

## Fragmented narrative techniques in Katherine Mansfield's short fiction - The daughters of the late colonel as a reflection of psychological and emotional turmoil of the Pinner sisters

Rummana Farooqui<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Bahrain, Bahrain; rkhalid@uob.edu.bh (R.F.).

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to explore the use of fragmentation in Katherine Mansfield's short fiction, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," to illustrate the emotional as well as the psychological trauma of the Pinner sisters, torn apart by the death of their father and their conflicting desires. In literature, fragmentation may serve as a tool for psychological exploration, depicting characters' fragmented thoughts and emotions to mirror the intricacies of the human psyche. In this short fiction, the narrative shifts between past and present, capturing the way memories surface and retreat in the minds of the women protagonists. Flashbacks in the narrative suggest that Constantia and Josephine's relationship with their brother Benny, nephew Cyril, and deceased mother is as complicated as their relationship with the colonel. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is a moving tale of family relationships, grief, and the struggle for freedom. The story also focuses on the importance of living life on one's own terms and the need to break free from the constraints of traditional ways and social conventions. Fragmented narratives allow us to capture the complexity of memory, experience, and life itself. By breaking apart the linear flow of time, the story reflects the way we actually live — with memories that intrude upon the present and with emotions that cannot be neatly contained within the boundaries of a single moment. As a result, the fragments leave room for the reader to fill in the gaps and to feel the weight of what is left unsaid. Thus, there are many works of modernist literature that fragment the narrative and do so for thoughtful and strategic reasons, such as adding depth to characters, settings, and plot. The objective of this study is to examine and analyze the use of fragmented narrative techniques as a reflection of the psychological and emotional turmoil of the Pinner sisters in the work of Katherine Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel." This study is based on the structural elements, using qualitative research with documentation techniques. Moreover, examining the emotional and psychological trauma of the characters in post-modernist literary works can be a subject of further research and can be compared with contemporary women's studies.

**Keywords:** Emotional turmoil, Experience, Family relationships, Flashbacks, Fragmented narrative, Freedom, Memory, Psychological trauma.

### 1. Introduction

The objective of this research is to examine the role of narrative technique in Katherine Mansfield's *The Daughters of the late Colonel*, as well as the psychological and emotional turmoil of the two sisters using ellipses and incomplete sentences or fragmentation to demonstrate the internal conflicts, unintended action sequences of the characters by producing fragmented narrative from a vocabulary of action. Katherine Mansfield's short story is about psychological captivity. It urges readers to use the sisters as an example of who not to be. As evident in the story: *Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without*

*asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. "Buried. You two girls had me buried! " She heard his stick thumping. Oh, what would they say? What possible excuse could they make? It sounded such an appallingly heartless thing to do.* (The Daughters of the late Colonel)

It encourages readers, with a focus on women to lead independent lives by describing the sisters' timid, encaged lifestyles and what specifically keeps them from freedom and happiness (Slap Happy Larry, 2019).

"The Daughters of the Late Colonel", published in 1921 is a purely modernist story whose unusual structure and techniques reflect the shifting sociopolitical scene of the modernist age. The story's domestic family issues mirror sociopolitical ones. Modernist writers attempted to confront the decline of widely held societal norms in their works as tradition and hierarchy were subject to revolutionary changes caused by war and other major upheavals to the European social fabric in the early twentieth century. Mansfield crafts a story that is as fragmented as the family at its center by oscillating between the past and the present, memory and internal conversation, and focalized around the consciousness of the central protagonists. The Pinner may serve as a microcosm of the larger societal disarray of this time period. This fragmentation is carried out by Mansfield's story itself, highlighting the sense of unpredictability and chaos. The narrative unfolds over a week, focusing on the struggles of the two sisters to manage their father's funeral arrangements and household duties while grappling with their new-found freedom from their father's oppressive control. Despite his death, the sisters remain haunted by the presence of their father, the late colonel, unable to make decisions or move forward with their lives. The story highlights the themes of repression, fear and the challenges of independence through the sister's indecisiveness and reflection on their past. Katherine Mansfield effectively demonstrates the use of fragmented narrative in the story.

As stated by Çeşmeci (2023) in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" by the 20th-century author Katherine Mansfield, reflects on the discontinuities and tensions of modern life in her stories.

The family shown in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is far from traditional family, reflecting the changing social landscape of the early twentieth-century Europe. Yet the story focus on the traditional values of female domesticity, male supremacy and the other social customs of grieving and mourning. In addition to highlighting the Pinner's unconventionality and fragmented qualities, Mansfield's own modernist style refers to literary modernist aesthetics and illustrates the general instability and sudden social changes she experienced as a modernist writer.

