

Dramatization of Tea in British Novels and Short Stories in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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“Serious literature responds imaginatively to its intellectual climate,”¹ Dominic Head argues in his recent book. Head’s argument attempts to describe the interaction of fiction and the real world. It is inevitable that the literary work carries impacts of its times, but through its ability to fictionalize and reimagine, it affords a reinvigorating perspective on the real. This article takes tea scenes in major writers’ works in the first half of the twentieth century to see how these dramatized moments yield a special insight to the important areas of social and cultural history.

As a literary device, tea is often a medium through which human relationships are examined, because tea is Janus-faced - though a polite ritual, it sometimes reveals unexpected underlayers. The discrepancy between surface and depth creates the space for literary imagination and recreation.

Tea scenes are abundant in late Victorian literature. Major writers, such as Henry James and Oscar Wilde among others, unanimously blend tea scenes into their writing, not as merely decorative passages, but as a substantial device that fabricates plots and structures of the narratives.² Diversified as these writers’ concerns and styles are from each other, tea nevertheless possesses sufficient flexibility to cope with that. The reason for this flexibility is tea’s long existence in British life and the literary tradition of tea scenes which has been nurtured by writers of different times after tea was introduced into the British islands in early seventeenth century. Virginia Woolf, a contemporary and acquaintance to most of the writers whose works are examined in this article, employs tea scenes in a

series of her novels, from *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), through *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and *The Years* (1937) to *Between the Acts* (1941), to tackle gender and feminist issues from different aspects of upper and middle class women's life.³ Though perceived over approximately the same span of time as Woolf's, the tea scenes examined hereafter feature a mixture of social classes and groups in different situations that are presented in a kaleidoscopic variety.

The purpose of this article is to see from the unique angle of tea scenes profound confusion and disparity across social classes brought by fundamental social changes, especially the two World Wars, and I will place the literary texts centre stage to reveal the significant patterns and themes in these reimaged teas that are deeply rooted in the contemporary life.

To serve this purpose, this article will examine a selection of works by writers who employ teas as the reflecting moments that highlight social differences within or without classes. The examination opens with texts of E.M. Forster and H.G. Wells, two prominent literary figures notably addressed themselves to their contemporary context. Samuel Hynes "finds everywhere in Edwardian writing the sense of disturbing changes, and the essential Edwardian mood is sombre - a feeling of nostalgia for what has gone, and of apprehension for what is to come."⁴ He also points out "a fundamental fact about the Edwardian decade," which "was concerned with the state of society, and acknowledged the urgency and force of social change..."⁵ Hynes's observation sets the tone for the tea scenes in this period. We will find characters in the teas are more socially mobile, yet as ever alienated and in conflict with each other than exchange of sociability and courtesy the occasion originally meant. The teas become the place that registers the general and drastic social changes. Meanwhile the contextual quality of tea makes it an extremely resourceful device for literary exploration.

The Tea that Makes a False Connection in *Howards End* (1910)

In *Forster, Ford, and the New Novel of Manners*, Galef observes: "It is a commonplace that the novel is a historical document, the product of its era...Registering the impact of society on the individual, this genre functions as both a record and a critique..."⁶ Forster's *Howards End* is such an example, a typical "condition of England" novel. "Only connect..."⁷ is the epigraphic theme of *Howards End* in face of the huge social changes. E. M. Forster believed above all in personal relationships and the private life, and *Howards End* seems to demonstrate some belief that problems confronting individual or society in general might be solved by a modification of outlook or imagination - by acquiring the faculty to connect one's own experience with that of other people. As Stevenson observes, such sentiments belong firmly to the heyday of British liberalism in the period from 1906 to 1914.⁸

In the narrative, the Bastis present a general challenge to the Schlegels by their vulgarity, and interrupted their ordered life. Their intrusions are at first comic - Helen takes Leonard's umbrella by mistake at a Beethoven concert - but become more serious when Leonard loses his post by taking Henry Wilcox's advice at a tea party at the Schlegels. Jackie, the wife is later revealed as a former mistress to Henry Wilcox, Helen in a symbolic act gives herself to Leonard and becomes the mother of his child, and Leonard finally perished from a heart attack precipitated by a blow from Charles Wilcox.

The Schlegel girls initiate him into the tangle of the cross-class plot. After meeting him accidentally at the concert, they invite Leonard to tea to warn him of the dangerous situation of the company he worked with, which they've learned from Henry Wilcox. The occasion is further complicated when Henry himself steps in and meets Leonard. Eventually the Schlegels' tea turns into a farcical yet serious class conflict, among the strong misunderstanding and disbelief from Leonard. The disparity submerged in this singular tea scene highlights the difficulty of the

“Forstian” epigraph of “only connect....”

