



In a German Pension: 13 Stories

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Rich, psychologically probing stories: "Germans at Meat," "The Baron," "The Modern Soul," "The Advanced Lady" and nine others.

In a German Pension: 13 Stories Details

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Panagiotis says

3,5/5

Κ?που στα μ?σα της δεκαετ?ας του '80, μου ?καναν δ?ρο το βιβλ?ο μιας συγγραφ?ως ?γνωστης τ?τε σε μ?να. Το βιβλ?ο ?ταν οι «Κ?ρες του αε?μνηστου συνταγματ?ρχη» της Κ?θρην Μ?νσφηλντ απ? τις Εκδ?σεις Γρ?μματα σε μετ?φραση Μαρ?ας Λα?ν?. Τ?τε εγ? μ?λις ε?χα πρωτοανακαλ?ψει τον Στ?βεν Κινγκ και δι?βαζα μανιωδ?ς ?,τι δικ? του υπ?ρχε. Το βιβλ?ο μπ?κε στην ?κρη και το ?πιασα στα χ?ρια μου μετ? απ? εν?μιση χρ?νο. Δι?βασα μια συγγραφ?α με τ?τοια οικονομ?α και καθαρ?τητα στη γραφ?, που σπ?νια συναντ?ς. Η διεισδυτικ?τητ? της, τ?σο στην ψυχ? των ηρ?ων ?σο και στην αν?λυση των καταστ?σεων που β?ωναν, μου φ?νηκε πρωτοφαν?ς. Δεν ε?ναι τυχα?ο ?τι η Βιρτζ?νια Γουλφ ?γραψε στο ημερολ?γι? της ?τι η γραφ? της Μ?νσφηλντ ?ταν η μ?νη που ζ?λεψε ποτ?!

Η Κ?θρην Μ?νσφηλντ ?ζησε μια σ?ντομη αλλ? ασυν?θιστη και περιπετει?δη ζω?. Γενν?θηκε στο Ου?λιγκτον της Ν?ας Ζηλανδ?ας απ? μεγαλοαστο?ς γονε?ς. Η σχ?ση της με την καταπιεστικ? μητ?ρα της ?ταν εξαρχ?ς δ?σκολη. Ολοκλ?ρωσε τις σπουδ?ς της στο Λονδ?νο και ταξ?δεψε στην Ευρ?πη. Αμφιφυλ?φιλη —στο ημερολ?γι? της αναφ?ρει δ?ο γυνα?κες με τις οπο?ες ε?χε σχ?σεις—, ?μεινε ?γκυος εκτ?ς γ?μουν. Παντρε?τηκε σε πρ?το γ?μο τον Τζορτζ Μπ?ουντεν, αλλ? ο γ?μος δεν κρ?τησε παρ? ελ?χιστες ?ρες, μιας και τον εγκατ?λειψε το ?διο βρ?δυ. Αποβ?λλει, και η μητ?ρα της την αναγκ?ζει να εγκαταλε?ψει το Λονδ?νο για ?να σπα στη Γερμαν?α. Με την επιστροφ? της στο Λονδ?νο ξαναβρ?σκει τον κ?κλο των Μοντερνιστ?ν και συνεχ?ζει τον μπο?μικο τρ?πο της ζω?ς της που ε?χε διακοπε?. Δε?τερος γ?μος με τον Τζον Μ?ντλετον Μ?ρι μετ? απ? μια θυελλ?δη πολ?χρονη σχ?ση. Το 1917 διαγν?στηκε η φυματ?ωση. Π?θανε στα τρι?ντα τ?σσερ? της χρ?νια. Κληρονομι? της ογδ?ντα οκτ? διηγ?ματα-διαμ?ντια.

Μετ? το «Γκ?ρντεν π?ρτι» απ? τις Εκδ?σεις Σμ?λη το 2006, μια ακ?μα εξαιρετικ? μετ?φραση της Μαρ?ας Λα?ν?, ?ρθε η ?ρα της «Γερμανικ?ς πανσι?ν». Το ντεμπο?το της Μ?νσφηλντ ε?ναι μια συλλογ? δεκατρι?ν διηγημ?των. Κυκλοφ?ρησε το 1911 απ? τον εκδοτικ? ο?κο του Στ?βεν Σου?φτ και γν?ρισε αμ?σως επιτυχ?α. Ε?ναι σπ?νιο να συναντ?ς μια γυναικε?α φων? με τ?τοια α?σθηση του χιο?μορ, με τ?σο ?ψογο κωμικ? timing. ?να χιο?μορ μα?ρο, σαρκαστικ?, χρησιμοποιε?ται για να στιγματιστε? η ανισορροπ?α δ?ναμης στις σχ?σεις των δ?ο φ?λων, οι μικρ?ς και μεγ?λες κοινωνικ?ς αδικ?ες.

