


Twentieth Century Fiction
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Lecture – 05
The Fly – Part 2

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Old Woodfield paused, but the boss made no reply. Only a quiver in his eyelids showed that he heard.

'The girls were delighted with the way the place is kept,' piped the old voice. 'Beautifully looked after. Couldn't be better if they were at home. You've not been across, have yer?'

'No, no!' For various reasons the boss had not been across.

'There's miles of it,' quavered old Woodfield, 'and it's all as neat as a garden. Flowers growing on all the graves. Nice broad paths.' It was plain from his voice how much he liked a nice broad path.

The pause came again. Then the old man brightened wonderfully.


'You know what the hotel made the girls pay for a pot of jam?' he piped. 'Ten francs! Robbery, I call it. It was a little pot, so Gertrude says, no bigger than a half-crown. And she hadn't taken more than a spoonful when they charged her ten francs. Gertrude brought the pot away with her to teach 'em a lesson. Quite right, too; it's trading on our feelings. They think because we're over there having a look round we're ready to pay anything. That's what it is.' And he turned towards the door.

'Quite right, quite right!' cried the boss, though what was quite right he hadn't the least idea. He came round by his desk, followed the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out. Woodfield was gone.

For a long moment the boss stayed, staring at nothing, while the grey-haired office messenger, watching him, dodged in and out of his cubby-hole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run. Then: 'I'll see nobody for half an hour, Macey,' said the boss. 'Understand! Nobody at all.'

'Very good, sir.'

<https://www.nptel.ac.in/resources/online-short-stories/the-fly>



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction, where we were looking at Katherine Mansfield's short story, 'The Fly'. So, we already had some lectures on this. So, we will just continue from where we left off last time. So, we see how this story is obviously, very modernist in terms of looking at memory, in terms of looking at trauma and streams of consciousness, but also equally this is a story about masculinity and masculinity crisis post First World War, something which we have seen already in Mrs. Dalloway and also to a lesser extent in Eliot's early poetry. Now, well the three obvious in the story is how there is an allegorical quality about the characterization.

So, the boss and the boss's son are very allegorically representative of certain kinds of masculinity; the boss being that of robust domineering, hegemonic masculinity, socially, prestigious you know and lots of money, healthy robust, etcetera. Whereas, the son is someone who is supposed to step into that same shoe and we see how the First World War, which can also be seen as a masculinist event or masculinist expansionist event of

greed and territorialization. Ironically, the First World War actually interrupts this masculinity narrative in his sense of killing the son.

So, the boss's son has been killed in the war and we see how that interrupts the entire narrative in the story and contrasted with the boss we have someone like Mister Woodifield who was obviously, very senile, very fragile and who represents a very enormous disembodied kind of masculinity, enervated, exhausted, etcetera. and the exhaustion and enervation are quite obvious in Woodifield's characterization and we see how he seemed to have moved on from the point of trauma. I mean he too had lost a son in the war. Son is called Reggie, and we see how his wife Gertrude and his daughters had been to Belgium, to take a look at his son's grave, and he was not there in Belgium.

So, you know he represents in a whole story of visiting the son's grave, in a second hand information way, to the boss and we saw how the entire metaphor the entire rhetoric the entire vocabulary in terms of how Woodifield describes his son's grave is very touristy kind of vocabulary; very touristy kind of rhetoric. It is not really the rhetoric of a grieving father or a mourning father and you know instead it is the rhetoric of a visitor, a tourist. He goes and looks at the grave is very touristy and the gaze is important over here, because he goes and he describes he has not been that, but he describes how the paths are nice and broad. How the graveyard was beautiful looked after.

Then he talks about the price of jam in the hotels, etcetera, and how the entire hotel industry is blossoming around this trauma tourism as it were, but what obviously, gets or does not get highlighted or rather what is an inconspicuous, what is a conspicuous absence in Woodifield's description is any real sentiment for a son's loss and conspicuous absence is very important thing in Mansfield's fiction, because it is a very as you can see from the story it is a very economic kind of expression, has an economy of expression, it is very minimalist, very sparse in terms of how it is represented and you know there is a lot of things packed into it say conspicuous absence becomes a very important point.

So, for instance there is no mention at all about the boss's wife or the son's mother, it would happen to be the boss's wife. So, the mother is conspicuously absent in the story. There is no mother figure at all. It is entirely about the boss and his heir, the son and how he is heirless now, because son has been killed in the war. So, this very masculinist kind

of universe is something which is obviously, parodied and critiqued by Mansfield. This is very scathing feminist critique on the First World War and only women we get to know over here are Woodifield's wife and daughter.

So, when we see how post First World War, they seem to have more agency over Woodifield, I mean they seem to decide when he is released to a city, they seem to decide to dress him up, to brush him and release him to the city just so he can go and visit his old friends and also they are the ones who travel to Belgium to take a look at her son's grave and not Woodifield. Woodifield is just repeating what he heard from the woman back to the post.

