

Prufrock Freud, and the Late Colonel's Daughters:  
New Light on the Genesis of a Mansfield Story

COLIN NORMAN  
*Queen's University*

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LESS THAN FIVE MONTHS BEFORE HER death in 1923, Katherine Mansfield wrote to Violet Schiff that Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is "by far by far and away the most interesting and the best modern poem" (Murry, *Letters* 2: 240). "Prufrock" had impressed her from the start: soon after its publication in 1917, she echoed it in her journal: "Is that all? Can that be all? That is not what I meant at all" (Murry, *Journal* 124). In a letter to Virginia Woolf of May 1919, she assessed it shrewdly from a technical perspective and perhaps with a writer's assimilating eye: "Prufrock is, after all a short story" (O'Sullivan and Scott 2: 318). This remark could certainly serve as a preface to her own short story, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," which is in some respects the mirror image of "Prufrock," from which it derives many of its basic conceptions. Furthermore, "Prufrock" may have inspired in "Daughters" a distinctive Freudian strain that is hitherto unrecognized yet essential to understanding its full implications.

These propositions need not exclude existing views about the genesis of "Daughters," which Antony Alpers describes at some length in both *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* and *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, and which may be summarized as follows. The story owes much to Mansfield's long-standing relationship with Ida Baker, or "L. M.," the model for Constantia, and in particular to an inadvertently "comical rumination" by Ida about never having changed her ways since childhood. Ida came from Burma, and the Late Colonel was based on her terrifying father, a doctor in the Indian Army. Furthermore, Ida's stone Buddha—the probable basis for the Buddha in "Daughters" — stood on Katherine Mansfield's mantelpiece in the flat that the women shared in early 1911, and moved with Katherine to other addresses. Josephine was based on Mansfield's cousin Sylvia Payne.

Thematically, "Daughters" received impetus from the story of Christ and the barren fig tree as told in Matthew 21.19 and Mark 13.28: Mansfield had once seen a "sad" withered fig tree surrounded by cheerful, talkative washerwomen, and Ida, who was with her, had connected it with the biblical story. Significantly, the conception of Constantia and Josephine as barren trees, destined never to flourish and bear fruit, is compatible with both Christian and Freudian readings of "Daughters," which reinforce one another in this instance.

These ideas—supplemented by impulses from Eliot and further impulses from Freud—fused to become the work of art that Mansfield completed in December 1920. When it appeared in the *London Mercury* in May 1921, it was largely misunderstood, perhaps because of its distinctly Freudian conception and conclusion. One early admirer, Thomas Hardy, sent Mansfield a message of approval through Middleton Murry. She noted that Hardy, like so many other readers, had somehow missed the point. "Even dear old Hardy," she wrote to Dorothy Brett, "told me to write more about those sisters. As if there was any more to say!" (O'Sullivan and Scott 4: 316).

The record of Mansfield's association with Eliot begins in June 1917, during a weekend at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor, "with the flower of Bloomsbury strewn amid the trees" (Matthews 54). Clive Bell arrived from London with a dozen copies of Eliot's just published *Prufrock and Other Observations*, which he distributed. They caused a stir and much discussion: Bell recalls that Katherine Mansfield read the title poem aloud (121-22).<sup>i</sup> A few days later, at a dinner party in London, Mansfield met Eliot himself. Afterwards, as she confided in a letter to Ottoline, "I came away with Eliot and we walked past rows of little ugly houses hiding behind bitter smelling privet hedges; a great number of amorous black cats looped across the road and high up in the sky there was a battered old moon. I liked him very much" (O'Sullivan and Scott 1: 312). /20/

Sydney Janet Kaplan observes that Mansfield's images of "ugly houses," "amorous black cats," and "battered old moon" evoke a London "not completely unlike Prufrock's 'certain half-deserted streets' and 'yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes'" (161). Furthermore, Mansfield's subsequent writing includes occasional echoes of "Prufrock." For Kaplan, however, such allusions are incidental: "Most similarities [between Mansfield's writings and Eliot's] appear to be more the result of parallel development than influence" (162).