Τα δεκατρ?α διηγ?ματα χωρ?ζονται σε δυο κατηγορ?ες. Τα πρ?τα θα μπορο?σες να πεις ?τι ε?ναι σατιρικ? πορτρ?τα: η δυσκαμψ?α της υψηλ?ς κοινων?ας και ο πιθηκισμ?ς της μεσα?ας τ?ξης της Γερμαν?ας αναδεικν?ονται μ?σα απ? τη δηλητηρι?δη διακωμ?δηση της αν?γκης για συνεχ? επιβεβα?ωση της δικ?ς τους πολιτισμικ?ς ανωτερ?τητας και υλικ?ς ευμ?ρειας. Η Μ?νσφηλντ παρατηρε? προσεκτικ? τον υφ?ρποντα εθνικισμ?. Τα σχ?λια των Γερμαν?ν βαρ?νων για τους ?γλους και τον τρ?πο ζω?ς τους, τα σουφρωμ?να χε?λη αποδοκιμασ?ας προς την πρωταγων?στρια και τις εγγλ?ζικες συν?θει?ς της, φα?νονται εφιαλτικ? προφητικ?. Τρ?α χρ?νια μετ?, οι δυο πολιτισμο? θα συγκρουστο?ν με ?ναν πρωτοφαν? για την ανθρωπ?τητα τρ?πο. Μια σ?γκρουση που θα οδηγ?σει στην πτ?ση της Αυστροουγγρικ?ς Αυτοκρατορ?ας.

Το βιβλ?ο, ?σο προχωρ?, γ?νεται ?λο και πιο μα?ρο. Τα παιγνι?δη, σαρκαστικ? διηγ?ματα, που σε ?καναν να γελ?ς με το ?ξυπνο χιο?μορ τους, δ?νουν τη θ?ση τους σε ?λλα, σκοτειν? και ακανθ?δη.

Η π?να της Μ?νσφηλντ γ?νεται πιο κοφτερ?, σχεδ?ν β?αιη. Πλ?ον κυριαρχε? ο υποβιβασμ?νος ρ?λος της γυνα?κας. Της γυνα?κας συζ?γου, κ?ρης, υπαλλ?λου. Η ενδοοικογενειακ? β?α, ο συζυγικ?ς βιασμ?ς, η απ?πειρα σεξουαλικ?ς επ?θεσης, η παιδικ? εργασ?α, ακ?μα και η β?α του τοκετο?. Η συγγραφ?ας παρατηρε? τα π?ντα με μεγεθυντικ? φακ?, δ?νοντας στο φως μια καθημεριν? πραγματικ?τητα που προκαλε? οργ?. Γ?νεται ιδια?τερα καταγγελτικ? για τον αντρικ? ζω?δη κ?σμο στον οπο?ο ζει και τους καν?νες που αυτ?ς ?χει επιβ?λλει. Ο θεσμ?ς του γ?μου και της οικογ?νειας φαντ?ζει σαν φυλακ?, με τις γυνα?κες να ?χουν αποδεχθε? τον ρ?λο που τους ?χει οριστε? — μια γυνα?κα μπορε? να αισθ?νεται πλ?ρης μ?νο αν τεκνοποι?σει. «Γ?ννηση», «Το κουρασμ?νο κορ?τσι», «Η ταλ?ντωση του εκκρεμο?ς», «Ξ?σπασμα», ?λα τους στ?ζουν φρ?κη. Σχεδ?ν ?λα τα διηγ?ματα ?χουν ?να τ?λος απ?τομο, ανοιχτ?, αφ?νοντας τον αναγν?στη μετ?ωρο, με ?να α?σθημα ανησυχ?ας.

Τα διηγ?ματα αυτ?ς της συλλογ?ς δεν ?χουν το τ?λειο φιν?ρισμα των διηγημ?των του «Γκ?ρντεν π?ρτι» που εκδ?θηκε ?ντεκα χρ?νια μετ?. Μοι?ζουν με ?κοπα διαμ?ντια. Άλλ? το οκατ?ργαστο ?χει τη δικ? του γοητε?α. Ας μην ξεχν?με ?τι τα διαμ?ντια, ?πως κι αν ε?ναι, ε?ναι παντοτιν?. Τελει?νοντας το βιβλ?ο, δεν μπορε?ς να μην αναρωτηθε?ς τι θα μπορο?σε να κ?νει αυτ? η συγγραφ?ας αν δεν την προλ?βαινε ο θ?νατος. Η κληρονομι? που μας ?φησε ε?ναι μικρ? σε ποσ?τητα αλλ? τ?σο πολ?τιμη.