We see how at the beginning of the story how the boss had draped almost violently decided or tried or orchestrate or engineer this entire architecture of newness around them right.

Everything is new; the carpet is new; the heating is new; the bookcases are new, etcetera, but amidst all this newness there is a spectral photograph of the boy something which is quite old and almost six years old and obviously, we know now that the photograph of the boy is exactly what holds the key to the boss's trauma.

Now, before I move on to the next section where Woodifield has left the room and the boss was you know had been patronizing in the beginning, poured in whiskey, had sort of a very sexist comment on woman's lack of understanding. So, all that hegemonic masculinity bits were all covered and marked embodied.

Now, the moment the grave of the boss's son was mentioned, the moment the grave of Woodifield's son was mentioned that is the moment when the boss's masculinity is so shaken up a little bit, because we see now that he does not really have a male heir to carry on his kingdom per say right. So, this heirlessness is something which is becoming obviously, part of the loss the sense of existential loss, the boss suffers now.

Now, what this story does and I have an article which I am happy to upload in the course of this particular NPTEL course on Twentieth Century Fiction. I have a published article on this particular story that I am happy to share in the platform that we have, but in that article and also elsewhere and also here, I would like to make the argument that there is a

very perverse equation over here between masculinity and trauma or traumatophilia or hysteria to some extent.

Now, hysteria as some of you would know had traditionally been medicalized as a female malady, something which happens only to women, because it is part of the woman's body and the man, the male body can never be hysteric. Now obviously, that all changed with the First World War, because post First World War we had something called a shell shock which is something which anticipated what we now called PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, where we have this very muscular strong, manly men coming back from the trenches shivering, like children shivering, like quote unquote women.

So, suddenly it was very spectacularly evident that men could also be nervous, men could also be hysteric. Obviously, hysteria had been always historically medicalized as a female disease the female malady. So, new name had to be given to this male condition and a new name for a time was shell shock and then later on of course, it became more classified medically and military medicine we know now as, PTSD. Now, interestingly in this particular story what we get to see in a moment we will see, how the boss basically congratulates himself on his masculinity by retaining in his mind, the original moment of trauma the original experience of trauma. In other words, he always wants to feel exactly the same way as he felt six years ago, when the first news of his son's death came to him right.

So, that was a big moment for him and his loss in his mind is bigger than anyone else's loss right and that sense of superiority that sense of entitlement to one's trauma is very perverse thing, but it is exactly what happens over here. So, he has a sense of entitlement to this trauma and at one point he will say he will think and it will be told to us that other men might live the loss on; other men might move on; other men might just make peace for that, but he the boss could never do it, because his son is dead and that is a very-very special kind of tragedy. So, we can see how the equation between trauma and masculinity gets established in the story in a very-very complex psychological manner okay.

So, we see at this point where the Woodfield is about to leave, leave the boss's office and as the boss is seeing him out, he came around his desk and this should be on the

screen. He came around by his desk, following the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out. Woodifield was gone. For a long moment the boss stayed, staring at nothing.

So, again we can say this is probably staring at nothingness, which is staring back at him right. Staring at nothing, while the grey-haired office messenger, watching him, dodged in and out of his cubby-hole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run. So, again look at the you know animal metaphors used over here, the infantilized metaphors, animal metaphors all be used very-very interestingly right. So, and then he says: I will see nobody for half an hour, Macey,' said the boss. Nobody at all.

So, we see how even the office messenger has a name Macey, but the boss and the son do not have a name at all. So, again this is part of the allegorical quality about this characterization over here. 'Very good, sir.'

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25/09/2019

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The door shut, the firm heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet, the fat body plumped down in the spring chair, and leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep....

It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave. It was exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him. For it was strange. Although over six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever. "My son!" groaned the boss. But no tears came yet. In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him. Time, he had declared then, he had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, might live their loss down, but not he. How was it possible! His boy was an only son. Ever since his birth the boss had worked at building up this business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning. How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years without the promise for ever before him of the boy's stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off?

And that promise had been so near being fulfilled. The boy had been in the office learning the ropes for a year before the war. Every morning they had started off together; they had come back by the same train. And what congratulations he had received as the boy's father! No wonder; he had taken to it marvellously. As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack of them down to old Macey couldn't make enough of the boy. And he wasn't in the least spoilt. No, he was just his bright natural self, with the right word for everybody, with that boyish look and his habit of saying, 'Simply splendid!'

But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. The day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you ...' And he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins.

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So, Macey is obviously, her job is to say yes to whatever the boss says. The door shut, the firm heavy footsteps, the firm heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet, the fat body plumped down in the spring chair, and leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep. So, the last bit is interesting over here because we can see how the boss is making this entire ritual about weeping. He is going back to his office, his fat body is plumped down a spring chair and he is

covering his face with his hands and we are told that he wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep.

So, the entire idea of weeping, the entire hysteria of mourning becomes a masculinist activity over here which is a subversion in some sense of the stereotypical understanding of mourning and hysteria, but the interesting thing is the boss here, wants the appropriate, the sentiment of mourning and add that to his masculinity and he wants to appropriate a sentiment of hysteria and add that to his masculinity right.