But Eliot's influence upon Mansfield was more profound than Kaplan allows. For example, J. F. Kobler has shown that "Prufrock" clearly left its mark on one of Mansfield's major stories, "Je ne parle pas français," written in early 1918.<sup>ii</sup> Antony Alpers sees this story as "in a limited sense" Mansfield's *Waste Land*, although it was written two years before that poem (*Stories* 559). Kobler notes the far more direct links with "Prufrock." Mansfield's story, like Eliot's poem, is a confessional monologue; like Prufrock, Mansfield's narrator, Raoul Duquette, in "Je ne parle pas français" has a divided personality. The story responds to the ideas and emotions of "Prufrock": "despair over the loss of love—of the inability to love and to communicate spiritually through love with fellow human beings" (Kobler 86). Furthermore, the two works exhibit marked similarities of language (Kobler lists thirteen instances, among them " 'the Ultimate Porter'" for " 'the eternal Footman'"; " 'That's not exactly what I mean'" for " 'That is not what I meant at all'"; "it has such a 'dying fall'" for " 'voices dying with a dying fall'" (85)). One might add that Duquette, a cynical Prufrock, sees moments of

hesitation as the "most thrilling instants in life"; he imagines "Life" shuffling along the street "with her old claws crooked over a stick," perhaps echoing Prufrock's "pair of ragged claws" (Eliot 73); both poem and story have moments of suspended agony ("But ah! the agony of that moment!"); Duquette refers to "my bad life, my submerged life," which recalls Prufrock's second self and his submerged libidinal life in "the chambers of the sea" (Alpers, *Stories* 277-83; subsequent references are to this text).

If "Je ne parle pas français" reflects Mansfield's admiration of "Prufrock," so does "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (1920). The latter story has much in common with "Prufrock," /21/ including several significant linguistic parallels, as the following analysis will demonstrate. Indeed it approximates a mirror image of Eliot's poem: Constantia and Josephine, the protagonists, are something like female Prufrocks.

Thus, like Prufrock the two spinster sisters are middle-aged, ill at ease with members of the opposite sex, and hopelessly indecisive.<sup>iii</sup> Prufrock's discomfort in the room where "the women come and go" (13) is comparable to the difficulties the sisters have with the priest Mr. Farolles, with entertaining their nephew Cyril, with brother Benny, and with their irascible father. Indecisiveness looms large in both works. Both convey it by echoing Hamlet. "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" (111), says Prufrock; in "Daughters," Constantia echoes Hamlet's "That is the question," to which Josephine replies, "And this time...we must come to a definite decision" (399).

Second, like Prufrock, the two women are defined by what other people think; that is, they live in the "eyes" of others and are metaphorically "pinned down" by those eyes. "I have known the eyes already, known them all," says Prufrock, and goes on to compare himself to an insect "formulated, sprawling on a pin ... pinned and wriggling on the wall" (55-58). The two sisters are victimized in precisely the same way by their tyrannical father, whose name (can this be mere coincidence?) is "Pinner," and who is famous for his terrifying "eye": thus, "Grandfather Pinner shot his eyes at Cyril in the way he was famous for" (397); dying, Pinner

had suddenly opened one eye. Oh, what a difference it would have made, what a difference to their memory of him, how much easier to tell people about it, if he had only opened both! But no—one eye only. It glared at them a moment and then . . . went out. (389)

Third, Prufrock's amorous second self, the "you" of his interior monologue, is cat-like; it is equated with the sensuous fog "that rubs its back upon the windowpanes" (15) and later with "the afternoon, the evening," which sleeps like a subdued, peaceful cat beside Prufrock, "Smoothed by long fingers" (75-76). It may seem incidental that in "Daughters" Josephine imagines Constantia and herself, clad in incongruous funereal /22/ dressing gowns, "creeping off to the bath-room like black cats" (387), or that proud young Kate, their forbidding servant, describes them contemptuously as "old tabbies" who are by