Buck says

I realize I'm about to piss off some lovely people around here, but it can't be helped: I dislike Virginia Woolf. A lot. The other day at the gym I was watching *Family Guy* on mute—yes, this is relevant—and the closed captions described a character's unintelligible yammering as “pretentious babble.” Exactly. Pretentious babble is what I hear in my head when I read Woolf. I know what you're thinking: “But, but—the beauty, the lyricism, the subtle nuances, the, the-” Yeah, fine, whatever. Pretentious babble. It's just me, alright? I readily admit my mind is neither subtle nor nuanced enough to appreciate the delicate English rose that is Virginia Woolf. (Okay, if you want the truth, I had mildly positive feelings about Woolf until a girlfriend dragged me to see *The Hours* and I spent the whole time swallowing my own sick).

Why this apparently random and senseless attack on the *grande dame* of the English novel? Because I always had a preconception that Katherine Mansfield was in the same tradition of gauzy, water-coloured impressionism. But she's not like that at all. She doesn't do lyrical. Her prose is so astringent and vinegary you could pickle a fetus in it (or, you know, something inoffensive). And her irony: just withering—the kind of irony that shrivels everything it touches: men, women, children, and Germans. Especially Germans.

According to impeccable scholarly sources (Wikipedia), *In a German Pension* is largely autobiographical. As a very young woman, Mansfield found herself scandalously pregnant and was packed off to a Bavarian spa by her mother for a ‘rest cure’ (i.e. childbirth on the hush-hush). In that light, the book reads like a clever girl's literary revenge on her circumstances. *I'll show these stupid Germans. And fuck you, mom.*

Most of the pieces here are not really stories; they're more like tart little sketches that capture a moment or a character while avoiding easy drama and cheap epiphanies. Some readers will be frustrated by the studied uneventfulness, but I'm okay with it. In my experience, a good 90% of life is just a bunch of nondescript stuff that won't fit into a slick narrative, that isn't even worthy of an anecdote. But clearly I need to get out more.

If the book lacks finish—Mansfield later dismissed it as “immature”—you have to remember this is the work of a twenty-two year old woman writing in 1910. The date is startling because there’s hardly a line here that couldn’t have been written yesterday. Somehow this rebellious, messed-up Kiwi chick turned herself into a modernist before there was any modernism to write home about. Just goes to show you how far a little talent and a shitload of anger can carry a person.

El says

Katherine Mansfield died of tuberculosis at the age of 34. *34. I'm 34.* That just puts a whole lot of shit in a whole lot of perspective.

I was going through one of those phases where I'm reading a really big book at home but currently don't have anything tiny enough to carry with me on the bus to and from work, so I'm in a major funk, so I spent a good part of last night opening books from my shelves, reading a page or two, and then putting it back. Nothing was speaking to me.

This slight little collection of Mansfield's writing spoke to me from the beginning. The stories in this collection were inspired by her time spent in Bavaria where she was sent to recuperate after a miscarriage. Mansfield was an observer of the best quality - she took what she saw and heard and applied it to her writing. And here are those stories.

I fell in love with Mansfield when I read her Journals. Even in some of her random thoughts, I could tell she had a strength in her writing that made me want to know more about her. She was known as one of the modernists and was friendly with other modernist-types like D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, and like so many other writers who died too fucking young, I wonder what she could have accomplished had she not contracted tuberculosis. She wrote about women in a way that most writers were, but more importantly she wrote about *people* in a way that not many people of her time were. These stories are satirical, cutting, and often leaves the reader feeling unsettled. To think that Mansfield was so young when this collection was published leaves me feeling pretty lazy.

And unfortunately I couldn't stop reading this, so now it's back to the drawing board in regards to finding something else to read this week during my commute. It's no tuberculosis, but that's what I've got going on - reading funk. At least this little collection helped me remember there's good literature out there, sometimes even in small packages.

Kathleen says

“On the appointed day the married ladies sailed about the pension dressed like upholstered chairs, and the unmarried ladies like draped muslin dressing-table covers.”

This collection of gently mocking tales is full of strangely accurate details like these.

Have you ever walked past windows along the street and wondered about the dramas going on behind each one? This was like that, only with a witty and insightful storyteller to fill you in.

My favorite was “A Birthday,” but I enjoyed them all. According to the introduction, Mansfield’s initial comment about the possible reissuing of this, her first book, was: “I can’t go foisting that kind of stuff on the public.” I’m certainly glad she changed her mind!

Κατερ?να Μαλακατ? says

Η -μ?λλον ?γνωστη στη χ?ρα μας- Κ?θρην Μ?νσφηλντ ε?ναι η πιο διακεκριμ?νη συγγραφ?ας της Ν?ας Ζηλανδ?ας. Γεννημ?νη το 1888, εγκατ?λειψε την χ?ρα της στα 15 για να π?ει Κολλ?γιο στο Λονδ?νο και δεν ξαναγ?ρισε ποτ?. Αν?συχο πνε?μα, κατ?φερε στα λιγοστ? χρ?νια της ζω?ς της να ανανε?σει τη φ?ρμα του διηγ?ματος, να σχετιστε? με πολλο?ς μοντερνιστ?ς συγγραφε?ς, την Γουλφ, τον ?λιοτ, και να δημιουργ?σει ακρα?α σκ?νδαλα με την συμπεριφορ? της.

