THE UNEMPLOYED "BLASÉ ATTITUDE" AND THE ARTIST FIGURE: READING KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "MISS BRILL"

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This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author SN conceived the idea of the work, produced the second draft, suggested references, and made substantial revisions to the first draft. Author HJ produced the initial draft. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript, and both worked closely throughout the composition process.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the lives of individuals in an urban setting by analyzing Katherine Mansfield's 1922 story "Miss Brill", applying Georg Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" as a significant contribution to social theories that tackle individuals' manners and psychological states in metropolitan life. In addition, we apply Charles Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life", particularly his central term the "Flâneur" which defines the artist figure as "the man of the crowd." Simmel claims that the city dwellers endure a coping mechanism called the "blasé attitude" that leads them to neglect the hustle and bustle of the city in order to cope with the rush and instability of modern life and preserve their sanity. Therefore, a city dweller employs the "blasé attitude" as a marker of modernity to assist him/her function in this life and look more intellectual and civilized. On the other hand, Baudelaire asserts that the "Flâneur" is a "stroller" in the city of Paris, feeling minute differences and observing every detail. In Mansfield’s story, Miss Brill's socially abortive existence could be understood in terms of two senses: the first as an artist in the Flâneur sense who consciously observes the crowded city life; the second as an artist who fails to employ the "blasé attitude". It is concluded that Miss Brill resists the employment of the "blasé attitude" for being an artist in the "Flâneur" sense. Nevertheless, her attitude of depression and destruction in her room at the end is partly due to her awareness that being a city dweller contradicts her very artistic being. Against the established stylistic brilliance of Mansfield’s writing, our work offers new thematic insights into her rich characterization and social relevance.

Keywords: Metropolis; Miss Brill; artist; blasé attitude; alienation; modernity; flâneur; philistine; short fiction; literary analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is probably needless to say that literature has sociological leanings and that literary studies relate directly to the lives of individuals and social transactions. Therefore, the relationship between the individual and the metropolis in literary works comes as no surprise. Sociology is defined by The American Heritage Science Dictionary [1] as the study of “social behavior, its origins, development,
organization, and institutions.” It is the social science that uses both "empirical investigation" and "critical analysis" [2] about social order and change (Ashley 4). Empirical investigation in the sense of acquiring knowledge by means of experience and observation is essential to the meaning of social research. More importantly, critical analysis refers to the reasoned and intellectual understanding of our surroundings (Ashley 4). Social research addresses politicians, developers, thinkers, educators and any kind of individuals interested in social phenomena in general [3] (Kahale & Florence 3). In the modern age, the idea of sociology interacting with literature has become a prosperous topic, since the modern age is an extreme shift in ideas, styles, and techniques. Many literary writers started to consider the circumstances and conditions that surround their characters in a literary work and thus account for their credibility.

Katherine Mansfield’s "Miss Brill" is a 20th century short story well-suited for our purposes of a social investigation of the relationship between the individual and the surrounding social environment. The story, in a modernist fashion projecting the inner life of the protagonist, traces one day in the life of a spinster who is in the habit of visiting the Jardins Publiques in Paris every Sunday. Because the story employs the stream of consciousness narration, we have an adequate portrait of Miss Brill’s rich and complex character.

One Sunday, Miss Brill recognizes slight differences as there are many goers in the park, unlike the previous Sundays. She (re)acts silently as she observes the visitors and interprets their actions and wordings and links them to the metropolis. A short time later, she appears to partake in their lives in her own way of eavesdropping and watching. She is mocked for her funny looking fox fur by a boy and the girl in the garden. She leaves dismayed to her apartment without the stop she used to make at the baker’s. In her room, a cry is heard, but still it is not revealed whether it is the fox fur or Miss Brill herself who cries. The short story shows Miss Brill as a spinster who is neglected and devalued in the community because of the technological advances and indifference that characterize the modern time. The city, therefore, is victimizing old, moral, and ethical individuals and acts as a sharp statement over their morality and traditions. However, in this article we argue that the main character is partly responsible for the depressing end she undergoes at the end in her room because she misemploys the blasé attitude of indifference and insensitivity to life in the metropolis. One critic [4] summarized the major themes of the story as “isolation, disillusionment and the gap between expectations and reality” (Song 119). What is left out from this list is probably a reference to Mansfield’s urban setting and representation of Miss Brill as a city dweller, which is what we intend to highlight in this article.

