire alone, to believe in the possible existence of metaphysical element in the Self freed from the conflict with the Other. The dichotomy of her desires may be the source of the described sadness:

(...) I must confess that there does seem to me something sad in life. It is hard to say what it is. I don't mean the sorrow that we all know, like illness and poverty and death. No, it is something different. It is there, deep down, deep down, part of one, like one's breathing. However hard I work and tire myself I have only to stop

⁵⁸ Mansfield 350.

to know it is there, waiting. I often wonder if everybody feels the same. One can never know.⁵⁹

The trouble is that the yearning for fulfilling the ontological desire can be felt but not articulated. And yet, all the protagonists have been able to maintain their frustrations, caused by their inability to fulfil or express their desire, without exhibiting any violence – something that does not apply for one of the characters in “The Fly.”

The major difference between the two characters in “The Fly” is in their desires: the seemingly weaker man, “old” Mr Woodifield admires the boss, who looks strong and powerful. The desire to live fully of Mr Woodifield is attracted by the appearance of the boss, who shows the marks of his success in fulfilling the common desire. Both men moreover realize their positions: Mr Woodifield is humble before the other man, a “narcissist” with self-centredness based on the other’s admiration. The boss feels the advantage of being a mimetic model and not being threatened in his position:

As a matter of fact, he was proud of his room; he liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it in full view of that frail old figure in the muffler.⁶⁰

They both enjoy the advantages of their mimetic roles because there is no chance of rivalry to occur. In spite of this, Mr Woodifield’s remark about the death of their sons disturbs the harmony. The imbalance between them becomes double-edged: the boss is a model, but at the same time Mr Woodifield with his matter-of-fact attitude to the loss would be a suitable model for the pragmatic boss because of his reconciliation with life. The problem is that the boss consciously denies such a model: “Other men perhaps might recover, might live their loss down, but not he.”⁶¹

The paradoxical denial of such a model is, according to Girard, normal: “If everyone were always aware of the true nature of their desires and their relations with others, they would not behave paradoxically or contradictorily.”⁶² The boss is neither able to express his grief nor is

⁵⁹ Mansfield 351.

⁶⁰ Mansfield 344.

⁶¹ Mansfield 346.

⁶² Doran xx.

he able to talk of his son as Mr Woodfield does. His disappointment of the vain pursuit of his desire results in 'pseudo-masochistic' behaviour, "which leads ultimately beyond disappointment to something altogether more grim: 'The will to make oneself God is a will to self-destruction which is gradually realised.'"⁶³ He thinks his grief to be better than the other men's and he admires the superiority of his social position: his Self imitates godlike features. He perseveres in his desire to feel his son's death as acutely as when it was fresh in spite of not being able to keep to this resolution. The way he achieves self-destruction is illustrated by his torturing the fly: he has drowned his grief as he drowned the fly – to death, which in his case resulted in emotional hollowness.

The boss can never achieve the fulfilment of his desire because he is unwilling to accept the dominance of the mimetic model of Mr Woodfield. Furthermore, he also does not want to give up creating the obstacles: his work that is the centre of his life, through which he understands the loss of his child, and his pleasure of being a model worth of following. The absurdity furthermore arises from his being the model with self-defined metaphysical desire that he has destroyed by his pseudo-masochism and which is symbolised by his sadistic behaviour to the fly. He, of course, appears an ontological model of his age for his physicality, success and determination, but because he is emotionally empty, he is a failure. His failure is due to the pathological internalization of the latent conflict in which he overcomes disappointment in a 'pseudo-masochistic' violent way. It is a demonstration of the frustration arising from the fight with life. Its roots lie in the boss's self-deception that his Self is as strong as the metaphysical Other.