implication past their sexual prime (389). On the other hand, Mansfield's letter to Ottoline Morrell (O'Sullivan and Scott 1: 312) refers to "amorous cats," and these same creatures, or their close relatives, appear in four stories that Mansfield completed soon after reading "Prufrock." Thus: "Outside the window hundreds of black cats with yellow eyes sat in the sky watching her" ("Prelude," Summer 1917, 231); " 'Good-night, my little cat,' said I, impudently, to the fattish old prostitute picking her way home through the slush" ("Je ne parle pas français," 1918, 298); "A grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, trailed after" ("Bliss," 1918, 308); "There were grey crabs<sup>iv</sup> all the way down the street slopping water over grey stone steps .... An old brown cat without a tail appeared from nowhere, and began greedily and silently drinking up the spill" ("Pictures," 1919, 326).<sup>v</sup>

Fourth, like Prufrock the two sisters discover that they belong not at the top, but at the bottom, of the pecking order. Prufrock is not Prince Hamlet, not even Polonius, but "Almost, at times, the Fool" (119) in the Shakespearean hierarchy. The sisters identify with "mice" (387) and "sparrows" (401), timid, lowly little creatures, and ultimately Josephine realizes that they have been, not the late Colonel's esteemed daughters, but rather his servants, and hence belong at the bottom of the social hierarchy:

There had been this other life, running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them back to get more things on approval, and arranging father's trays and trying not to annoy father. (402)

Unlike the languid social sophisticates of Eliot's poem, these two women "come and go" for menial reasons. They occupy an even lower rung on the social scale than father's helpers or servants: Nurse Andrewes condescends to them, and Kate, "the enchanted princess" (389), treats them with contempt.

Fifth, "Prufrock" has comic overtones, even though it strikes a consistent note of pathos and concludes on a note of near /23/tragedy. The same can be said of "Daughters," in which "the subdued elegiac sense of wasted lives provides a note of potential tragedy, although the surface is restrained comedy" (Introduction, Abrams 2184). Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr argue that readers of the story must perform a "balancing act," because "the pathos so precisely matches the comedy" (93).

A related point: both works are self-consciously theatrical. "Prufrock" owes something both to Browning's dramatic monologues and to Shakespeare's soliloquies, and Prufrock, after a sidelong glance at Hamlet, portrays himself as one of Shakespeare's fools. In "Daughters," the sequence in which the deaf, testy, and stick-thumping Colonel confronts the unlucky Cyril, who must shout "'Father's still very fond of meringues'" (397), is pure stage comedy of a type that would have been familiar to contemporary audiences in London's West End. Indeed, Mansfield seems to have conceived her characters partly as comic stereotypes: the Colonel is a precursor of David Low's Colonel

Blimp, Cyril is the self-effacing young man who tries desperately to please, and Kate is the servant who rules the roost. In this same matter, it is surely ironic that Constantia and Josephine, two middle-aged spinsters, behave like stage ingenues, for reasons that will become clear and that bear upon the story's serious themes. In essence, they are Mansfield's "fools."

Sixth, both "Daughters" and "Prufrock," like many other modern works, render the stream of consciousness. In this case, the similarity may reflect a degree of imitation. In Eliot's confessional monologue, Prufrock is talking to himself: the debate between "you" and "I" seems to take place somewhere in the mid-region of the mind, on the borderline between conscious and unconscious states. Something equivalent happens in "Daughters," which shifts almost imperceptibly from a narrative voice into a character's inner thoughts and semi-conscious free associations. This similarity partly reflects parallel development rather than imitation, since the technique has its origins in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (1908), "The Little Governess" (1915), and "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day" (probably written before June 1917). It comes into its own, however, in "Prelude," a stylistic *tour de force* that Mansfield was revising when she encountered "Prufrock" in June 1917, and which may, there- /24/fore, reflect Eliot's influence. The style of "Daughters" (1920) epitomizes the mature technique; Alpers describes the evolution of this technique and suggests that "Prufrock" may have influenced it (*Life* 189-93, 238-40, 244-46).