So, the whole idea of equating masculinity and trauma becomes interesting and we see over here, how we are told that he wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep. So, weeping obviously, becomes a ritual, a part of the ritual or fall out of the ritual. So, he had intended he had arranged to weep and he better start weeping now. So, that becomes part of the masculinist, almost muscular control or motor control over his own senses.

So, he intends to have he wants to have entire ownership or absolute ownership of his motor mechanisms including weeping. It had been a terrible shock. We get this back story now a little bit. It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield's sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave. It was exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him. Again, this becomes almost like a Medusa stare where the woman looks at the man and turns them into stones. He is literally a stone, he is literally a tombstone now and in some of his dreams or nightmares or visions the boss thinks his bravest son is opening up and his son is inside the grave lying unblemished forever.

So, there is no degeneration whatever, but Woodifield's daughters and wife are staring at him. It is really freezing Medusa kind of a stare that a woman gives to the man over here and that in a sense is an experience of emasculation for the boss as well as for the son who is dead now right. So, the son is immobile, almost stuck in the coffin, he does not know where to go, does not know what to do and the woman are staring at him as if you know they are turning him into a stone further right. So, for it was strange. Almost six years have passed away, the boss never thought of the boy, except as lying unchanged.

So, in the boss's mind, the boy had always remained unchanged. You know six years ago whatever he looked like, whatever he seemed like that is exactly the way he has stayed in boss's imagination okay. Unblemished in his uniform, asleep forever. "My son!"

groaned the boss. But no tears came yet. In the past, in the in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such a grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him.

So, this is a point in the story where we begin to get a sense of the boss's hubris. You know what a hubris is. Hubris is false pride. It is something which we had borrowed from the Greek tragedies, something which is there in almost all tragic heroes, the otherwise impeccable, the otherwise, perfect otherwise very-very good and caring except the fact that they have hubris to think too highly of themselves, that the vanity overshoots, eclipses the good work that they do.

So, you know and the boss over here obviously, will exhibit hubris, you know he would tell himself that his son was the only son. So, everyone else might be moving on, but he does not want to move on he cannot move on, because you know his son is the only son. So, whenever we see how he also taught himself in his mind that he can control his emotions, he can control his crying at will right.

So, I can cry anytime I want to again I can emote anytime I want to as far as my son's death is concerned and remembering that is concerned, and this is a hubristic statement that he had made earlier to people. Time, he had declared then, he had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men might perhaps might recover, might live the loss down, but not he.

So, again this is a classic hubris statement where he says I defy time, I challenge time to dry up my weep and this exactly is what happened in the story just becomes almost a revenge of time in some sense, but the boss at this point at least wants to enact you know some kind of revenge on time where he tells time openly that you know other men might have looked down, but no matter how much time goes away I am going to be stuck to this mourning figure forever right.

So, I will be the perfect mourner as the time could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, might live the loss down, but not he. So, again this hubristic understanding of himself becomes interesting over here, other men might live the loss, so other men may move on, but not he, not me. I lost my only son except as if he was the only father with an only son in the entire Europe, in the entire world fighting the First World War okay.

Other men might live the loss down might recover might live the loss down, but not he. How was it possible? His boy was an only son. So, it is almost as if no one else had an only son who got killed in the war, but again look at the very myopic parochial and also quite entitled view of the boss, only son. Ever since his birth the boss had worked as building up his business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning.

How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all these years without the promise forever before him of the boy stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off? So, again look at the conspicuous absence of the woman figure over here. The conspicuous absence of boss's wife or the son's mother over here.

So, everything is projected through the boss, everything is focalized to the boss, obviously, that is critiqued by Mansfield in a very-very subtle and scathing manner, but what he is saying, what the boss is thinking over here is you know the entire life of the boss had been to prepare something which the person like him same gene, same blood, same body, will step in and carry on and hopefully at some point his son will also emerge and it will give him this kingdom.

So, it becomes constant and endless chain process and endlessness is exactly what is interrupted by the death of his son and that is something which we will come back to later okay. So, he was a very promising son, he was beginning to flower as an employee, as a boss, as someone who is devastating and ruthless and cunning in business which is exactly what the boss is, but then all that has come to an end, because of one incident and again look at the way how this incident has been narrated to us. And that promise had been so near been fulfilled. The boy had come in office learning the ropes for a year before the war.

So, the boy who had come to the office, learning about the trade you know getting accustomed to the trade for almost one year before joining office. Every morning they had started off together; that had come back by the same train.

So, the boss and the son they would go out together, you know the boss would go to his cabin and the son would go to the site perhaps and then he would do some very-very menial jobs which is going to please the boss quite well right.

So, we are told that you know every time they used to go out together, come back together and this entire narrative of intimacy between the boss and the son is interesting, because again the other parent is absent, the other the spouse is absent and the mother figure, the wife figure is entirely absent.