In fact, the polite social occasion of tea has been used to emphasize class differences. Looking back the history of tea in the British islands, in the early part of the eighteenth century tea was the preserve for the well-off, the precious leaves doled out from the locked caddies by the mistress of the house. Later, as tea became a popular taste, they slid to disrepute and were soon vanished and forgotten. By the mid nineteenth century tea was a luxury that even the poor tried to afford, drying out the leaves - often sold to them adulterated - for repeated use. Maxine Berge observes in *Consumers and Luxury* that the tea-table was one of the major growth areas of luxury production and consumption and a key area for the understanding of the dynamics of household organization and communication in the eighteenth century. For the wealthy people, the tea-drinking provided them with an opportunity to display their magnificence in the matter of tea-pots, cups and so on.⁹ From another perspective, Marjorie Morgan concludes in *Manners, Morals and Class in England 1774-1858* that from the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, opportunities for economic, political and social advancement had surged, causing the aristocratic elite to become more defensive and exclusive. More complicated etiquette was developed to keep the aristocracy as well as smaller fashionable circles apart from and more refined than those they considered beneath them in the social scale.¹⁰ It is against this historical background that afternoon tea was finally established into a formal and ceremonious occasion of visiting for the fashionable society, with fully developed complicated etiquette and fancy equipages.

Though the reduction of heavy duty from the mid-1840s turned tea into a staple of the popular diet affordable for almost all social classes, the difference in established social meanings of tea and tea habits of different classes remained intact. To see Forster’s tea scene in this context will be easier to catch the nuances in

the narrative, and to understand the meaning in the description of the tea cups and their consequent effect on Leonard Bast.

‘Sugar?’ said Margaret.

‘Cake?’ said Helen. ‘The big cake or the little deadlies? I’m afraid you thought my letter rather odd, but we’ll explain - we aren’t odd, really - nor affected, really. We’re over-expressive: that’s all.’

As a lady’s lap-dog Leonard did not excel. He was not an Italian, still less a Frenchman, in whose blood there runs the very spirit of persiflage and of gracious repartee. His wit was the Cockney’s; it opens no doors into imagination, and Helen was drawn up short by ‘The more a lady has to say, the better’, administered waggishly.

‘Oh yes,’ she said.

‘Ladies brighten -’

‘Yes, I know. The darlings are regular sunbeams. Let me give you a plate.’

‘How you like your work?’ interposed Margaret.

He, too, was drawn up short. He would not have these women prying into his work. They were Romance, and so was the room to which he had at last penetrated, with the queer sketches of people bathing upon its walls, and so were the very teacups, with their delicate borders of wild strawberries. But he would not let Romance interfere with his life. There is the devil to pay then.

...

He drank, and wiped his moustache, which was going to be one of those moustaches that always droop into teacups - more bother than they’re worth, surely, and not fashionable either.

...

‘I don’t want your patronage. I don’t want your tea...’¹¹

The Schlegel girls know they are doing an unconventional thing in inviting Leonard Bast who is from another social group. The man has previously impressed them with his pretension to culture and they sincerely wish to know him and if possible, help him by warning him of the dangerous situation the company he worked. Conscious of the gaps between their different life styles, the girls are eager to make Leonard comfortable at their tea table, which the man is obviously unfamiliar with. Regretfully the man neither has the intuitiveness nor the cultivation to appreciate the sisters' kindness and good will. Rather singularly, he suspects that their hospitality and enthusiasm is a trap, and in his inadequate understanding of the Schlegel aesthetics, the decorative painting of the room and the delicate tea cups are all taken as evidence of their impracticability. Through description of their different tea manners and conversations and the momentary glimpse into Leonard's thoughts, Forster prepares the reader for a conflict.

The Schlegel girls and Bast represent two social classes, and the man is shown as the inferior in his failure to comprehend the others' generosity. He too quickly picks impression from the decoration of the room and tea utensils to judge and stereotype the Schlegels. Preoccupied with his own class stereotyping and limited by his social environment, the man is not able to reach a higher understanding of his fair friends. His tea manners, especially the caricature of his awkward moustache, are a metaphor of his limitations and his lack of self-knowledge. Margaret shows her disapproval of the inadequacy in his education: "She knew this type very well - the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books."¹² Mutual antipathies rise before actual personal intercourse from pure class stereotyping.

Indeed Leonard's hopes are kindled only at the cost of great pain, and he will come to mistrust the healing power of culture, as will Margaret Schlegel concludes: "Culture had worked in her own case, but during the last few weeks she had

doubted whether it humanized the majority, so wide and so widening is the gulf that stretches between the natural and the philosophic man, so many the good chaps who are wrecked in trying to cross it."¹³

The tea uniquely bring these characters physically close, close enough to observe the small details suggestive of more profound differences. While the conventional function of such social occasions lead one to expect a harmonious gathering, the scene develops into a conflict. The man's self-righteous misunderstanding of the girls and the girls' indignity of being wronged, turn the tea into a farcical failure.