Seventh, the conclusion of "Prufrock" has him metaphorically walking the beach and hankering after the unattainable mermaids "riding seaward on the waves / Combing the white hair of the waves blown back" (126-27). Whatever else it may imply, the sequence suggests a yearning for love and sexual fulfilment. "Daughters" ends on a similar note. Constantia's concluding moment of insight involves sacrificial, erotic images, and ends with the idea of gazing restlessly out to sea:

She remembered the times she had come in here, crept out of bed in her nightgown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn't minded. She remembered too how, whenever they were at the seaside, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up, while she gazed all over that restless water . . . . It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now? (402)

Parallel development may contribute to these similarities. Mansfield frequently uses the moon or the sea as symbols; furthermore, epiphanies combining moonlight, the sea,

and a ship contribute to two stories written before "Daughters": "Die Einsame (The Lonely One)" of 1904, and "Prelude," the story Mansfield completed soon after her encounter with "Prufrock" in 1917. But these two epiphanies have nothing to do with sensuality: in both cases the ship resembles the chariot that swings low to carry the soul away. The erotic element in the passage from "Daughters," therefore, sets it apart from the two earlier stories but links it with "Prufrock." Significantly, the connection between moonlight, the sea, and eroticism recurs in /25/"At the Bay" (1921), which, like "Daughters," was written after Mansfield's encounter with "Prufrock."

Finally, the similarities between "Daughters" and "Prufrock" encompass central themes and their means of expression. Both explore a yearning for fulfilment that is ultimately frustrated by protagonists who fail to make a crucial, liberating decision. Both end on a note of evasion, with hope submerged and opportunity lost. In both works the central conflict involves minds divided against themselves, and is psychological rather than external.

In the case of "Daughters," that conflict is depicted in distinctly Freudian terms, a fact hitherto unnoticed yet indispensable to an adequate understanding of the story, and hence worth exploring in some detail. This Freudian thrust of "Daughters" deserves attention in its own right, regardless of its origins. But did Mansfield perhaps take her cue from "Prufrock," in this matter as in so many others? Perhaps, since "Prufrock," whatever Eliot's intentions and whatever its actual provenance<sup>vi</sup> is easily read as a parable about the repression of sexual desires or Freudian libido—in other words, in terms of early Freudian concepts that were distinctly in vogue by 1920, when Mansfield wrote "Daughters." Prufrock's second self, the "you" of his internal monologue, while propelling him toward a declaration of love, is, for example, not merely cat-like but libido-like, a somewhat disreputable creature who is solely devoted to what the early Freud called "the pleasure principle" and to achieving sensuous and sexual fulfilment. Prufrock's conscious self, the "I" of the story, who is akin to the Freudian ego, at first follows the lead of the libidinal voice. Later, in the cat-stroking episode, he soothes and stills it; finally he submerges it in an image that suggests, among other things, the repression of libidinal desires. These are relegated to "the chambers of the sea," a fine equivalent for Freud's unconscious, whether Eliot intended it to be or not, and denied any realistic fulfilment in the conscious waking world of human voices. The striking thematic similarities between this episode and the "forgetting" episode at the conclusion of "Daughters" are self-evident. /26/

In "Daughters," Mansfield, borrowing the theme from "Prufrock" and portraying it in distinctly Freudian terms, tells her own story of sexual repression and its life-denying consequences. That may sound implausible in the light of Mansfield's remarks about psychoanalysis (which was fundamentally Freudian at the time) in a letter to Middleton Murry of 13 October 1920:

I am amazed at the sudden 'mushroom growth' of cheap psycho analysis everywhere. *Five* novels one after the other are based on it: its in everything. And I want to prove it wont do—its turning Life into a *case*. And yet, of course, I do believe one ought to be able to—not ought—ones novel if its a good one will be capable of being *proved* scientifically to be correct.<sup>vii</sup> Here—the thing thats happening now is *the impulse to write is a different impulse*. With an artist—one has to allow—oh tremendously for the subconscious element in his work. He writes he knows not what—he's *possessed*. I dont mean, of course, always, but when he's *inspired* — *as* a sort of divine flower to all his terrific hard gardening there comes this subconscious . . . wisdom. Now these people who are nuts on analysis seem to me to have no subconscious at all. They write to *prove*—not to tell the truth. (O'Sullivan and Scott 4: 69)

She expresses similar views in "Psychology" (1919), which implicitly mocks the idea that " 'the young writers of to-day'" should be trying "'to jump the psycho-analyst's claim'" (321).