2. THE "BLASÉ ATTITUDE": "MISS BRILL" AND THE CITY DWELLERS

The German thinker Georg Simmel, in an article published in 1903 and entitled “The Metropolis and Mental Life” [5] presented a sociological understanding of the modifications and adjustments people employ as a reaction to the external forces in the city. In this work, he maps out the characteristics of modernity and the metropolitans. On the other hand, Lewis Mumford [6], answered "What is a City?" by arguing that "The city is a related collection of primary groups and purposive associations: the first, like family and neighborhood, are common to all communities, while the second are especially characteristic of city life" (184). Simmel's work on the metropolis provides different sociological terms to the understanding of the individuals in the city. His discussion assesses the reasons that cause the individuals' lack of feelings and sensitivity. This might be related to Mumford's notion of "purposive associations" if we take this to mean goal-directed communication, i.e. practically and materialistically minded people who shun each other except for the purposes of conducting business.

In this regard, Simmel [5] asserts that "Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner" (12). This idea is not hazardous as the "sphere of mental activity" is "least sensitive and furthest removed from the depths of personality" (Simmel 12). In “Miss Brill” [7], the garden goers are pictured through the eyes of Miss Brill as people with "something funny about nearly all of them" while "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!" (Mansfield 2). As the goers are very callous, they do not perform and remain hushed, unemotional, and inactive toward the comings and goings of others. Miss Brill recommences in her thoughts: "They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting" (Mansfield 2). It is not the acting of artistic features and characters, but the act of movement with no expressive responses resembling machines' tasks. The story becomes one of modern alienation. Miss Brill is keen on observing life around her on Sunday afternoons from the enclave of her compartmentalized life. She has a life of her own inside her to make up for this alienation, mainly her artistic sensitivity: “And when she breathed, something light and sad—
no, not sad, exactly—something gentle seemed to move in her bosom” (Mansfield 1).

Simmel [5] argues that “The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (11). The metropolis creates an intellectualistic outlook, a psychological state and a mental attitude. As Simmel contends, “Instead of reacting emotionally, the metropolitan type reacts primarily in a rational manner, thus creating a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness, which in turn is caused by it” (12). This intellectualistic attitude of “reserve and indifference” (16) can serve to protect the individual against the metropolis. The blasé attitude, thus, helps individuals to protect themselves by “renouncing the response” (14) to “the content and the form of metropolitan life” (14). The blasé attitude reserved to the city is a “psychic phenomenon” (14) whose essence is “an indifference toward the distinctions between things” (14). Distinctions between things for the blasé person are meaningless; therefore, a response to them is renounced (14).

Actually, the expression "Blasé Attitude" refers back to the mechanism the dwellers employ in order to ignore differences between things and so become unobserved. The structure relies on the correspondence between the elements in the city, on the distinguished modes of productions, careers/expertise, and freedom. The city labels the birth of original and multiple stimulations at once that must be accompanied with direct and rigorous reactions. The hysterical flow of stimulations and the direct responses required could cause psychological and social disorders. As a result, the blasé is formed out automatically by dwellers to uphold their sanity in such hectic incidents. The "blasé attitude" is a self-defense mechanism that implies to the urban dweller being indifferent and non-chalant. In the story [7], one little boy tries to return some violets to a lady but "she took them and threw them away as if they'd been poisoned" (Mansfield 2). Under the spell of this blasé attitude, people become ungrateful and indifferent to anything around them. A woman is delighted to see the man, but he "lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and even while she was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on" (Mansfield 2). People act hurriedly and mechanically in this urban setting. A sense of apathy characterizes their social lives.