We are not even told if she is alive or dead, it is that sense of absence which is there, which is articulated over here. And what congratulations he had received as a boy's father! No wonder; he had taken to it marvelously. As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack of them down to old Macey could not make enough of the boy. And he was not in the least spoilt. No, he was just say his bright natural self, with the right words for everybody, with that boyish look and the habit of saying, 'Simply splendid!'

Now, this bit is interesting, if you want to take a look at and those of you interested in research in masculinity, this is definitely a very key point. If you take a look at the rhetoric used in this particular point, simply splendid and not least be spoiled very industrious you know and very-very enterprising that is exactly the brand of masculinity created by the boy scout movements in Europe and America and other parts of England especially, in England and this brand of boy scout masculinity is exactly what informed the empire and the entire imperial expansion.

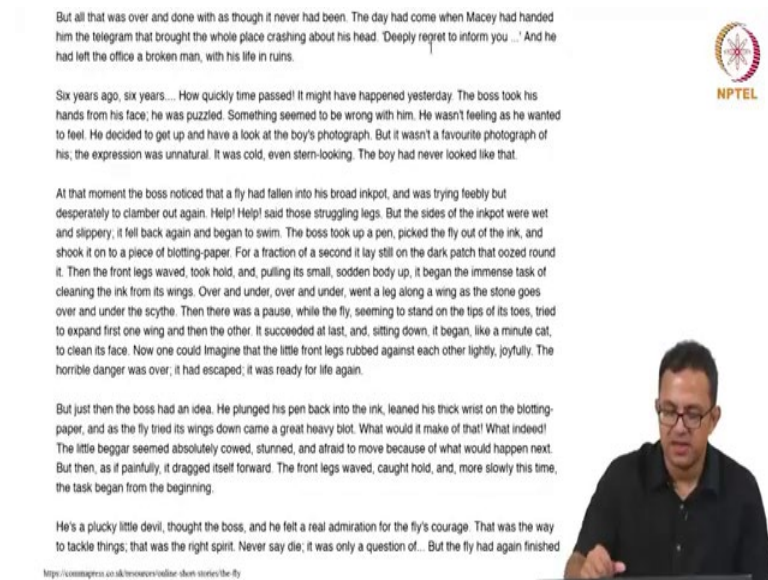
Now, the boy over here is obviously, part of the imperial expansionist program, because the boy is someone we do not quite know what the boss's business is, but obviously, he seems to be quite ruthless in terms of his business enterprise. So, it could be something which is morally dubious, we do not quite know, but the whole point is the son was prepared was being groomed, was been trained to take over the kingdom from where the boss had left right and he seems to be this very boyish, enterprising, industrious kind of person who everyone likes.

So, he had this boyish look and he had this habit of saying simply splendid. So, everything was simply splendid to him, made it alliterate and again that becomes very-very boyish, boy scout-ish kind of a movement, boy scout-ish kind of rhetoric, used by the boy over here.

So, we see how the entire construct of masculinity is applied over here. The boy is someone who is supposed to take over from the boss and how this entire takeover is supposed to take place in a very seamless way and the seamlessness is interrupted

exactly by the First World War and this is what we are told. But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. So, in one flash for instance everything came to an end how.

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But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. The day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you...' And he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins.

Six years ago, six years.... How quickly time passed! It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands from his face; he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. But it wasn't a favourite photograph of his; the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern-looking. The boy had never looked like that.

At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into his broad inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again. Help! Help! said those struggling legs. But the sides of the inkpot were wet and slippery; it fell back again and began to swim. The boss took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it on to a piece of blotting-paper. For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then the front legs waved, took hold, and, pulling its small, sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. Over and under, over and under, went a leg along a wing as the stone goes over and under the scythe. Then there was a pause, while the fly, seeming to stand on the tips of its toes, tried to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and, sitting down, it began, like a minute cat, to clean its face. Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over; it had escaped; it was ready for life again.

But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting-paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot. What would it make of that! What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as it painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning.

He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of... But the fly had again finished

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

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So, the day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you.' And he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins. So, this is a very standard telegram sent out to all the you know parents who lost their sons in the war.

So, if you see movies of First World War, we find that as a long template which is being tapped over the typewriter; we regret to inform you and as a blank space to which in which the name is filled in and other biographical details are filled and whether the template is very standardized and that actually makes it very-very cold—the fact that the institution of military is letting you know that you have lost a dear one in the war and then the entire impersonal touch makes it even more menacing.

So, the rhetoric over here is quite impersonal in quality and that had obviously, fueled the boss's trauma. So, deeply regret to inform you and he had left the office a broken man, his life in ruins. So, again if you take this point and go back to the beginning of the story find how the boss is trying to reconstruct himself.

So, he had been broken by the First World War, by the death of the son and now he is making an effort to reconstruct himself by getting more material markers—an electric heating, you know and different kinds of things right. Six years ago, six years. How quickly time passed! It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands on his face; he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He was not feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. It was not a favorite photograph of his; the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern-looking. The boy had never looked like that.