?δη απ? το σχολε?ο την απασχ?λησε η θ?ση των γυναικ?ν της εποχ?ς της και αποφ?σισε να παλ?ψει για αυτ?ν. Παρ? ?λα αυτ? ?ταν το 1909 κατ?φτασε η μητ?ρα της στο Λονδ?νο αν?συχη, ο?τε εκε?νη κατ?φερε να μην την στε?λουν «σε μια Γερμανικ? πανσι?ν» για να αναρρ?σει. ?ταν 21 ετ?ν, ε?χε μ?λις παντρευτε? ?νων ?ντρα- που τον παρ?τησε σε ?να μ?να- ε?χε ερωτικ? σχ?ση με μ?α γυνα?κα, εν? κυοφορο?σε το παιδ? εν?ς ?λλου ?ντρα.

Εκε? στην Γερμαν?α η Μ?νσφηλντ θα γρ?ψει τα πρ?τα της διηγ?ματα, βασισμ?να π?νω στις εμπειρ?ες της, θα αποβ?λλει και θα εμφαν?σει και τα πρ?τα συμπτ?ματα πλευρ?τιδας. Θα γυρ?σει το 1911 για να μπλεχτε? σχεδ?ν αμ?σως σε μια καρμικ? συζυγικ? σχ?ση με τον συγγραφ?α Τζων Μ?ρυ και να συνεχ?σει τις ερωτικ?ς συνευρ?σεις με δυο διαφορετικ?ς γυνα?κες. Μ?σα στην καταιγ?δα της προσωπικ?ς της ζω?ς κατ?φερε να εκδ?σει ?λλες δ?ο συλλογ?ς διηγημ?των και να λ?βει μ?ρος στην συντακτικ? επιτροπ? του λογοτεχνικο? περιοδικο? που ?βγαζε ο ?ντρας της. Π?θανε στα 34 της απ? φυματ?ωση και μετ? θ?νατον εκδ?θηκαν ακ?μα δ?ο συλλογ?ς.

Στο «Σε μια Γερμανικ? πανσι?ν» κ?νει εντ?πωση απ? την αρχ? στον αναγν?στη η καθαρ?τητα της γραφ?ς της, το πικρ? της χιο?μορ, η απ?σταση που κρατ? απ? την ιστορ?α, αν και ε?ναι β?ωμα. Πολ? συχν? οι ?ρωες της μ?νουν χωρ?ς ?νομα – ο Κ?ριος Σ?μπουνλος, ο Βαρ?νος- γιατ? αυτ? δεν ?χει καμ?α σημασ?α. Ακ?μα συχν?τερα τα διηγ?ματα μοι?ζουν απ? με επεισ?δια, ?πως θα γ?ριζε κανε?ς μια μικρ? μ?κους ταιν?α σ?μερα, σαν να σταμ?τησε ο φακ?ς της συγγραφ?ως σε ?να καρ?. Η αποδομημ?νη, κινηματογραφικ? α?σθησ? της για την λογοτεχν?α ?ταν κ?τι εντελ?ς νεωτερικ? για την εποχ?. Κ?τι καινο?ριο και φρ?σκο, που ?κανε τα σ?γχρονα διηγ?ματα αυτ? που ε?ναι σ?μερα.

Την απασχολο?σαν τρ?α βασικ? θ?ματα. Το πρ?το ε?ναι η γυνα?κες? η θ?ση τους στην κοινων?α, ο τρ?πος που τις χειρ?ζονται οι συγγενε?ς και οι ?ντρες τους, το παν?ρχαιο ?νειρο «να βρεις πλο?σιο σ?ζυγο και να του κ?νεις πολλ? παιδι?» που τις δ?νει σε μια μο?ρα που δεν θα επ?λεγαν οι περισσ?τερες.

Ενδι?μεσα περιγρ?φει τον τρ?πο που συμπεριφ?ρονταν οι Γερμανο? το 1910, τον σωβινισμ? και της υπεροψ?α τους, τ?σο καυστικ?, που σχεδ?ν ?θελα της προαναγ?λλει τον π?λεμο που θα ?ρθει. Στ?νει το φ?ντο της εποχ?ς με απ?στευτη εν?ργεια και εν?ργεια.

Τ?λος, ασχολε?ται με το τ?λος μιας εποχ?ς ?σον αφορ? την κοινωνικ? διαστρωμ?τωση. Το δραματικ? δι?γημα με την μικρ? υπηρετριο?λα που αναλαμβ?νει εκε?νη π?νω της ?λο το νοικοκυρι? μοι?ζει να ‘χει βγει απ? τον Τσ?χωφ ? τον Ντ?κενς κι ε?ναι το μ?νο που ακολουθε? την

κλασικ? δομ? του διηγ?ματος, το μ?νο που καταλ?γει σε ανατροπ?.