According to Simmel [5], the blasé is a simple procedure for "the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life" (11). Miss Brill is conscious about individuals being indifferent. She is aware of their employment of the "blasé attitude" as the narrator makes clear [7]:

Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt 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! And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting home at just the same time each week—so as not to be late for the performance .... (Mansfield 2)

Miss Brill in this excerpt is depicted ironically as an artist who perceives the world to be complete picture. She assures herself that her absence makes difference. Nonetheless, she is convinced that she is mocking herself after all. Her own justification is that she is a part of this picture and the other performers must be in search for her to act on the stage. Miss Brill seems to be poor and innocent; she tries to state the unobvious. The rational explanation for the exact time she arrives in the garden is captured in these questions: Is it true that she would be missed by other performers? Or does she want to draw for herself a place in the days of other goers and thus be noticed? Is it true that if she would arrive in any time performers would wait for her? Unfortunately, she lies to herself because indifference and insignificance are characteristic of city life. The man and the woman in the garden "did not speak.” This is “disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation” (Mansfield 1). The people are very static and unemotional; an Englishman and his wife are described in the following terms from the perspective of Miss Brill: “They’ll always be sliding down my nose! Miss Brill had wanted to shake her” (Mansfield 1). That is to say people are indifferent to any action and remain "still as statues" (2). Miss Brill became an expert at “listening.” She views herself as a good observer of people’s lives. In her loneliness, her fur becomes her friend, her “Dear little thing!” She desires belonging to her community and attaining communal interaction. Since she cannot achieve this, she imagines this affinity with others. While she imagines singing with the rest of people and the band, her epiphany comes when a young couple accuse her of being a “stupid old thing” with a fur that is “so funny” and like “a fried whiting” (3). She returns to her room dismayed and puts it back in its box. When she puts the lid on she thinks that “she heard something crying” (4). This ending suggests Miss Brill’s failure to employ the blasé attitude practiced by others and testifies to her artistic sensitivity.
The "blasé" attitude is juxtaposed against the rural one. While the rural dwellers emphasize the social interactions as the pillar of their traditional and conservative life, the urban dwellers do not. Consequently, the main clash between individualism and the metropolis is obvious in Simmel's essay. Simmel [5] argues that this clash is the marker of modernity in the city; the objectivity passes over the subjectivity, which results in the devaluation of subjectivity. He also emphasizes the nonstop circulation not only of money and goods but also of social individuals and groups (Simmel 11&12). Therefore, human dealings in the city are often transient, speedy, and superficial.

3. ANDROGYNY AND MISS BRILL'S FLÂNEUR

The critic Virginia Woolf [8] wrote a very significant work entitled A Room of One's Own (1929) on women's unfair treatment in history and how they were understood through an era of masculine domination. She detests the overweening toward masculinity by literary critics, writers and novelists. One important concept she develops is the "androgynous mind" which refers back to the mind as both feminine and masculine. Woolf describes this term as she says: "in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man" (Woolf Ch.6). According to Woolf [8], the author deals with the things objectively under the function of the androgynous mind as there would be no sex-consciousness. Any matter is perceived indifferently whether the author is masculine or feminine. That is why Woolf calls for the dysfunction of sex-consciousness as it guarantees the objective perception and interpretation of literature, reality, and any subject. With magnitudes of this mixed, masculine and feminine mind, Woolf argues the mind's inability to account for creativity and objectivity for each separate feminine or masculine mind aside. She asserts that probably “a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (Woolf Ch. 6). Shedding more light on the androgynous mind and its role in perceiving reality, Woolf argues:

*And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female... The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. (Ch.6)*

In this quotation, Woolf asserts the necessity of synchronization between the two genders. The interactions that occur pave the way for "fertilized" thinking and creativity as well as a better employment of all facilities surrounding our lives. The interaction between the genders takes place in terms of "fusion." In fact, the rapid developments and the shifting position of women through history made them indulge in the rush of cities and pushed them to play roles that were adjusted for men in the first place. Many stories and literary works came to revolve around female characters like “Miss Brill,” Mrs. Dalloway (1925), and others. This ends up the assumption of the flâneur as exclusive for the masculine gender. For instance, in a novel like Mrs. Dalloway [9] Clarissa is seen wandering in the streets of Paris and other characters trace and observe her, which makes the female not only a participant in the flâneur but also a target to be observed.