So, again this is a moment of epiphany for the boss's son, you know and the boss is obviously, looking at the boss's son through a very focalized frame over here and a focalized frame is a photograph. Interestingly this is a photograph which is supposed to project a certain sentiment to the boss; he wants to cry, he wants to weep out his sorrow, he wants to weep out his mourning and he is looking at the photograph to get a trigger from which he is going to weep, but then he realizes this is not a good photograph of the son.

So, he needs a different photograph. So, it almost becomes something erotic in quality. I am looking at a photograph to have an erotic experience, this release that the boss talks about over here is obviously, there is a quasi-erotic quality by this release, because that also reestablishes his masculinity, because he knows he thinks he is in complete control of everything around him and the sense of control gives him a sense of entitlement.

So, he needs to know everything he needs to have this entire knowledge of everything. So, that brand of masculinity which is all controlling all knowing all traveling that has just come to an end over here after the First World War and hence, we have Woodfield locked up in his house.

So, the all old travelling bit is completely gone, the daughter, the wife they all take over in terms of running the household and they only granted permission to come to the city every day except you know every Tuesday, every week right.

So, that becomes his only relief that he can look forward to right. So, the question of agency becomes important in this sense, because agency stereotypically has always been a manly enterprise, but post First World War we find how agency becomes more sort of inverted in quality. So, wife and the daughters who travel to Belgium, is they who report

back about the jam, is they who haggle with the jam prices you know in the hotel rooms and like I said is they who gave a report to the trauma in terms of how the traumatic, the sites are kept now in terms of the buried soldiers right.

So, that degree of mobility and agency is now conferred or now visible with a woman rather than the men. The men, obviously, senile and they are waiting to die. They are two grieving fathers and they obviously, quite they have nothing do forward to. The only thing they had to look forward to is the sons, that the creation of the sons in terms of being heirs to the kingdom, but that possibility is now permanently gone, it is precluded okay.

So, he is trying to take a look at the boy's photograph and relieve himself by crying right. He is got his clothes off, he is looking at the photo and tries to relive himself through a very bodily functional way, but we are told that the you know the boss is unable to carry out, it is almost a performance anxiety about weeping.

So, again if we take a look at weeping, mourning, hysteric weeping, hysteric mourning, these are stereotypically speaking very-very feminine activities quote, unquote feminine whatever that means, but the boss is trying to appropriate those activities in terms of reestablishing his masculinity and therein lies a complication in this story right.

So, he is trying to look at the famous photograph of the boy that which that would help him to weep that would help them to gush out his pent-up emotions, but he cannot find anything at all okay. And then you know obviously, we are told that the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern looking right.

So, it was not really warm and the way the boss wanted it. At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into the broad ink pot. So, this is not a pointless story where a fly episode takes place, it is obviously, quite symbolic in quality as well right.

So, you see that fly fall into a black ink pot, and was trying feebly, but desperately to clamber out again. Help! Help! Said those struggling legs. So, again look at the way in which the entire insect is now magnified and right so, we can see the legs, we can see the front leg, we can see the back leg, we can see two wings. Everything can be seen in a very magnified way right.

So, that becomes an interesting way of representation. At that moment the boss noticed a fly. A fly had fallen into this his broad inkpot, it was trying feebly, but desperately to clamber out again. Help! Help! said those struggling legs. But the sides of the inkpot were wet and slippery; it fell back again and began to swim. So, it was becoming a bit of a Sisyphean enterprise right.

So, it is like the birth of Sisyphus, where you know you push a stone on top of a wall and then if the stone rolls on again you have to go to do it again and you are doomed to do it forever right. So, there is a Sisyphean quality about the fly over here, it has got a blot of ink falling over him, it is obviously, very injured, but he wants to get another chance he wants to leave this place as soon as possible. So, the fly obviously, is exhibiting the kind of masculinity, that a boss wanted his son to exhibit and the boss wanted himself to exhibit right.

So, you know so, it fell back again and began to swim. the boss took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it a little piece of blotting paper. So, he takes out the fly and puts in a blotting paper. For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then the front legs waved, took over, and pulling, and you know its small sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from his wings.

So, what happens is the boss rescues the fly here now but he also drops a blot of ink on her. So, now, obviously, she is very-very concerned, you know the fly becomes concerned and the fly tries to restart the entire process.

So, again this whole idea of restarting and returning to the point of action gives it a Sisyphean quality, it is like the fly's doomed forever to keep restarting okay.

So, for a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then her front legs waved, took hold, and, pulling the small sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wing.

So, again you know it is trying to clear the wings on his ink, because it cannot fly with such heavy ink on it okay. Over and under, over and under, when a leg along a wing as the stone goes under the scythe, over and under the scythe. So, stones and scythe metaphor is interesting, because scythe has traditionally been seen as a vehicle of death right. So, if you find old medieval tragedies you find describe, they always come in with

this sense of death and this whole idea of having this the scythe metaphor. The scythe metaphor is something which carries a sense of mortality to it in a very symbolic way right.