## 2. Methodology

The method used in this research is a descriptive objective approach and close reading that requires focusing on the intrinsic elements of the stories by analyzing and explaining them in detail. Data obtained for the research is from two sources: the primary source, that is, the text of the story and the secondary source, which includes the internet and articles published in periodicals and journals.

## 3. Literature Review

The fragmentation of the Modernist text is usually attributed to two phenomena: first, writers' responses to the 19th-century movement, which emphasized the "objective," tangible external world of their time and delighted in describing it in great detail; second, writers' attempts to deal with the effects of the World War I, which broke the seeming logic and order of life into shattered pieces, also known as T. S. Eliot's "heap of broken images", in the opinion of Kaščáková (2010).

Kerzenwax (2024) reiterates that fragmented narratives in literature are so familiar as they reflect the way memory works, the way life works, in all its broken, beautiful complexity. As a result, the disjointed paths of storytelling are interconnected by these fragmented structures that capture the truth of our inner worlds, where time bends and memory become a labyrinth.

As mentioned by Almaarroof (2024). In contemporary literature, fragmentation is usually used to undermine conventional narrative frameworks and linear storytelling. The aim of modernist literature was to portray the characters' subjective experiences as well as the fractured aspect of reality. Virginia Woolf's work "Woolf (1925) is a noteworthy example, as it uses a fragmented narrative structure to delve into the characters' inner thoughts and feelings. Woolf presents time and consciousness in a fragmented manner through the use of stream-of-consciousness and shifting perspectives. Faulkner (1929) is another example of fragmentation in contemporary writing. Faulkner illustrates the Compson family's fractured viewpoints through the use of several narrators and non-linear narrative. These modernist writers experimented with narrative structures, focusing on internal conflicts, subjectivity, exploring fluidity of time by challenging linear narrative as well as social norms of early twentieth century. Also, the fractured narrative structure symbolizes the fragmented nature of memory and time, as well as reflects the disintegration of the family. Almaarroof (2024) further states that the Modernist writers uses fragmentation to focus on the individual's subjective experience and the disintegration of traditional values as well as to capture the fragmented nature of reality and consciousness.

A potent literary device, fragmentation has been used by authors to present the complex ideas and to reflect the fragmented nature of human experience and to interconnect different narrative perspectives. Fragmentation is frequently used in contemporary writing to illustrate the characters' subjective experiences and undermine conventional narrative frameworks. Moreover, it challenges traditional storytelling conventions and encourages readers to engage with multiple perspectives and interpretations. Thus, by reflecting the fragmented nature of reality, fragmentation adds depth and richness to literary works. Hence, we can better appreciate the numerous ways that fragmentation is used to enhance literary works by knowing the historical context, pioneers, and instances of this method in both modern and postmodern literature. Fragmented narrative in Modernism in a way is similar to Postmodern literature which is grounded in the principles of rejecting strict rules of plot construction, an ironic perspective on reality, discourse fragmentation, hybrid genres, paradox, and a plurality of styles, as stated by Sunayna (2024).

As stated by Hussein, Khaleel, Shuash, and Ghena (2020) in order to illustrate how alienated man is in the contemporary world, modernism uses language of fragmentation. Many critics of contemporary literature understand a sense of chaos that can also be determined and heightened by modernism, to address topics like time, psychology, sexuality, and epistemology.

To sum up, Fragmentation reflects the fractured world that can be seen as a representation of the fragmented human psyche, offering insights into unconscious thoughts and desires through disjointed narratives celebrating the fragmented, diverse, and often chaotic aspects of contemporary existence, as mentioned by VD Blogs (2024). This nonlinear narrative technique, as showcased in Mansfield (1922) mirrors the fragmented, chaotic experience of living in the modern world. Also, the story reveals the emotional and psychological turmoil of the Pinner sisters after the death of their father and to cope with the realities of life.

#### 4. Discussion

In literary theory and literature, the idea of fragmentation examines narrative and thematic components that depart from traditional patterns, providing a prism through which writers can play with form and content to express complex meanings and reflections of the human condition.

The fragmented approach enables readers to embrace the intricacies that exist within memory and experience and real life. These literary pieces showcase our authentic lifestyle because they present memory fragments that disrupt time progression along with emotional free-flowing characteristics which defy sequential constraints.

The fragmented nature of the narratives creates open areas which bring emotionally profound truths to light. The empty spaces in stories that break apart are often the conditions where profound self-realization with our world becomes possible. The actual course of life follows no clear path. Neither is memory. Therefore, the modern stories need not align with linear structures. Fragmented narratives

consist of events mixed together, and readers are anticipated to decipher the order of the story by integrating the various elements of the tale.

Modernist works are often characterized by significant fragmentation like the storyline is disordered and does not adhere to a straightforward chronological sequence from beginning to end. This can be unappealing for numerous readers since it may render a narrative difficult to follow and less engaging.