Marvin Magalaner detects an apparent contradiction: "Though Mansfield in her criticism ordinarily is scornful of writers who attempt to introduce Freudian concepts or even Freudian symbols into their fiction, in 'Bliss' she appears to be doing just that" (85). She does the same thing in "Daughters," and without contradiction. Properly understood, her sometimes incoherent letter to Murry proffers a distinct theory and implies a challenge. She wants to prove that one can write a story that conveys "the truth" of psychoanalytic insights not in terms of clinical ideas, but through the medium of art. Thus she rejects the "cheap psycho analysis" of novels that are merely mechanical case histories. She allows, though, for the "*inspired*" artistic work that will transmute "subconscious" insights into artistic "truths" that accord with psychoanalytic /27/ ideas and are in that sense "capable of being *proved* scientifically to be correct." 7 The challenge is to write this kind of story, one to which she rose magnificently in "Daughters," begun just one month later: after that period of germination, one assumes, her "subconscious" had done the "terrible hard gardening" that could transform crude psychoanalytic ideas—formless seeds—into "divine flowers" of wisdom.

But did Mansfield—scarcely the rigorous intellectual—know enough about Freudian psychoanalysis to take up her own challenge? She probably did. She must have learned something from all those "cheap" psychoanalytic novels that as a reviewer she so despised. And she would almost certainly have acquired a smattering of Freud from her associations with the Bloomsbury Group and with D.H. and Frieda Lawrence.<sup>viii</sup> Furthermore, English translations of Freud's works were widely available in the second decade of the century. Still, Mansfield's reading was haphazard, and largely limited to books she had to review. She never mentions actually reading Freud and probably did not: in her previously quoted letter she refers to "psycho analysis" instead of

"psychoanalysis" and makes the mistake, still common, of referring to the "subconscious" instead of the "preconscious" or "unconscious."<sup>ix</sup>

Nevertheless, by November 1920, when she wrote "Daughters," she had crossed the threshold of that period—from 1920 to 1940—in which Freudianism enjoyed an immense popular vogue. One way and another, Mansfield would surely have acquired some familiarity with Freud's ideas by 1920, enough to transmute the ore of his fundamental insights into the gold of her own images, rich in both comic and tragic implications.

The following pages offer a Freudian reading of "Daughters" that may strike modern readers as being in some respects too fundamental. The proper response is that the Freudian elements have hitherto gone unrecognized, despite the clarifying light they shed on the story, one that puzzled Mansfield's initial audience and has puzzled many readers since. For that matter, for the reasons just discussed, Mansfield's own understanding of Freud may well have been derivative and in some respects less than sophisticated. /28/

"The Daughters of the Late Colonel" tells the story of Constantia and Josephine, the motherless victims since childhood of a tyrannical father. Mansfield's deftly comic treatment of this situation prevents it from becoming melodramatic, yet allows for pathos and potential tragedy. This is no simple Freudian "case."

The predicament of the two spinster sisters rests on a paradox that Freud had helped to explain. The Late Colonel, though literally dead and buried, remains alive and well in the sisters' unconscious, whence he continues to direct their every move and to blight their prospects of escaping from the prison of the self to find happiness and fulfilment. The story reflects on the general theme of the subjugation of women. It also reflects on repression and its life-denying consequences: the sisters have repressed their own desires for fulfilment—including sexual fulfilment—in order to serve their father. Consequently, they have failed to grow up and develop along normal paths, and, thus, they frequently behave like children rather than adults, as they regress to earlier, childish stages of life, upon which they are fixated. Not surprisingly, they exhibit a Freudian ambivalence towards their father: subtle forms of hatred well up through the public surface of love and respect.