So, we know already if we read the metaphor close enough. We know already the fly is doomed into performing something that you know would lead to its ultimate demise. Then there was a pause, where the fly seeming to stand on tip of its toes, tried to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and, sitting down, it began, like a minute cat to clean its face.

So, again the fly had been careful with his wings and now, he feels he sits in front of the you know the entire magnification takes place over here and we find that how the fly is equated with a minute cat and not just that if you take a look at the description of fly, the legs, the you know the entire right leg, left leg thing as if as a human being has been shown a very graphic and magnified detail.

So, the magnification is interesting over here, they are looking at a fly who is almost big enough to be a minute cat. So, you know you can compare how big the fly is. It is obviously, very hyperbolic in quality.

And no one could imagine the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over; it had escaped; it was ready for life again right. So, but then just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on a blotting paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot.

So, that the boss at this point he wanted to torture the fly and this becomes interesting, because what happens is it becomes an episode of sadomasochism. So, the boss is obviously, torturing the fly and he tries to torture, but at the same time the boss is torturing himself, because he sees in a struggle of the fly, a projection of his own struggle.

So, he wants the fly to win at one point, because that will also mean he would win right. So, it is a very interesting idea of empathy that is created over here, albeit through torture. So, the boss is torturing the fly, but in the process he is getting more empathic to the fly in some sense right. So, that is what makes this sadomasochistic. So, instead of just torturing the fly as masochistic as he is also torturing himself and that loop becomes

interesting for us to examine okay. So, he plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on blotting paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot. What would it make of that! What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed. So, you know again the word beggar is important, you know as a human being.

So, you can see how the fly is increasingly equated with bigger animals. So, first there is a degree of deer and monkey and then you know the whole idea of the fly becoming something like cat-like becomes interesting right. So, we see the dog image also before, and all these animal metaphors become interesting, because in a very literal and symbolic sense, this is almost like a post-human world right. The First World War had just ended and the demography is very different. We can see in the story there is a very conspicuous absence of women, but also the death of all the young men, the young men are all gone they are all dead. So, Woodifield's son is dead, the boss's son is dead.

So, the entire demography becomes very disturbed demography right. So, in the sense all these animal metaphors become important in this short story, because you know we take a look at the cat image over here, the dog image is used to describe Macey, the boss's messenger and so the whole idea is to you know Mansfield is obviously trying to tell us that this is a universe where the abled men are all gone.

So, this is the very differently abled kind of a universe, a differently abled kind of a cosmos right and also the woman over here are very conspicuously absent. So, that becomes interesting. Now, the whole idea of using the cat over here is interesting, because it is obviously, magnifying the creature and its magnification just becomes also an act of deceleration right.

So, we see how the entire episode is decelerated in a very-very interesting sense. It the deceleration; obviously, dramatizes what happens. So, the boss is dropping blots of ink on the fly, which is equated with a cat, but we see how each drop is described in great detail and almost slowed down time and it slowed down time becomes important, the magnification of the fly's body becomes important right. So, the fly's body almost get corporealized So, there is a degree of corporealization of time as well as the fly's body.

So, and also the whole idea of the little beggar becomes important, because the fly is compared to little beggar and also this particular description obviously, comes from a very patronizing offensive, masculinist position of privilege where someone who is underprivileged becomes a little beggar and the fly over here becomes a little beggar. Again, very boy scout elitist entitled sense of masculinity which is you know which is being voiced over here, through this use of expression. The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next right. But then, as it painfully dragged its way forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning right. So, again the degree of deceleration is important. It is more slow, and also look at the way in which the front legs have been described.

I mean normally we would look at a fly, you do not see the legs. This is one little tiny thing, but it is magnified and the entire process decelerated. So, we see how the front legs are waving, catching hold and slowly began to move. So, this is what I mean about a Sisyphean quality of the entire episode where those of you are aware of the myth of Sisyphus would know that you know, he was doomed to push a stone against the mountain and it would go up on the mountain and the stone would fall down again and he was doomed to you know just carry on that task forever.

So, Sisyphus, obviously, represents a sense of purposelessness and he becomes a very important symbol in existentialist literature especially in the works of examples Sartre and Albert Camus and you know Mansfield obviously, draws on that Sisyphus image quite heavily over here. He is a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and I felt a real admiration for the fly's courage.

Now, this is interesting, because again if you look at the metaphor. He is a plucky little devil right. So, there is very boy scout, almost like a head coach, a goading on the star player you know, you are a plucky devil go beat it you can do it. So, it becomes a bit of a pep talk kind of rhetoric over here again very-very masculinist in quality. He is a plucky little devil, thought the boss and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage that was the way to tackle things and that was a right spirit never say die, it was only a question of. So, again this vocabulary is very-very masculinist in quality that is the way to do it, that is the right spirit, never say die, etcetera. It is almost like a coach goading on a

player to do something, there is a sporting image about it, a sporting quality about this particular vocabulary.