Ο τρ?πος γραφ?ς της Μ?νσφηλντ ε?ναι εντυπωσιακ?ς. Ειδικ? αν αναλογιστε? κανε?ς π?σο σημεριν? μοι?ζει το κε?μενο, κι ας ?χει γραφτε? εκατ? χρ?νια πριν, π?ς ?γραφαν οι σ?γχρονο? της. ?πως ?γραψε η πολυναγαπημ?νη μου – και ?σπονδη φ?λη της συγγραφ?ως- Βιρτζ?νια Γουλφ, «ζ?λεψα το γρ?ψιμ? της! ?ταν το μ?νο γρ?ψιμο που ζ?λεψα ποτ?».

Ana Rînceanu says

"Germans at Meat" - an English woman is at a German pension where she and her dinner companions talk about the possibility of war breaking out (3 stars)

"The Baron" - an unnamed narrator observes a solitary baron (3 stars)

"The sister of the Baroness" - an English lady is staying in a German pension where people are expecting the arrival of a daughter of a baroness and her aunt (3 stars)

"Frau Fischer" - Frau Fischer comes to the pension for the 'cure' and begins to tell our unnamed English lady about life and love, the way Germans see them (3 stars)

"Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding" - Frau and Herr Brechenmacher go to a wedding (4 stars)

"The Modern Soul" - an English Fräulein befriends a buffoonish professor, a widow and her actress daughter while staying at a pension (3 stars)

"At "Lehmann's"" - Sabina works in the Lehmann's home and coffee shop when she meets the Young Man (3 stars)

"The Luft Bad" - a (English?) woman visits a bath house (3 stars)

"A Birthday" - Andreas goes to fetch a doctor because his wife has gone into labor (3 stars)

"The Child-Who-Was-Tired" - a child servant in the boarding house takes care of the masters and her children (4 stars)

"The Advanced Lady" - the young lady from England, Violet, is the subject of the other bath house patrons' gossip (4 stars)

"The Swing of the Pendulum" - a young woman is awaiting her sweetheart when another man enters the room (3 stars)

"A Blaze" - a married woman has a dispute with the unmarried man she's been flirting with (4 stars)

Paul says

An excellent set of short stories; brief with abrupt and unsettling endings and sharp, dry humour. These are early stories by Katherine Mansfield, written when she was barely over 20. She was recuperating from a miscarriage in Germany and from a short unpleasant marriage.

The stories analyse the German middle class and their habits, prejudices and loves. They also look at the more difficult lives of the servants. Mansfield was in the vanguard of the modernist movement acquainted with Virginia Woolf and D H Lawrence and the like. There is a focus on the role of women as wives, mothers, lovers, put upon servants (the wives as well as the servants) and there is a sense of injustice and even rage underneath. Some are very funny, some tragic. One in particular has a jaw dropping ending (The Child-who-was-tired) that stays with you, the horror of it gradually seeping in.

Mansfield was influenced by Chekov and became an increasingly good short story writer before her early death. Mansfield referred to these stories as immature as she developed her craft; but they are fresh, sharply humourous and do feel very modern.

Samadrita says

There was a time when I had lost all interest in Jane Austen, resigned to accepting the self-assured utterances of a few male acquaintances who still continue to believe that she wrote nothing other than classical 'chick-lit'. (My ignorant, younger self hadn't thought of asking them what was wrong with 'chick lit' in the first place) But a reading of *A Room of One's Own* and a re-reading of *Pride & Prejudice* later, I was tempted to literally beat some sense into those bluntheads (with a brick-sized omnibus edition of JA's works preferably) who had caused me to momentarily stray from my earlier path of fangirlish enthusiasm.

A female voice with a dignified sense of humor and impeccable comic timing is a rarity in the hallowed halls of literature *still*; a female voice with the ability to comment on the power imbalance in gender relations and small quotidian societal injustices under the veneer of wry humor even more so.

Katherine Mansfield, who put together this excellent collection of short stories nearly a century after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*, reminds me of Austen in the sense that her mockery of stiff-upper-lipped high society German ladies and barons is a throwback to Austen's keen talent of zeroing in on individual character quirks and highlighting the constant need for validation through assertion of material prosperity. But this is where the parallels end.

The last few short stories in this collection astonish with their thematic depth despite their brevity. Issues of rabid sexism, domestic disharmony, marital rape, thwarted attempts at sexual assault, the bodily violence of childbirth, abuse of young children employed as servants are touched on in the subtlest of ways. These grim realities were, perhaps, not unknown to JA but who, nonetheless, steered clear of them in her romantic comedies. The fact that Mansfield wrote these stories while quietly living out the ignominy of childbearing out of wedlock in a foreign country should be kept in mind while dissecting the rather no-holds-barred approach she adopts while exposing human foibles.