Freud's theories about free association and a closely related concept, the association of ideas, bear upon the treatment of time in "Daughters," something that critics make much of but never really explain. Alpers refers to the story's "curious shifts of time that work so well" (*Stories xxviii*). They imply "that time itself is one of the characters" (*Life* 327). In "Daughters," says Magalaner, "time has no meaning and no boundaries .... The sisters cannot exist in the definite realm of clock time" (92-93). Kobler describes the story's "mazelike treatment of time," and says of the two sisters that "the story involves flashbacks and returns that are seemingly beyond their mental control, even when it is their thoughts that create the flashbacks" (65).



Freudian theory can explain these puzzling "flashbacks and returns" that are beyond "mental control" and have nothing to do with normal "clock time." According to Freud, the mind's free associations are not really free at all, but reflect the hidden workings of the unconscious, where ideas may be associated without regard to logic or normal time sequence. Furthermore, associated ideas are often clues to unresolved conflicts lurking in the hidden recesses of the unconscious. In other words, patterns of association that flit about in time, and that may seem to be random, irrational, trivial, and irrelevant—like those in "Daughters"—may embody all-important truths in a disguised form (see, for example, Freud 1: 72-75, 129-42; Gay 71-73, 127n, 297-98; Strachey 18-20).

The story begins with an emphasis on Freudian parapraxis in the sense of "forgetting" something important because it is too disturbing to contemplate. Confronted by the fact of their father's death and funeral, the two sisters lie rigid on their beds, "thinking things out, talking things over, wondering, deciding, trying to remember where..." (386; ellipsis in original). Their intense mental effort, concluding with a mysterious ellipsis, suggests the operation of mental censorship. On the one hand, for reasons that do not become clear until Section 5, they dare not contemplate the dreadful fact that they have had father buried ("Buried. You two girls had me *buried!*"). Nor are they able to confront another equally disturbing fact, that he is "buried" forever in their unconscious minds, where he is very much alive and in control, as subsequent events will demonstrate.

Parapraxis in the sense of a Freudian slip of the tongue follows soon afterward: the unconscious subtext of Josephine's not entirely logical exclamation "father's head!" is that "father's dead!" This suitably disguised but exhilarating prospect almost provokes a fit of childish giggling, implying regression to an earlier stage of development: "Years ago, when they had stayed awake at night talking, their beds had simply heaved" (386).

"`We miss our dear father so much!": Josephine's twenty-three fits of weeping as she replies to twenty-three letters of condolence introduce a Freudian theme, the sisters' ambivalent feelings toward their dead father (387). Josephine's grief, though comically mechanical, is surely real. But soon afterward, in Section 4, Constantia's ambiguous response (something like a private, internal "slip of the tongue") to Josephine's plans for the funeral suggests the opposite side of the coin: /30/

`I should like it to be quite simple,' said Josephine firmly, `and not too expensive. At the same time, I should like—'

`A good one that will last,' thought dreamy Constantia, as if Josephine were buying a nightgown. (390)

According to Freud, both slips of the tongue and dreams may reflect wish fulfillments in a disguised form. Here "dreamy" Constantia clearly wants a funeral that will last—that is, one that will keep father safely dead and buried. She disguises that wish in a simile about

buying a good nightgown that follows, by free association, from what Josephine has just said. Her concerns about burial lead, again by free association, from Section 4 to Section 5, which explores the dreadful prospect that father is in some sense far from being dead and buried:

Neither of them could possibly believe that father was never coming back. Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. `Buried. You two girls had me *buried!*' She heard his stick thumping. Oh, what would they say? What possible excuse could they make? (391)