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to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and, sitting down, it began, like a minute cat, to clean its face. Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over; it had escaped, it was ready for life again.

But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting-paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot. What would it make of that! What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as it painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning.

He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die, it was only a question of... But the fly had again finished

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its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, "You artful little b..." And he actually had the brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen deep into the inkpot.

It was. The last blot fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the dragged fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

"Come on," said the boss. "Look sharp!" And he stirred it with his pen in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.



It was only a question of, but the fly had once again finished his laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on a new clean body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; and the boss felt a rush of relief.

So, again this is what I meant when I said that it is sadomasochistic, because on the one hand the fly is a fly and the boss is the boss, but on the other hand there is a bit of empathy that a boss creates with the fly, because a fly's struggle in a way, reminds him of his struggle and in a way he wants the fly to win, because the fly's victory would be a very symbolic statement over the boss's own victory. It will be motivation for the boss to draw on, but obviously, he keeps torturing the fly in the same time.

So, it becomes a very interesting relationship of torture and empathy which is simultaneously present both these sentiments simultaneously present. So, the boss drops another blot of ink, what bothers this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. So, again this is what I meant when I say he wants the fly to win. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, "You artful little b." And this b could be any word yeah which is obviously, you know offensive in quality, but in a masculinist way it means something positive right.

So, and again look at the word tenderly, you see he is leaning on the fly and telling it tenderly. It is almost like he is caressing the fly. Just now we saw that you know he wants to fly to win, etcetera. and then we see this interesting thing and actually had a brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process right.

So, he is actually trying to breathe in the fly to help it dry itself at well at the same time being the person who dropped the ink in the first place. So, we see this very curious comingling of torture and empathy at play over here. So, he is more the torturer as well as the tortured, the boss. So, he is feeling tortured with the fly and in the process he is trying to help the fly to come out of it first. You know to get itself dry. All the same, there was something timid and weak about his efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, and he dipped the pen deep into the inkpot. So, again the last blot is about to come now, the boss tries one more time to drop a blot of ink on the fly and see what happens.

It was. Now, every time I read this story, I am reminded of this terrible sense of finality that is there in this one sentence, it was which is two words right. So, the sense of finality, the sense of mortality, the sense of ending, that is there is so brilliantly captured by this very short sentence it was; so, you know everything comes to an end. It was the last blot fell on the soaked blotting paper, and the draggled fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were struck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen. So, again it becomes very mangled body as you can see and again this almost becomes a human body in a sense and we can always safely say that the fly becomes something of a projection of the boss's son.

It is perhaps the way he died the front legs were mangled and the back legs not to be seen, the front legs not to be seen, the back legs were stuck to the body again. This is a very typical image of a bombed human soldier right, bomb dropping on a trench and a soldier's body getting mangled, the limbs getting mangled and stuck to the body and some limbs disappearing. So, this whole idea of the mangled body becomes a very graphic description over here, very disturbing description over here and it is interesting, how the descriptions are projected onto the body of the fly. This is what I meant, when I say the fly is corporealized in a very-very human way. So, the fly becomes human humanized and corporealized and only in the sense of suffering a torture.

‘Come on,’ said the boss. ‘Look sharp!’ And he stirred it with a pen in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

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He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of... But the fly had again finished

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its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, "You artful little b..." And he actually had the brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen deep into the inkpot.

It was. The last blot fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the dragged fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

'Come on,' said the boss 'Look sharp!' And he stirred it with his pen in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste-paper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey.

'Bring me some fresh blotting-paper,' he said sternly, 'and look sharp about it.' And while the old dog padded away he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was... He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.



So, again the boss is goading the fly and again this is a very complex psychological statement that we can make that when you say that boss had you know he felt a degree of admiration empathy for the fly's courage to come out of this torture chamber, but at the same time he comes in and tortured him playing the god as well as the victim together and now when the fly is dead his is trying to goad it to make it come back to life just so, the fly's coming back to life, the fly's winning will be a motivation for him.

But then the fly's death reminds him of his own death, reminds him of his imminent mortality, reminds him of his imminent wait for an ending and obviously, reminds him of his son's death. He stirred it with his pen in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead. Again, a degree of finality and an ending about a statement. The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper knife and flung it in the waste paper basket. So, again if you look at the movements over here are very-very interesting. The word corpse is used, which is obviously, used for human bodies. So, the fly is described as a human body.

So, the fly's body you know strange that he talked about the fly's body, the fly is a creature, but everything is magnified and decelerated as a mention of fly's body is now corporealized, and it is lifted with a paper knife and flung in the waste paper basket.

Again, this is very-very iconic, because on the First World War this is exactly how the soldier's dead bodies were flung out of trenches right into—it is like a garbage thing. So, you know there would be a heap of dead bodies and the soldier's dead bodies are to be flung from the trenches with a big bayonet sometimes, flung in a big heap of corpses right and that big heap became a very-very iconic symbol of human destruction, organic destruction.

