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Rita Dove and Katherine Mansfield were not contemporaries, nor do they write in the same genre. But two works, one from each author, are worth comparing and contrasting since both have a similar underlying theme, which leads the reader to a contrary conclusion.

“DayStar” is a poem by Rita Dove that has to do with the life of a busy mother who is only able to leave her perpetual duties for an hour a day. Katherine Mansfield’s “Miss Brill” is about a woman who is an avid people watcher who uses her avid imagination to find meaning in every exchange happening in earshot of her.

Both authors are female authors and create a female protagonist that is involved in a daydream. Rita Dove is a contemporary writer, born in 1952 in Akron, Ohio. Rita Dove came from a background and time period in which there were more opportunities for women and less inequality than there was during the time that Katherine Mansfield was active.

Dove came from a good time period for women’s rights. In contrast, Mansfield was born in 1888 and lived until 1923. She was brought up in New Zealand, which at the time was a colony of the British Empire. This was a tumultuous time for the British Empire, due to the First World War. Mansfield died young, of tuberculosis at the age of 34. Both writer’s seem to have a different take on human nature.

Both women protagonists are imaginative, and use their imagination for different reasons. They are both observing. In the poem the subject imagines a palace in the sky while her children nap. In the short story a woman listens to people’s conversations in a park and imagines they are all part of a play and that each is important in the creation of the scene unfolding in the realm

of reality before her.

In "DayStar" the subject "wanted a little room for thinking: / but she saw diapers steaming / on the line," (Dove, 1-3). This gives readers a vivid image, which is easily relatable. A mother figure plays into most lives, and associated with the archetype of a mother needing to tend to a household. Motherhood is not like a job where there are set hours. Every mother works 24/7 with few hours of respite.

In the case of the mother in the poem, her respite is to sit in a chair behind herself while her children are napping. Her time is limited. She has, "an hour, at best, / before Liza appeared pouting from / the top of the stairs." This is a poem fueled by imagery. Each stanza gives a concrete image.

In the first stanza the dominant image is "diapers steaming on the line" (Dove, 1). The next stanza provides an image of "A doll slumped behind then door." The third stanza has the beautiful poetic combinations "the pinched armor of a vanished cricket" and the image of a "floating maple leaf" (Dove, 3).

The fourth stanza is unlike the rest in the poem, as it does not have a dominant image present. This is the stanza where the protagonist "closed her eyes" and see only her "own vivid blood" (Dove, 4). The next stanza there is the competing image of building a palace and field mice. Because it turns out that's what the woman was imagining behind the house, building a castle in her imagination before waking up the reality of her domestic chores. The poem does not pain these chores as burdensome. There is the element of family love present, and also the realization that sometimes it is wise to take a break from those chores and reflect in silence, letting the

imagination run wild.

The character that Mansfield presents, “ Miss Brill” employs her imagination in a much different way. The writing is less poetic, as it is a short story not a poem. But it does begin with a slow narrative filled with descriptions that conjures pervading imagery.

“ Miss Brill” begins with a description of a fur that she decided to wear. Miss Brill is very satisfied with her decision to wear the fur, and in her mind she imagines it as a little animal surrounding her. “ Little rogue!” she calls her fur (Mansfield, 1). The character is presented as an endearing, if not quirky character. Most of the story is told through Miss Brill’s voice as she observes her surroundings. The theme of Shakespeare that “ all the world is a play” and we are all actors of it is the theme of this story. In the sense that both characters have a sort of “ imaginary” world to go to that is like a refuge from the rest of life, this character is similar to the subject of Dove’s poem. However, at the end of Dove’s story this land is still in tact. Something traumatic happens in the last few paragraphs of Mansfield’s story, which destroys Miss Brill’s weekly tradition of going out into the park as an actress on the stage of the public world.

Towards the end of the story Miss Brill begins noticing a young couple sharing the bench with her. The couple apparently does not realize that Miss Brill is listening and observing everyone in her vicinity. This is the first difficult realization that Miss Brill must accept upon hearing this couple talk about her: it shows they are not noticing people like Miss Brill suspected everyone else in the park was noticing everyone else. Because they think they can talk negatively about Miss Brill in her vicinity it shows that they do

not really see her as anything other than a material object. The boy asks, "Why does she come her [the park] at all - who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?" These are hurtful words, and in the context the couple is irritated with Miss Brill because she is preventing them from getting down to some necking. Miss Brill, unfortunately, does not see this context, and she leaves the park broken, her imaginary and joyful world broken.

In this sense, it seems Miss Brill's fantasy; at least in her understanding of it was based on an illusion, rather than an escape. The subject in "DayStar" has a more solid foundation for the palace in her life that her fantasies occupy. Presumably, the only thing that could ruin it is a child not falling asleep for their naps. Eventually, her children will become older with more independence and she will no longer need to escape, but neither will she feel a sense of loss at leaving behind the no-longer-needed day dreaming space.

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