The story is written in a modernist style which means that it has no set beginning, middle, and end structure. Mansfield (1922) instead includes long and short paragraphs, changes in narrative style, and different narrators and points of view. This episodic narrative unfolds over the span of a week. The main setting is the Pinner family home, situated somewhere in London. The narrative's tone is both grave and somewhat whimsical. Mansfield, the modernist, tested the boundaries of narration and character development in her quest to convey the mindset (emotional and the psychological turmoil) of the Pinner sisters in the aftermath of their father's passing. Employing a third-person narrative style, Mansfield (1922) skillfully shifts between each sister's viewpoint as they strive to cope with their evolving situation.

In the words of Pattnaik (2023) Fragmentation in character development is used to exhibit vulnerabilities, flaws and irrational thoughts and actions of the characters to give a specific flavor to an otherwise straightforward narrative. Mansfield's exquisite portrayal of the sisters' reaction to their father's passing and their child-like demeanor in their fear of his persistent influence in their lives and home illustrates a lifetime of psychological trauma that is only beginning to mend by the conclusion of the story.

The fragmented narrative mirrors the complexities of memory and the non-linear experience of time. To cite an example from the story where Constantia and Josephine struggle to cope with the reality of their father's death. *"Supposing father had wanted to say something—something private to them. Not that he had. Oh, far from it! He lay there, purple, a dark, angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in. Then, as they were standing there, wondering what to do, he had suddenly opened one eye. Oh, what a difference it would have made, what a difference to their memory of him, how much easier to tell people about it, if he had only opened both! But no—one eye only. It glared at them a moment and then... went out".* (The Daughters of the late Colonel)

Thus, these lines are proof of the emotional and psychological trauma of the Pinner sisters.

Mansfield alludes to the emotional and psychological abuse inflicted by Colonel Pinner's death on his daughters. An example from the story shows that Josephine is clearly grieving for her father's passing, and she experiences guilt because her sorrow is accompanied by a feeling of relief. This guilt transforms into her conviction that their father isn't truly gone and that he will be angry with them for interring him.

*"I don't know," she said forlornly. "It is all so dreadful. I feel we ought to have tried to, just for a time at least. To make perfectly sure. One thing's certain"—and her tears sprang out again— "father will never forgive us for this—never!"* (The Daughters of the late Colonel)

The daughters could not come to terms with their reality even long after the death of the Colonel, Mr. Pinner. Constantia's withdrawal into her imagination to evade conflict was a result of her life lived in fear of her father, Josephine's innocent perspective, and their physical response to the sound of the organ grinder indicate that they lived in profound fear of their father's volatile temper. Josephine and Constantia sprang to their feet together.

*"Run, Con," said Josephine. "Run quickly. There's sixpence on the—" Then they remembered. It didn't matter. They would never have to stop the organ-grinder again.* (The Daughters of the late Colonel)

They realized that their father is dead and there is no need for them to panic.

In another instance, it is noted the multiple mentions of the thumping of a cane on the ground by the colonel. Despite his illness, his commanding personality prevailed in the household, resulting in his daughters becoming indecisive, frightened, and overprotected.

*One day when Cyril visited them. His grandfather said, "Come on, out with it!" cried Colonel Pinner testily, beginning to thump again.*

*And Cyril leaned forward and yelled, "Father's still very fond of meringues." Josephine repeated, "Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues."*

*"Can't hear," said old Colonel Pinner. And he waved Josephine away with his stick, then pointed with his stick to Cyril. "Tell me what she's trying to say," he said. (The Daughters of the late Colonel)*

Even the end of the story is remarkable in a sense that Josephine and Constantia hesitate at the thought of freedom. Fearful of moving on in their lives, the sisters observe the sunset over their shattered aspirations. Josephine senses as though something within her is grieving for the absence of freedom, while Constantia withdraws her hand from the sun's comforting warmth. They desire to proceed, to advance, yet neither is prepared to do so alone, and thus, like the cloud that veils the sun at the conclusion of the story, the sisters conceal their genuine feelings from each other and opt to remain where they are for the moment.

*A pause. Then Constantia said faintly, "I can't say what I was going to say, Jug, because I've forgotten what it was .... that I was going to say."*

*Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, "I've forgotten too." (The Daughters of the late Colonel)*

Thus, we find that although the sisters desire freedom, but they are also afraid to make that first move.