"I suppose it's the savage pride of the female who likes to think the man to whom she has given herself must be a very great chief indeed."

It's a pity of monumental proportions that the 22-year old who wrote with such insight didn't live long enough to hone her craft to absolute perfection or to leave enough of a mark on the literary landscape of her times like her much venerated contemporaries. But then there's the consolation that she wrote at all.

Ilse says

Short stories can be like photographs, catching people at some moment in their lives and trapping the memory for ever . There they are, smiling or frowning, looking sad, happy, serious, surprised ... And behind those smiles and those frowns lie all the experience of life, the fears and delights, the hopes and the dreams.

? Katherine Mansfield

Last year, I was enraptured by a collection of Katherine Mansfield's short stories, *Something Childish But Very Natural* so while reading **Willem Elsschot's** *Villa des Roses*, written around the same time and also set in a boarding house, Mansfield's debut collection from 1911, **In a German Pension** popped up from some hidden corner of the mental bookshelf.

For these pension stories, Mansfield took inspiration from her own stay as a 'cure guest' in Villa Pension Müller at a Bavarian spa of Bad Wörishofen in 1909, sent off there by her mother to muffle her extramarital pregnancy which would end in a miscarriage.

With demonic zest Mansfield's sharp-witted and observant narrator, a young English woman, looks at the peculiarities and behaviour of the pension guests, many of them at the spa on account of their 'nerves', trenchantly depicting the gross and distasteful table manners of the German pensioners, picking teeth with a hairpin, overeating, cleaning ears with a napkin, talking about saliva, spitting cherry stones in public, repugnantly displaying the use of handkerchiefs. The narrator's bantering commentary on the boarders' preoccupation with bodily functions and digestion and their unctuous attitudes is mirrored by the depreciatory and spiteful opinion which the German guests confide to the narrator vis-à-vis the odd manners of the English: *"It is a great pity the English nation is so unmusical". "I have never been to England", interrupted Fräulein Sonia, 'but I have many English acquaintances. They are so cold!' She shivered. 'Fish-blooded', snapped Frau Godowska, 'Without soul, without soul, without grace. But you cannot equal their dress materials.'* 'England is merely an island of beef flesh swimming in a warm gulf sea of gravy'. *"She was like a young tree whose branches had never been touched by the ruthless hand of man. Such delicacy! Of course it is difficult for you English to understand when you are always exposing your legs on cricket fields, and breeding dogs in your back gardens. The pity of it! Youth should be like a wild rose. For myself, I do not understand how your women ever get married at all."*

After all, one ought not forget WWI is hovering over some of these stories, and Mansfield astutely bares the stereotyping in the hearts and minds of her coevals, speaking their minds openly, some lines alluding to the oncoming conflict:

"I suppose you are frightened of an invasion too, eh? Oh, that's good. I've been reading all about your English play in a newspaper. Did you see it?"

"Yes." I sat upright. "I assure you we are not afraid."

"Well then, you ought to be," said the Herr Rat. "You have got no army at all – a few little boys with their veins full of nicotine poisoning."

"Don't be afraid," Herr Hoffmann said. "We don't want England. If we did we would have had her long ago. We really do not want you".

"We certainly do not want Germany," I said.

(Germans at Meat).

Fairly light-hearted and jocular as long as the pension guests are concerned, the tone and themes of the stories gradually darken, and angst, even tragedy enter. The few stories that do not focus an on the pension guests but on the villagers convey pictures of quotidian domestic cruelty, reminding us that barbarism begins at home, touching upon the deplorable plight of womanhood, the discomfiture of childbirth, the imbalance of power in the institution of marriage and its subsequent violence and exploitation and the sexual and social oppression of women and girls. Lofty musings on conformist femininity and love are exposed as fibbing and lampooned:

Whom then, asked Fräulein Elsa, looking adoringly at the Advanced Lady – “whom then do you consider the true woman?” “She is the incarnation of comprehending Love!” “But Love is not a question of lavishing”, said the Advanced Lady. “It is the lamp carried in the bosom touching with serene rays all the heights and depths of – “Darkest Africa,” I murmured flippantly.

(The Advanced Lady)

The swing of the Pendulum

Nonetheless men and women alike get a good dressing-down by Mansfield's barbed pen, men are repulsively unhygienic and egocentric, women coquettish and wanton, like in the last two stories portraying the female protagonists as cold-hearted and calculative temptresses, taking umbrage at the men eventually succumbing to their frivolous games, like the *allumeuse* in **Blaze** when confronted with the consequences of displaying her ambivalent nature: *I can't help seeking admiration any more than a cat can help going to people to be stroked* .