As a result, this assertion of the major role of women in different literary works such as novels and short stories explicates Woolf's assumption of the androgynous mind. The flâneur has always been attached to masculine characters in literary works and to masculine individuals in reality too. The female characters who embody the flâneur are a strong evidence of the indifference between the two minds. This journey of discovery and wondering requires the physical strength and power that are distinctive features of a man. Still, such a journey never declares the mental superiority of a man over a woman. A woman is able to observe and connect phenomena since she is highly enrolled in the massive society. Woolf’s concept of the “androgynous mind” should prepare us for Miss Brill as the female artist figure in the flâneur sense.

Elizabeth Wright [10] in her paper "Re-evaluating Woolf's Androgynous Mind" interprets Woolf's term "androgynous mind" and gives a broad view of Woolf's influence on critics. She claims that Woolf offers a novel comprehension: “Androgyny, for Virginia Woolf, was a theory that aimed to offer men and women the chance to write without consciousness of their sex – the result of which would ideally result in uninhibited creativity” (1). On the other hand, Baudelaire presents the artist as the flâneur, as an idler or a stroller in a masculine body. Mica Nava [11], countering the logic of Baudelaire, argues that modern life allowed for a new brand of the flâneur. For example, the department stores provided a spectacular environment in which to stroll aimlessly, to be a
flâneuse; it is a context which legitimized the desire of women to look as well as be looked at—it enabled them to be both subject and object of the gaze, to appropriate, at one go, the pleasure/power of both the voyeur and the narcissist (72).

Nava argues that the experience of a flâneur is not exclusive for the male gender but that it is expected and comprehensible for females due the new interactions and enrollments women undergo in the public world. A woman in public is not a matter of shopper; however, women in any place like to observe things and like to be observed in return. Woolf asserts that the existence of women in streets after WWI is no longer an indication of prostitution and sexual harassment of the sort Baudelaire [12] describes as "women who have exaggerated the fashion" and "totally destroying its aims" (Baudelaire 35). As an artist, a woman may well be in the public realm to observe and record impressions.

Woolf's work received two opposite points of view between those who oppose her term “androgyne” seeing it as a feminist problematic and those who consider it as a fresh reading of texts in general. However, we find this notion of “androgyne” an apt one for our reading of Miss Brill as an artist figure in the flâneur sense often ascribed to men. The next section better utilizes the flâneur as an artist figure.

**4. THE "FLÂNEUR" AND MISS BRILL**

Charles Baudelaire is a French poet, critic and essayist whose essential works stress the concept of the "flâneur" which relates to depiction of the streets of Paris. The flâneur has become a very important marker of writers, scholars and artists. The verb flânerie signifies the act of strolling with diverse associations. In Baudelaire’s "The Painter of Modern Life" (1859) [12], the flâneur is depicted as a man who has the crowd as "his element” (9) and who spends his time observing and wandering in the streets of Paris as an artist. He is a man who wants to be one with the crowds “amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite” (9). For Baudelaire, Monsieur C. G. is a “passionate lover of crowds and incognitos” (5) and as an artist he is a “man of the world” (6; emphasis original) who “wants to know, understand and appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe” (7). The flâneur for Baudelaire wants “to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world” (9). In other words, he is “an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’…” (9). For Baudelaire, Monsieur G.— i.e. the painter and illustrator Constantin Guys—“marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom” (11). He takes delight in the landscape and life around him like animals, people, and things. In brief, he “delights in a universal life” (11). Likewise, Miss Brill [7] spends her Sunday evenings in the garden just to hear, see, watch, criticize and observe the public in Paris, chiefly the garden goers. When she breathed "something gentle seemed to move in her bosom" (Mansfield 1). The artist's emotion, sensitivity, and oversight lead her to distinguish each aspect in the garden to get satisfied and relaxed. Yet, the air is noticed and observed regardless of its invisibility. Therefore, it emerges that the flâneur is not an eye-seeing procedure only, but also a sensitive process before all. Miss Brill is a spectator from her bench, and all the people are actors and actresses; this is why she seems to be a commentator later on. She is sensitive to all details around her, including people’s reactions and the music played by the band.