How people behave when their illusions of mimetic desires are shattered completely, when they lose their models or when they lack a mimetic model is explained in the analysis of the stories whose main characters are elderly and solitary. The desire to be opened to the Other is different: if the Other is a model, then it is vague or metaphysical. In the case of vague or dead models, the Self loses its fight with the Other at the expense of resigning from the desire for the ontological fullness of being. If the model does not exist at all, because the subjects are themselves perceived as desirable models, they understand their desire to be unrealizable, not knowing how to merge the Self and the Other. The dreams and acts of imagination inspired by the sense of nearness of fulfilment makes them sad because they have to admit that they cannot reach it in this world. Their frustrations are calm; their latent conflicts are internalized without any significant manifestation. It may look sad, but at least they are true to themselves,

⁶³ Fleming 25.

which gives them insight into reality and self-knowledge. Their introspections of the Self and the Other are moreover the search for the ontological fullness of being. That cannot be said about the boss in “The Fly” who denies everything, perceiving himself almost a god. He violently fights with the help of his pseudo-masochism against the acknowledgment of “self-deception — and this is no more effectively shown than in the phenomenon of *narcissism*.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Doran xx.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Following the earliest concepts of literary criticism that sought “the real-world significance behind”⁶⁵ literary texts, Girard borrows from the classical authors their aesthetic and cultural stance on the text in order to defend its link to the author. That does not mean that he takes into account the authorial intention, he rather demonstrates the analysis of the text so as to prove the value of literature in the way it unites the particular and the universal. Doran summarizes Girard’s approach: “Girard sees the uniqueness of literature in its ability to reconcile universality and particularity in ways that philosophy cannot easily match.”⁶⁶ His primary tool of analysis is the theory of mimetic desire which is based on Aristotelian notion of mimesis. Girard’s innovative concept of mimesis aims at the same thing as Aristotle does: “it is one of grasping human reality through its most pertinent representations, which are in most cases literary, mythical, or religious.”⁶⁷ Mansfield stories reveal the human reality through the representation of seemingly banal episodes of everyday life that contain poignant moments of human existence.

Whether Mansfield depicts children, adults or elderly people, they all appear to be involved in mimetic desire. Since the mimetic desire develops from the basic form of natural imitation to the desire of the ontological fullness of being, it also illustrates the process of gaining the self-knowledge. As the stories with the children protagonists indicate, the involvement in mimesis is a semi-conscious activity. Mimetic desire is then, in fact, defined by the partially realized “the will to know and the will to create”⁶⁸. The two wills together create the background for the mimetic desire. Mansfield formulates the particularities of desire in her journal from October 14, 1922: “to be rooted in life – to learn, to desire to know, to feel, to think, to act.”⁶⁹ Of course, children cannot understand that by their imitating a particularity, their desire is focused on the universal element the particular model seems to possess. In Girard’s words: “To desire is to believe in the transcendence of the world suggested by the Other.”⁷⁰ Neither many of the adult characters realize it, as it is shown in “Prelude” and “At

⁶⁵ Doran xxv.

⁶⁶ Doran xxv.

⁶⁷ Doran xxv.

⁶⁸ Doran xxv.

⁶⁹ C.K. Stead, *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield: A Selection* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) 279.

⁷⁰ René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*, ed. Mark R. Anspach, trans. the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 1.

the Bay.” It is usually because of intuition that people are attracted to a model, be it in externally mediated desire, as in “The Doll’s House,” or in internal mediation, as in “Bliss.”

In external mediation the space between the subject and the mediator is sufficient enough for the subject to create an idealistic view of the mediator, so that it is secure from the intrusion of reality. The danger is much higher if the subject and the mediator are in close contact, so that the mimetic rivalry can appear, as it happens to Rosemary in “A Cup of Tea.” The story is an example of transition from external mediation of desire to internal mediation and back again. According to Girard, there is only a step from rivalry to a conflict: “Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus, mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict.” He continues in his explanation of the origin of mimetic rivalry, which helps to perceive the conflicting position of Bertha Young:

However, men always seem half blind to this conjunction, unable to perceive it as a cause of rivalry. In human relationships words like *sameness* and *similarity* evoke an image of harmony. If we have the same tastes and like the same things, surely we are bound to get along. But what will happen when we share the same desires?⁷¹

Rivalry should, as Girard argues, lead to violence. Mansfield stories, however, do not correspond to his theory completely. They, on the other hand, show that it is more natural for people to try and avoid conflicts as long as it is possible. The conflicts, nevertheless, do not disappear, but become latent and the source of tension. In “Marriage à la Mode” Mansfield demonstrates into what lengths people can go to keep their conflicts latent.