Depicting Germans as boorish and self-righteous, English women as silly sporty moos unlikely finding or keeping husbands and having procreation issues – in some sense reflecting her own - Mansfield's sardonic blow-up of the mutual tribal biases are far from political correct - if that anachronism would make any sense in the context of these tales - with its irresistible vitriolicism my children found me chuckling aloud. As immature Mansfield might have considered this debut herself, a work of juvenilia that she refused to have republished during her lifetime, the stories are in spurts hilarious in their hyperbolism and razor-sharp observations, stunningly precise and incisive in its details, rich in themes and worded in effervescent and sensuous prose, full of life. Some of the stories might be less subtle and slightly more predictable than what she will write later in her so brief a life, or have not the delightful open-endedness that will characterize later stories, to me this collection was sheer delight.

At the head of the centre table sat the bride and bridegroom, she in a white dress trimmed with stripes and bows of coloured ribbon, giving her appearance of an iced cake all ready to be cut and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom beside her, who wore a suit of white clothes much too large for him and a white silk tie that rose half-way up his collar.

(Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding)

The oil paintings are from the New Zealand artist Susan Wilson, who illustrated Katherine Mansfield's short stories for The Folio Society in 2000.

Nasia says

ταν να βιβλ?ο με 13 ιστορ?ες που με σατυρικ? δι?θεση αναγν?ριζε κανε?ς το πνε?μα της εποχ?ς και γν?ταν κοινωνικ? κριτικ?, αλλ? ταν τ?σο μικρ? η κ?θε ιστορ?α που προσωπικ? με ?φηνε πολλ?ς φορ?ς αδι?φορη. Καταλαβα?νω μως τον σκοπ? που ε?χε η συγγραφ?ας.

Majenta says

I read this sometime in the last few years. It's an interesting collection.

"Hoo-wih!" shouted the wind, shaking the window-sashes.

...very creative!

Cathy says

he stories in this collection are divided between vignettes of guests staying at the Pension, which are gently mocking in tone, and much darker stories that often have a sting in the tail. A frequent theme of the latter is the social and sexual oppression of women.

In "German Meat", the female English narrator is a sardonic commentator on the coarseness of the German guests who are constantly eating, perspiring and discussing their ailments and bodily functions. They, however, believe themselves superior to the English, particularly when they learn the narrator does not know what kind of meat her husband likes and, worse still, admits to being vegetarian. Mansfield deftly conveys the guests' greed and grotesque habits in a few short sentences.

'A glass dish of stewed apricots was placed upon the table.

"Ah, fruit!" said Fraulein Stiegelauer, "that is so necessary to health. The doctor told me this morning that the more fruit I could eat the better."

She very obviously followed the advice.'

In "The Sister of the Baroness", Mansfield exposes the snobbery of the other guests who cannot contain their excitement at the prospect of a relative of a wealthy member of the nobility staying at the Pension. 'Coffee and rolls took on the nature of an orgy. We positively scintillated. Anecdotes of the High Born were poured out, sweetened and sipped: we gorged on scandals of High Birth generously buttered.' Unfortunately their fawning regard for the new arrival turns out to be misplaced when it is revealed she is merely the daughter of the Baroness's dressmaker.

In "The Advanced Lady", the pretensions to intellectual superiority of a lady writer is lampooned.

"But Love is not a question of lavishing," said the Advanced Lady. "It is the lamp carried in the bosom touching with serene rays all the heights and depths of..."

"Darkest Africa," I murmured flippantly.

She did not hear.'

Amongst the darkest of the stories is "The Child Who Was Tired", which recounts the unrelenting toil of a young girl and the dreadful act she is driven to by despair and exhaustion.

Another notable story is “Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding” in which the conventions of domestic bliss are satirised both in the descriptions of the pompous Herr Brechenmacher and the events of the wedding breakfast. The bride is described as having the appearance of “an iced cake, all ready to be cut and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom beside her”. There is a sense of violence underpinning the story which is realised in the final sentence.

Although Mansfield later came to regard this early collection of stories as having little merit, I enjoyed the precision of the writing and their dark humour.

Kinga says

Katherine Mansfield would've matured to be an amazing writer if she hadn't died at the age of 34 of tuberculosis – which quite possibly was another of the knock-on effects of the gonorrhoea she contracted from her Polish lover – Florian Sobieniowski. Was it worth it, Katherine - <http://www.audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/...> ? Ladies, beware of men who have more consonants in their names that seems reasonable.

I know all that from the introduction to my Penguin edition written by Anne Fernihough – an introduction that was rather dense and scholarly. Too late did I realise that Hesperus produced a very pretty edition of ‘In a German Pension’ with an introduction by Linda Grant. I bet that one didn’t have moronic footnotes that explained who Wagner or Mozart were (a famous Austrian composer, apparently). I’m trying to imagine a world in which someone who has never heard of Mozart reads Katherine Mansfield’s obscure short stories.