In his essay, Baudelaire [12] asserts that Monsieur G., obsessed by the world of images that filled his mind, plucked up the courage to cast ink and colors on to a white sheet of paper; he is the artist who is overwhelmed by his sight which is able to detect the details (Baudelaire 6). In a similar vein, once Miss Brill arrives to the park she immediately begins to observe life around her: "There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday" and justifies "the season had begun" (Mansfield 1). Thus, to understand the nature of the "man of the crowd", which is Miss Brill in the story in a gender-neutral way, one must understand that curiosity may be the starting point of genius (Baudelaire 7). As Baudelaire explains, "Curiosity had become a fatal, irresistable passion" (7). Thus, Miss Brill never minds the silent old people on the bench as long as "there was always the crowd to watch" (Mansfield 2).

Against Simmel's point of view of the city dwellers, the artist in the metropolis feels himself as a stranger who observes life paradoxically. The artist is not determined whether to stay detached or get engaged in the life of the metropolis. Miss Brill considers herself to be a stranger in the garden, for instance, whilst she listens to the band and the music played. She ironically articulates that the band "didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present" (Mansfield 2). Does she speak of the latest comers or herself? Being an artist, Miss Brill is the stranger. A "flâneur" is described as tentative individual in the city. Priscilla P. Ferguson [13] writes that this is "a paradoxical situation in which the flâneur is enmeshed—[f] lânerie' requires the city and its crowds, yet the flâneur remains aloof from both" (27). Miss Brill is absolutely eager for the city dwellers, but
she resists admitting it because it contradicts her being as an artist.

According to Baudelaire [12], the artist in the "flâneur" adores "the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities" (11). The dandy look is a distinctive feature of the "man of the crowd" (Baudelaire 7). Furthermore, the "artistic device of the physiologies," (Baudelaire 8) recaptures the scenes and pictures as a play on stage. In “Miss Brill” [7], the concern with appearances is conspicuous from the beginning when the aged-lady Miss Brill "had decided on her fur again" (Mansfield 1). The fur marks the trendy artist, who appears bizarre to the citizens though. The artist in the "flâneur" has a distinctive quality called the "dandy looking" (Baudelaire 26) during the tour of inspection. Subsequently, Miss Brill activates that dandy look to publicize the start of her own "flâneur" lifestyle. The "fox fur" (Mansfield 1) to Miss Brill is associated with the classy, rich, and aristocratic social group of the community; however, to the city dwellers this fur is neither prestigious nor classy. The fur is considered by the girl and the boy to be a silly thing no one might wear in any place in the world—even in the countryside. The girl comments that Miss Brill’s fur is "so funny," while the young couple are seen by Miss Brill as "beautifully dressed" before she hears their insulting conversation (Mansfield 3).

The falsity of appearances is neither convenient to the artist nor to the people in the metropolis. Baudelaire suggests that individuals are concerned with their appearances by the affirmation that they deliver judgments on one’s inner knowledge, spirituals, and morals and on one’s "aristocratic superiority of mind" (Baudelaire 27). This is why Miss Brill distinguishes the goers in the garden with regard to their clothes, colors and make up. For example, she observes that some of those around her are "dressed up in velvet and lace" and "girls in red" and "soldiers in blue" (Mansfield 2). For an artist, the total picture is drawn with the excessive details of exterior looks. Nonetheless, the claim modified by Baudelaire is pathetic and challenged in Miss Brill. The appearances are misleading and never express the inner being, virtues, and morals of individuals. Miss Brill first describes the girl and the boy taking the place of the old people on the bench as a "hero" and a "heroine" (Mansfield 3) who are extremely in love and whose style transmits the positive emotions to Miss Brill on her bench. Miss Brill soon realizes her misguided impressions formed on the basis of appearances.