Section 6, literally about a trip to father's room in which the sisters steel themselves to "*Go through father's things and settle about them,*" is metaphorically a journey, rich in basic Freudian connotations, into the unconscious. Freud describes the systems of the mind in terms of two rooms: an entrance hall presided over by a watchman or censor, and a room beyond it, which is the domain of the unconscious (Freud 1: 336-37). In Mansfield's story a dark hall guards the approaches to father's room, where the sisters run into their *bête noir*, the servant Kate, terrifying, censorious, and omniscient: "As if anything ever deceived Kate!" (392). Struggling with the door handle, they regress to childish patterns of speech: "'You—you go first.'... `No Jug, that's not fair. You're eldest' . . . . `But you're tallest'" (392). Within father's room itself, events take on the dream-like quality associated with Freud's unconscious: "they weren't in father's room at all .... Was the door just be-~~31~~/hind them? . . . Constantia felt that like the doors in dreams, it hadn't any handle at all" (392). The sense of regression becomes even more pronounced: Josephine "pulled a funny old-fashioned face at Constantia, just as she used to in the old days when she was going to cry. `I can't open,' she nearly wailed" (393). The scene concludes with Constantia triumphantly turning the key in father's wardrobe as if to lock him in. Her triumph is hollow: symbolically she has ensured that father will remain "locked in" forever at an unconscious level, whence he will continue to blight their prospects for liberation and happiness.

A series of free associations follows these events. Constantia's triumph reminds her of a childish incident in which she pushed brother Benny into the Round Pond. The image corresponds to a Freudian "screen memory" of childhood: it implies but never directly states that Benny, another despotic male, is a chip off the old block.<sup>x</sup> That proves to be the case, as Josephine imagines him giving orders to a black runner in Ceylon, where her father had also served: "His right hand shook up and down, as father's did when he was impatient" (394). Further free association links this section with the succeeding Section 8. Thoughts about giving father's watch to Benny lead to thoughts about time and then to thoughts about their dear nephew Cyril, who, as Sections 8 and 9 establish, has little or

no "time" for them: he arrives late, saying " `I had to meet a man at Victoria'" (395), and leaves early with the excuse that " `I've got to meet a man at—at Paddington'" (396). The subtext is clear enough: beyond the house lies a man's world, which has no time for spinster aunts.

Section 10 deals with the crucial question of whether or not to sack Kate, the servant to whom they are subservient. Symbolically, sacking Kate would amount to getting rid of the Freudian watchman or censor who is at the same time another stand-in for father: she consistently treats the sisters with authoritarian contempt. Significantly, Constantia exhibits Freudian "resistance" to a prospect that would represent getting rid of father's influence and taking control of her own destiny: she almost falls asleep when having to confront making a "definite decision" about Kate (399). The theme of chronic indecision, which is also at the heart of "Prufrock," comes to the fore. " `Isn't it curious, Jug,' said she, `that just on this /32/ one subject I've never been able to quite make up my mind?'" (399). It becomes clear, both here and in Section 11, that neither sister, since childhood, has ever been able to make up her mind about anything that matters; also that this chronic disability has its roots in a psychological conflict between children and father reminiscent of those that Freud had explored.

The concluding Section 12 begins on a promising note with images of healthy intrusions from the outside world—the organ-grinder and his music from the street below, the sun that "thieved its way in" (401), and the young sparrows, ready to take flight, cheeping on the windowsill. The organ-grinder's music triggers a string of free associations and the conviction, for a moment, that father really is dead and buried. The theme, for once, is "remembering" rather than "forgetting"

Then they remembered. It didn't matter. They would never have to stop the organ-grinder again. Never again would she and Constantia be told to make that monkey take his noise somewhere else .... The organ-grinder might play there all day and the stick would not thump. (400)

Josephine's long-standing association of the organ-grinder's music with father's thumping stick now yields to a new refrain. Its nursery-rhyme rhythms suggest the fulfilment of a profound wish that goes all the way back to childhood:

*It never will thump again,  
It never will thump again.* (400)

Constantia's refrain ("A week since fatter died, / A week since father died" (4001) ) is of the same order.