Stories collected in this volume are semi-autobiographical because Mansfield herself was sent away to a ‘German pension’ for a ‘cure’ - her affliction being getting pregnant outside of wedlock. Her semi-autobiographical narrator is stuck in the pension where she is surrounded by crass idiots. She vents her anger by writing sharply satirical portraits of them. This all is something I could very much relate to because I am, also, often angry and surrounded by idiots.

The stories, of course, touch on bigger problems than being annoyed by a dinner companion who picks his teeth and cleans his ears at the table, while talking absolute bollocks. It’s all about gender roles and sexism, and class system, and exploitation of children and sexual violence. The stories start off light and satirical but get progressively darker. Apparently they are obviously inspired by Chekhov and mock Virginia Woolf gently, which I wouldn’t know because I haven’t read either. I know, how embarrassing! What the hell! Why would I even admit to that in public?

Anyway. Mansfield was slightly embarrassed by those stories she wrote when she was 22. She called them immature and rolled her eyes at how obsessed she was with bodily functions (there is a lot of detailed bodily functions here). Quite honestly though, who isn’t embarrassed by what they produced when they were 22? And if you aren’t, then it’s probably because you haven’t developed any further and that’s nothing to be proud of. I checked my blog to see what I wrote when I was 22 and it’s bloody cringe-worthy. I can’t believe I was allowed to vote and drink alcohol – I was a complete bimbo. And I guess that’s the difference – there is no-one in the world that could read my blog from those days and not cringe, while Mansfield’s stories, even if occasionally immature, smart-ass and swaggering, are still very much readable, a hundred years later.

I changed my Tinder profile to say that I like men who read Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Parker. I haven’t been very lucky so far.

Duane says

This is Mansfield's first published collection of short stories, and it comes from her experiences during her short time in Germany prior to 1906. She called it "immature", but you can see the promise of things to come in this collection. One story alone, The child who was tired, makes it worth reading.

Jan-Maat says

As everybody knows 24 is the highest number, and in the same spirit there are only two women writers, Jane Austen is one, and then there is the other one.

That other one though is multifaceted.

Mansfield herself apparently regarded this collection as immature, which I suppose we can understand in many different ways. Everything from Mansfield saying 'pooh don't be impressed by these, kiddo because you ain't since anything yet, I've once started to write' before she cartwheeled down the street and black flipped into her publisher's office, down to feeling, as I did at first, that the stories were immature in the simpler sense of 'ew, other people talking about their bodies and bodily functions, totally gross and disgusting, I'm going to be alone in my room with my genius' as though she was some kind of turn of the century *Adrian Mole*.

I read further:

"Do you know that poem of Sappho about her hand in the stars...I am curiously sapphic. And this is so remarkable - not only am I sapphic, I find in all the works of all the greatest writers, especially in their unedited letters, some touch, some sign of myself - some resemblance, some part of myself, like a thousand reflections of my own hands in a dark mirror.'

'But what a bother,' said I" (p.41)

and further:

"Is it a novel?" asked Elsa shyly.

'Of course it is a novel,' said I

'How can you be so positive?' said Frau Kellermann, eyeing me severely.

'Because nothing but a novel could produce an effect like that.'

'Ach, don't quarrel,' said the Advanced lady sweetly. 'Yes it is a novel - upon the Modern Woman'" (p.82)

I felt both those passages were about Mansfield and her ambition at that stage in her brief life. From the first quotation I felt that this collection was not so much about sensitive 'English' woman meets boorish Germans before the first world war so much as Mansfield confronts herself, I recalled Virginia Woolf writing in her diary that Mansfield stank like a civet cat (from the perfume she wore), the women in these stories I felt more and more were facets of Mansfield herself, as she was, also as she might become, or have been. From the second it seemed to me that this is Mansfield's anti-manifesto. You can't, she says, come to a conclusion about 'the Modern Woman' and it is impossible to present contemporary woman in a novel because the form of the novel tends to a message and a single viewpoint. No, instead you have to smash it to understand it. Once you've smashed the mirror into enough pieces then perhaps can you begin to get a sense of the many facets of the modern woman, says the young woman from New Zealand, pregnant and hiding from English

social disapproval in deepest, darkest Bavaria.

And what does she show us? Artistic pretension, rivalries with the difficult Mother, illegitimacy, sexual violence, snobbery and social exclusion, abuse, marriage as a battleground of dominance and inherent abuse, marriage as a chain of childbirths (none of which could never be personal concerns or worries for Mansfield herself, oh, no never). For Mansfield the experience of being a modern woman can not be expressed in a novel with a beginning, a middle and an end, but only in fragments, disconnected fragments offering foreboding, promise(view spoiler) or both.

Some of these themes continue into her later fiction though with an over laying preoccupation with death, and I think, returning to the question of immaturity, with a more sophisticated use of setting, imagery and incident. But there is an intensity and sharpness here. Her child was stillborn, the stories live.