Immediately after Miss Brill examines the girl and the boy, they turn out to be neither lovers nor friends. They seem to be in a sexual relationship, and the conversation she hears provides the evidence of her failure to label people properly. Baudelaire [12] interprets the painter he refers to as Monsieur G. as a virtuous person whose art is a principle for others, so his character and morals are noticeable in his paintings. Consequently, Miss Brill—by the fury look she insists on—intends to reconcile the morals of the old times she used to live in. Baudelaire argues:

_What to the reader may have seemed a digression is not one in fact. The moral reflections and musings that arise from the drawings of an artist are in many cases the best interpretation that the critic can make of them; the notions they suggest are part of an underlying idea, and, by revealing them in turn, we may uncover the root idea itself. Need I say that when M.G. commits one of his dandies to paper, he always gives him his historical character, we might almost say his legendary character. (29)_

Therefore, the love Miss Brill imagines exists only in the sexual sense; it doesn't represent the spiritual part anymore. According to Baudelaire, the "man of the crowd" is very sensitive and always admits that "I am passionately in love with passion" (Baudelaire 9). The conversation between the girl and the boy emphasizes this idea. In response to the boy’s sexual advances [7], the girl answers "No, not now," which means that she rejects the relation temporarily, but the boy is rude enough to insist: "But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" (Mansfield 3). The boy believes that the girl refuses him because of Miss Brill only, and that leads us to another assumption as the lovers do not care about the other park goers because of this indifference mechanism/attitude; however, they seem to consider Miss Brill to be dissimilar because of her character. Had she not been there, they would have had their intimate relation without restraint.

Baudelaire [12] argues that M.G his man "will be the last to linger wherever there can be a glow of light" (11) as he likes the complete picture and the full understanding to the picture he is about to finish. The details are very important that they might change one’s interpretation and imagination. Miss Brill spends the entire day in the garden, not missing any incident. She goes on Sunday and follows her desire to explore more about the mysterious people around her who have come from different places in Paris. Miss Brill [7], resembling M.G., likes to observe everything: "Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all" (Mansfield 2). This is because she is convinced that "It was like a play. It was exactly like a play"
I have said “full-grown” person because the child or the adolescent who may look like a small philistine is only a small parrot mimicking the ways of confirmed vulgarians, and it is easier to be a parrot than to be a white heron. “Vulgarian” is more or less synonymous with “philistine”: the stress in a vulgarian is not so much on the conventionalism of a philistine, as on the vulgarity of some of his conventional notions. I may also use the terms “genteeel” and “bourgeois”.

According to Nabokov, the philistine man or woman is interested in the objectivity of the world around him/her, neglecting the essentials of life such as morals. In this case, the philistine becomes indifferent and acts like a parrot who imitates the majority in order to survive since being against the norm would be very difficult to undergo, yet the child and adolescent are not included as they are imitators by nature. Therefore, the “full grown” undergoes this indifference intentionally to survive. This is why the city dwellers employ the “blasé attitude” which is connected to the philistine, and it becomes their natural mechanism. The city dwellers then become less sensitive; even if they read a work of art they would hardly value its spirit and meanings or perceive it as a written, informative manuscript stimulating their very existence and routine. Eventually, they become victims of the world of occupation and habituation.

The discussion of the philistine is related to this article in the sense that the city dwellers—by employing the “blasé attitude”—can be labelled as philistines. The philistines are seen as negative, destructive, and unworthy citizens in the metropolis. However, the employment of the “blasé attitude” is necessary to overcome the rush and irregular events of life and preserve the sanity of the dwellers. Life has become more complicated and intricate in the age of manufacturing and technology, and the employment of the “blasé attitude” would be beneficial in such a life.

The city dwellers are not expected to read a book in the middle of the day on Sundays and take this to be the source of life and happiness. Yet, the newspapers are read to cope with the stress in the world to lead to a better living there. Simmel [5] says that the dwellers’ minds become calculative because of the correspondence to money economy which is necessary for their bloody existence (13). In this regard, Miss Brill seems very conscious about the mechanism the city dwellers employ as she always criticizes them. On the other hand and as an artist, she avoids this employment with the recognition that it

(Mansfield 2) and the loveliest scene out there consisted of her interaction with the other park visitors. She thinks of the spectacle in front of her in terms of an unfolding drama she participates in: "Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted?" (Mansfield 2).