So, again a sense of trash becomes important. How human bodies become disposable trash, everything organic becomes disposable trash and when you see this almost obsession with trash throughout modernism and we will move onto this Virginia Woolf's short story from here after this called 'Solid Objects' just entirely about trash right, but even if you take a look at Mrs Dalloway, *The Wasteland*, even Eliot's early poetry or *Ulysses* for the matter we find this whole idea of trash becomes important, because along with the different machines of production in modernism or modernity in cultural, modernity we also see different machines of dissemination and also production entails the production of rubbish, the production of trash and the human body is now converted into a trash right.

So, he flings it to the waste basket, but such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. So, again it is a bit of an oxymoronic expression positively frightened. So, he is being seasoned, consumed by a certain sentiment, you know and is frightened by the sentiment. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey. 'Bring me some fresh blotting paper,' he said sternly, 'and look sharp about it.'

So, again he wants desperately to clamber back to his masculinist rhetoric, he was trying desperately to get back and recover and retrieve and re-articulate his masculinist vocabulary, look sharp about is how a manly man speaks to his underling.

He wants to recover his sense of ownership, his sense of agency, but then it is too late as we are told and while the old dog padded away, he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before, what it was. He took out his handkerchief and pressed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.

So, this is how the short story ends, but what happens essentially is it just becomes a very sweet revenge of time and as we mentioned the boss's hubris was that he had taught that anyone everyone else can live the loss down and move on with time, but he will have

triumph over time. In a sense of retaining his original experience of trauma and this is what I mean when I say there is an equation and trauma and privilege in the story because you know the boss thinks that I can consume, I can re-experience my trauma at will at any given point of time, no passage of time can dilute my trauma in that sense right.

So, that has been his hubris all the time. Every time I want to cry that my son is dead, I can cry at will. I can weep at will. I can retain and re-articulate and re-experience my trauma very-very experientially and viscerally in a great embodied way, but of course, this fly episode, obviously, you know just completely ends you know finishes any sense of struggle for the boss, because when the fly's struggle comes to an end symbolically and in every projected kind of way his own struggle comes to an end as well right. So, the fly and the boss end together right.

So, now he goes back and he is trying to recover his boss-ness, he is trying to give orders desperately to Macey to bring some fresh blotting paper and to look sharp about it and that is all that he can order for. I mean also notice the way in which in this office there is no indication of any work getting done, of any productivity at any level. Everything is just coming and being designed as empty structures, the boss comes, there is an office, it is a very decked up office, its messenger, etcetera. But do not quite know what work is done, if any production happens itself or maybe not.

So, it just becomes an office in a very hollow emptied-out kind of away because obviously, the person who would carry on the production, the son, is dead now. So, all the boss is doing now is just you know stalling, the collapse of this entire architecture and the last statement is important.

For the life of him I could not remember right. This becomes a very sweet revenge of time when he cannot remember what he was thinking right. In other words, you know he becomes quite essentially and symbolically and literally a timeless man right he becomes someone who is you know denied of time. So, timeless in the sense he does not know about future; obviously, because the son is dead and also, he cannot recover the past, because he cannot remember. So, you know, obviously, his present becomes precarious in that sense. So, the precarious quality of his present is because of his timelessness. The

father does not have a future to look forward to and also there is no past that he can think off right.

So, so when I say this is a vendetta of time, what I am actually saying is time leaves the boss right and in that sense is timeless. So, you know time goes away from the boss entirely and you know you know he is just denied this comfort of time in every which way and this becomes the vendetta, this becomes a revenge of time very symbolic and exponentially, a revenge against this erstwhile hubris of having control over time in terms of you know never living this loss down right.

So, we see how this entire story is deeply psychological as you can see, is very existential psychological is very modernist with the First World War as very spectral background draw the story as you can see you know which is something we just saw in *The Wasteland* as well and also *Mrs Dalloway* more directly, but if you compare and contrast this with *Mrs Dalloway*, we find that the minimalism in Mansfield's short fiction actually makes it very-very sinister in quality.

So, the sinister cooled quality about loss is conveyed to us in very minimalistic ways and there is hardly any characters hardly any action except the fly episode which is deeply psychological and we find how streams of consciousness, epiphany this entire embodied engagement with time always become very important markers of masculinity in the stories.

So, in one sense it is very modernist, it is always engaging with consciousness in other sense it is also very-very, it is a deep feminist critique of a certain kind of masculinity which had historically created the wars for example, expansionist kind of masculinity which the boss embodied.

So, with that we come to an end of *The Fly*'s deeply psychological and complex story. So, do read it again and again and like I said I have an article on it which was published in a Katherine Mansfield and psychology collection published by Edinburgh University press, which I am happy to upload in the forum for your perusal.

So, from this we will move on to our next text, which we will announce in due course of time. So, do reread the fly and write to me in the forum, if you have any more questions or comments on this text.

Thank you for your attention.