To sum up, the story is evident of colonel's oppressive tyrannical status as a controlling patriarch and the Pinner family's profound instability and insecurity. By using fragmented narrative technique, Katherine Mansfield explores the family dynamics in the story *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*. *flashbacks and memory in the narrative. How do these elements serve as symbols or tools to explore the sisters' inner conflicts and desires?*

Thus, by using the elements flashbacks and memory in the narrative, Katherine Mansfield explore the psychological and emotional turmoil of the sisters. Revealing dysfunctional family dynamics, emotional paralysis, their indecisiveness as well as their inability to separate memory from reality.

## 5. Conclusion

The result of this research, by analyzing the story, shows that the women characters specifically the daughters of Mr. Pinner were repressed and discriminated. Fragmentation is implied in the story for breaking narratives into irregular pieces in order to present a complex reality and ambiguity reflecting the uncertain state of the mind of the characters. The fragmentation narrative explores the dysfunctional and disconnected family relationships. Through the dialogues of the characters and paying close attention to their behavior and actions in the story, we find that the women characters exhibit submissive, repressive behaviors against the patriarchal attribute of their father. It showcased gender inequality and struggle for freedom. Author demonstrates the psychological captivity of the two sisters using symbolism and metaphors for imprisonment throughout the story. Expressing indecisiveness of the sisters and how it cripples them. Thus, the sisters, though physically free from their father, fail to achieve full emotional or psychological independence. Mansfield (1922) ends her short story, where the two sisters decide to tell each other something, but in the end, none of them can muster the courage to open their hearts. This lack of indecisiveness and their dilemma is accurately captured by Mansfield using fragmented narrative. The story sends a message to readers, particularly women, that they should break down their mental barriers to live life freely and make their own choices or end up like the spinster Pinner sisters, alone, unhappy, and held back into psychological captivity. As mentioned by Gerardo (2006). Mansfield appears to critique the patriarchal restrictions and its impact on women; when utilized strategically, it is viewed as a substitute for the constraints of the system. She ultimately states that "in this imperfect, present world we have failed each other, scores of times, but in the real unchanging world we never have nor come down from our high place". Ultimately, everlasting

time may serve as the “real” option for transformation. Further research can be conducted to examine emotional and psychological trauma in the post-modernist literary works using fragmentation and can be compared with contemporary women's studies.

### Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

### Copyright:

© 2025 by the authors. This open-access article is distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

### References

- Almaarroof, A. (2024). *Fragmentation in modern and postmodern literatures*. ResearchGate. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380137647\\_Fragmentation\\_in\\_Modern\\_and\\_Postmodern\\_Literatures](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380137647_Fragmentation_in_Modern_and_Postmodern_Literatures)
- Çeşmeci, S. (2023). *Social alienation and loneliness in Mansfield's Miss Brill and the Daughters of the Late Colonel*. DergiPark. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/3603462>
- Faulkner, W. (1929). *The sound and the fury*. New York: Random House.
- Gerardo, R. S. (2006). "The daughters of the Late Colonel": Feminine temporality in Katherine mansfield's short fiction. In G. S. Castillo García et al. (Eds.), *The Short Story in English: Crossing Boundaries*. Alcala De Henares: Publications Service of the University of Alcalá.
- Hussein, M. A., Khaleel, A. S., Shuash, R. A., & Ghena, H. K. (2020). Self-consciousness and fragmentation as major themes in modernism. *International Journal of Development Research and Innovation*, 19, 1–10.
- Kašćáková, J. (2010). *Speaking silence in "the daughters of the late colonel"*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356256049\\_Speaking\\_Silence\\_in\\_The\\_Daughters\\_of\\_the\\_Late\\_Colonel](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356256049_Speaking_Silence_in_The_Daughters_of_the_Late_Colonel)
- Kerzenwax, J. (2024). *The power of fragmented narratives: How disjointed storytelling reflects the complexity of memory* Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@joana.kerzenwax.rpllc/the-power-of-fragmented-narratives-how-disjointed-storytelling-reflects-the-complexity-of-memory-0357978e8295>
- Mansfield, K. (1922). *The daughters of the Late Colonel*. In *The Garden Party, and Other Stories*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Pattnaik, M. (2023). *Fragmentation in fiction writing — structure, narrative, and character-building*. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@MandiraPattnaik/fragmentation-in-fiction-writing-structure-narrative-and-character-building-a96337214c0a>
- Slap Happy Larry. (2019). *Psychology by Katherine Mansfield*. Slap Happy Larry. Retrieved from <https://www.slaphappylarry.com/psychology-katherine-mansfield/>
- Sunayna. (2024). Fragmentation in postmodern literature. *Migration Letters*, 17(2), 123–130.
- VD Blogs. (2024). *Unraveling the tapestry: Narrative techniques in modernist literature*. VD Books. Retrieved from <https://vdbooks.ca/2024/02/13/unraveling-the-tapestry-narrative-techniques-in-modernist-literature/>
- Woolf, V. (1925). *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Harcourt Brace.