Her mind becomes clear, and she accepts that she, like people and even animals, are not only audiences but actors and actresses since in her mind the scene is clearer now: "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" (Mansfield 3). Being in a play, Miss Brill admires the existence of others in the same way the "man of the crowd" does in Baudelaire's description of him. Describing his man of the crowd, Baudelaire argues, "The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes" (9). The only one whose existence necessarily triggers the existence of the audience, or the crowd, is the artist.

The correspondence between Baudelaire's "man of the crowd" and Mansfield's "Miss Brill" is reasonable due to the fact that they are both artists. However, the dissimilarities consist only in that every artist interprets a different picture of art between his/her hand. Still, what unites them is their sensitivity, i.e. over-spirituality and intellectualism. This makes them different from the insensitive, uneducated, and unintellectual city dwellers. We can interpret this attitude of the park goers and city dwellers in general and identify it as the “philistine attitude.” The philistinism of the park goers is the exact opposite of the artistic being of Miss Brill.

According to Merriam-Webster Online [14], the philistine is "a person who is guided by materialism and is usually disdainful of intellectual or artistic values." For the most part, the word “philistine” was discussed by many critics and philosophers, in particular F. Nietzsche, V. Nabokov, V. Goethe and M. Arnold. Their definitions are mainly central and comparable in the sense that the philistine refers to a person who lacks the sensitivity or who is uneducated, materialistic. The philistine devalues culture and traditions, regarding them with indifference. The interpretation directs the reader to the city dwellers' distinctive characteristics. Nabokov [15] in his essay "Philistines and Philistinism" (from Lectures on Russian Literature 1981) defines the philistine in the following terms:

A full-grown person whose interests are of a material and commonplace nature, and whose mentality is formed of the stock ideas and conventional ideals of his or her group and time.
might compress her soul. She tries to get engaged in the conversations in that garden in her way through watching and eavesdropping, even with her mind affirming her predictable failure of understanding the dwellers and accepting defeat. The story ends on this anti-climactic note [7]:

But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room her room like a cupboard——and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklace quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying. (Mansfield 4)

The main problem with Miss Brill is that regardless of her awareness of the characteristics of the metropolitan dwellers, she deceives herself to the end fulfilling the role of the self-delusional artist. As an artist who refuses to be like others, she walks home miserably, a dazed individual with new recognitions. These recognitions are seen as destructive force upon her. First, she does not stop to get the "almond cake" she used to get every Sunday. Then, she steps up her room with a crushed heart. Her room now is "the little dark room" (4). Finally, the controversial attitude at the end is when she returns the fur back to the box and she thinks that "she heard something crying" (4), but it is not revealed whether it is her cry or that of the fur she imprisons. She understands the contradictions she encounters, and she has "shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons" (3) which reveals her awareness to every detail of her brittle life.

5. CONCLUSION

We tried to read Katharine Mansfield's story "Miss Brill" using textual analysis and two works: Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life"; specifically, two key terms we used were the "blasé attitude" and the "flâneur". The thesis is to argue that Miss Brill as an artist in the "flâneur" sense resists the employment of the "blasé attitude" for being an artist in the "flâneur" sense; nevertheless, her attitude of depression in her room at the end is controversial due to her awareness of the characteristics of metropolitan life yet inability to conform to the blunt lifestyle of the metropolis.

Mariam Mandel [16] convincingly argues that Miss Brill “consistently reduces the world in which she lives” as she “catalogues what she sees” and “dehumanizes it” so that she can cope with this world (475). While such an argument may well make her to blame for her isolation and “self-destruction” (Mandel 476), Miss Brill as an artist figure in the muddled setting of the city seeks to shape reality and impose a sense of order on it. While she does seek to control her surroundings in a reductive way according to Mandel (477), her excuse might be the disorienting life around her. Miss Brill tries to make sense of this life in her own way. She refuses to be negligent and cold like those around her. If she gives up the blasé attitude, it is because she has an artistic temperament. The urban, and French, setting of the story should not be dismissed in any careful reading of the story. However, we should not ignore the fact that Miss Brill is an outsider in this foreign culture, being a teacher of English. Again, she corresponds to the prototype of the artist figure as the outsider of the sort we find in the modernist works of James Joyce. Therefore, we might as well exonerate Miss Brill for her reserved nature instead of simply blaming her for her plight.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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