These insights lead to Constantia's confrontation with "her favorite Buddha," who stands on the mantelpiece, smiling enigmatically: " `I know something that you don't

know,' said her Buddha" (401). In Freudian terms, the Buddha is something like a benign alternate father figure—the one she wants, but has never had—who approves of her hopes for liberation and smiles upon the sacrificial, erotic fantasies in which "she had lain on the floor with her arms outstretched" (402). Immediately afterward comes the recognition, only half-comprehended, that she and Josephine have squandered the best years of their lives in their father's service. /33/

The story concludes on a moment of truth akin to Prufrock's, when there is no time left for procrastination and he must make a potentially liberating decision *now*. "What did it mean?" asks Constantia. "What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now?" (402). But the moment passes when the mental censor intervenes, like a cloud blotting out the sunlight, and the story returns to its initial Freudian theme of forgetting, which echoes the Prufrockian theme of submerging beneath the waves into the chambers of the sea. Constantia forgets what it was that she was going to say. Josephine "stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, 'I've forgotten too'" (402). Father's will has triumphed, and Constantia and Josephine are destined to remain the Daughters of the Late Colonel for as long as they both shall live.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Bell mistakes the date of the event; see Alpers, *Life* 239.
- <sup>ii</sup> Dates of stories derive throughout from Alpers, *Stories*.
- <sup>iii</sup> Bruch Hayman argues for a young Prufrock, but the consensus sees him as middle-aged. Mansfield's spinster sisters must be middleaged, since they have a thirty-five-year-old photograph of their mother, who died during their childhood ("Daughters" 401).
- <sup>iv</sup> The crab image may echo Prufrock's "pair of ragged claws." Mansfield also used crab images in "At the Bay" (1921) and "A Married Man's Story" (1921), both written after her encounter with "Prufrock."
- <sup>v</sup> Cats appear in just three of some fifty stories that Mansfield wrote prior to reading "Prufrock." "Enna Blake" (1898) and "Ole Underwood" (1913) feature kittens, and "Epilogue I: Pension Seguin" (1913) describes "a large black stove that had the appearance of a headless cat" (138).
- <sup>vi</sup> Eliot claimed that the form in which he began to write was based on Jules Laforgue and the later Elizabethan drama. If "Prufrock" embodies a concept of the unconscious, it probably came from Karl Van Hartmann, through Jules Laforgue, rather than from Freud (Tindall 277-79). Nowhere does Eliot express any enthusiasm for Freud. As a

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young man he typically withdrew from disturbing new ideas and "reverted to his need for order, for discipline, for tradition" (Ackroyd 41). Whereas Roger Fry and Herbert Read embraced Freudianism, Eliot, as critic, was "filled with /34/ scruples" (Tindall 216). But as an undergraduate at Harvard until June 1910, Eliot might have encountered Freudian ideas. By mid-1905 Freud had published works that described his fundamental principles (Gay 153). Ernest Jones offered a colloquium on Freud in Boston in 1908; Freud himself lectured at Clark College in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1909 (Jones 267-68). Eliot completed "Prufrock" in the summer of 1910 (Ackroyd 45). Note that Eliot himself underwent a form of "psychological therapy" in 1921, from which he claimed to have benefited (Ackroyd 115-17), and that the "very great doctor" who reconciles husband and wife in *The Cocktail Party* (1949) is "half-priestly and half-analytical" (Ackroyd 295).

<sup>vii</sup> Modern readers might of course question Mansfield's view that psychoanalytic insights are "scientific."

<sup>viii</sup> Re the Bloomsbury Group and Freud, see, for example, Alexander 135-36, 198; Alpers, *Life* 227-30; Holroyd 161-62, 181-82; Kallich 31-43; Meisel, Introduction passim; Strachey, Lytton 112-20. Re the Lawrences and Freud see, for example, Tindall 223, 225; Alpers, *Life* 160-214 et passim; Maddox 102-109; Worthen 442-44.

<sup>ix</sup> Re misuse of the term "subconscious," see Gay 453, 453n.

<sup>x</sup> Like dreams, screen memories of incidents from childhood escape mental censorship by disguising their "forbidden" content (Freud 1: 236-37).

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