Furthermore, a latent conflict has a potential to turn into an internalized form that may lead a character on its way to self-knowledge and self-authenticity, or it can change into a pathological form that is concerned with the negative implications of desire, which are, above all, jealousy and envy. The stories where the characters search for the Self are “The Garden-Party,” in which Laura observes the emergence of her authentic desire, and “Bliss,” where Bertha discovers the existing rivalry and faces the re-evaluation of her position. The extreme example of this search is “Miss Brill,” in which the Self is shattered by the Other, depriving it

⁷¹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Continuum, 2005) 155.

of the mimetic model; it is an episode about “a painful, obliquely gained, knowledge of the emptiness of one’s own desires.”⁷²

“Poison” and “The Fly” exemplify the situation when the latent conflict becomes pathological. In “Poison,” the positive features of mimetic desire get distorted by the characters who are the victims of negative implications and who prefer hurting each other to bringing the conflict out in the open. The pathological behaviour in “The Fly” can be explained by the nature of mimetic desire. According to Girard, it arises from:

... the dual nature of desire, a force oriented toward the Self, an energy which is strictly narcissistic and yet tears the individual away from himself to make him into the satellite of an Other.⁷³

The boss’s narcissism, which is just a way of denying the dominance of the Other by pretending to be the superior self-sufficient being, is the source of frustration that he is unable to maintain the difference between the metaphysical authority of the Other and self-constructed superiority. It results in the pseudo-masochistic behaviour whose violent demonstration is the torturing of the insect.

The shift from the natural mimetic activity towards the mimesis of the highest model is a gradual process from having at first a definite mimetic model to the final stage in which the definiteness is supplanted by an indefinite model of the ontological fullness of being. The transition, moreover, includes the wish of the characters to extricate themselves from the mimetic mechanism. If the young and adult characters’ goal to free themselves from the rules imposed on them by the society is problematic because it would mean the absolute independence from others, the elderly characters are left outside the mimetic mechanism due to their difference. They are thus not chained by a definite mimetic model neither by the social rules, and they find their Otherness, detected in them by their surroundings, to be the authentic Self. They however pay for the discovery by remaining in isolation and solitude. The mimetic desire, freed from particularity, can become wholly ontological. Being left alone with the metaphysical desire means that every desire is in fact targeted at death, which, as Girard says, is the ultimate meaning of any desire. It is therefore obvious from where the sadness of human

⁷² O’ Shea 34.

⁷³ René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound* 7.

life comes: the ontological desire cannot be reached in this world regardless how much the characters try to fulfil their lives according to their sense of the ontological fullness of being.

Mansfield's achievement is the depiction of the duality of human existence: the division between individuality and universality, between the Self and the Other, between the urge to imitate others' desires and the denial of imitation. All this is part of the search for self-authenticity, the true self-authenticity being a reflection of the universal. Although the characters in her stories are weak, naive and ignorant, they cannot help themselves but to dream of fulfilling their desires, even the ontological one. The reason behind it is that each of them "desires *being*, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess."⁷⁴ Their imagination betrays their longing for it, but only until they are surprised by the conflicting nature of the mimetic mechanism. The moment they comprehend that the mimesis demands from them to change their routine, they are willing to do anything to avoid the open conflict.

The latent conflict, in the end, seems as the best strategy how to keep the balance between one's own ideals and the reality, or, in other words, the harmony between the Self and the destabilizing influence of the Other. Children's inner harmony is not shattered due to their almost complete opening to the Other. In this way, they partially reach the ontological fullness of their models whose qualities mirror the values they detect in the metaphysical Other. The complete mergence of the Self with the metaphysical Other would mean the merging of the particular with the universal, therefore reaching the fullness of being in this way would require fulfilling the ultimate meaning of desire.

As a consequence, the individual search for universality by means of mimetic desire reflects the role of literature, as analysed by Girard. Mansfield's attitude to the search by literary means is expressed in her letter to S.S. Koteliansky: "there can be no ultimate finding, there is a kind of finding by the way which is enough, is sufficient."⁷⁵ The doubts about the sufficiency are however embodied in the feelings of her characters. The feeling of failure, which is the poignant element of Mansfield's stories, is a form of frustration that accumulates in people who sense that they fail in tracing universality despite their understanding of its form in the particularities and despite the perseverance in creativity.

⁷⁴ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 155.

⁷⁵ Stead 269.

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