On the other hand, the Schlegels' tea with their upper-middle class aestheticism and social manners become class wall for Leonard (in his own thoughts he describes his visit of the Schlegel's as "he had at last penetrated"). Leonard's thoughts clearly differ from the Schlegels' who have perceived it as a connecting site. Unexpectedly, it turns out to be the false connecting place, in particular in the relation between Leonard and Henry that obviously lacked sincerity. In contrast to the Schlegels' good will, the Wilcoxes refuse to treat Leonard as an equal. Margaret's endeavor at the unpleasant meeting however impresses Henry, who begins to feel attracted to her. In this sense the Schlegels begin to function as the hinge that connects the classes above and below them into an entangled fate. Barbara Rosecrance notes Forster's method: "The conscious intent of *Howard End* is to resolve conflict and affirm possibility."¹⁴ Forster, by upstaging a conflict in this unfulfilling tea, will spend the rest of narrative trying to solve it.

Apart from this perplexing tea scene, tea in another occasion spotlights the only Schlegel man, Tibby. The Cambridge educated brother hardly shows any sympathy or belief in his sisters' efforts to connect. On Leonard's first visit to the Schlegels for his umbrella, Tibby however steals back to make a private tea for his family.

The brother, finding the incident commonplace, had stolen upstairs to see whether there were scones for tea. He warmed the teapot - almost too deftly-rejected the Orange Pekoe that the parlour-maid provided, poured in five spoonfuls of a superior blend, filled up with really boiling water, and now called the ladies to be quick or they would lose the aroma. ¹⁵

Tibby is indifferent to the working class Bast as well as the capitalist Wilcoxes, the empire builders who are 'irrevocably masculine'; he is the effeminate literary intellectual. Tibby's behavior annoys both of his sisters, who rightly accuse him of only caring for cultured females singing Brahms. The narrator, probably the author himself, shares this criticism embodied in his comment of Tibby's tea manners (of being "almost too deftly"). Rosecrance appositely calls Tibby "Margaret's effeminate brother,"¹⁶ which his tea scene seems to give the best footnote. His connoisseurship in tea and preference of good cups of tea with his sisters over communication with men from other classes reveal his lack of interest in other classes. Tibby's tea will also quickly remind those who are familiar with Oscar Wilde, of the dandy's tea in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Dorian poured tea for Lord Henry and the jealous Hallward. Reading Tibby's tea with Wilde's homoerotic scene makes him even a more effeminate character. If the sisters' unfulfilled tea revealed the difficulty to connect, the brother's points to the urgency to connect.

In an interpretation which first appeared in his book *E. M. Forster* (1943), Lionel Trilling offered a thoroughgoing symbolic reading according to which *Howards End* was to be seen as "a novel about England's fate," "a story of the class war."¹⁷

Daniel Born in his recent book disputes Trilling's analysis of the novel, and argues it needs revision on one crucial point. For Born, most distorting is Trilling's insistence that the novel's characters all belong to the middle class. This denial of class differences obscures far more than it illuminates, yet few readers have

bothered to question it. The flaccid term, “middle class” made here to encompass at one stroke the poverty line Basts, the independently wealthy Schlegels, and the rapidly rising Wilcoxes, might be an indisputable labels as defined by Trilling: everyone who is neither destitute nor blueblood royalty. When we ponder the enormous differences in cultural outlook, living space, and habits of the Basts, the Schlegels, and the Wilcoxes, the blanket term “middle class” is rendered empty. There is a struggle - Leonard’s demanding recognition. There is economic oppression; there are possessors and dispossessed.¹⁸

Though Forster’s treatment of the class needs reconsideration, the tea scenes he used to reflect class consciousness are well designed, effectively utilize the existing social meanings in tea, and the teas reasonably collect the characters across social classes to highlight class alienation and difference in the minute details of tea manners. It is a ritual Forster and his contemporary readers were familiar with as it was ubiquitous and practiced daily. Forster has found the right place to detonate the explosion for his class war.

Born, while pointing to Forster’s condescendence and lack of knowledge for the portrait of the working class characters, nevertheless acknowledges the portrait of Leonard Bast “is reminiscent of Gissing, especially Gissing’s proletarian intellectuals who, barely scraping by, manage despite exhaustion to read a little literature in their shorted evenings. Like Gilbert Grail in *Thyrza*, or even Hardy’s *Jude*, Bast has achieved tragic consciousness of his condition.”¹⁹

The Dreadful Teas in H.G.Wells’s *Kipps* (1905) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1909)

Slightly before Forster’s *Howard End*, H.G. Wells published two of his naturalistic works, *Kipps: The Life of a Simple Soul* and *The History of Mr. Polly*, which established him as a serious writer. In both novels, Wells employs tea as the demanding social manners and occasions that ambush his ignorant class-

climbing characters. Henry James praises *Kipps* (which he would later call “raw”) in a letter to Wells: “You have written the first closely and intimately, the first intelligently and consistently ironic or satiric novel...You have for the very first time treated the English lower middle class, etc., without the picturesque, the grotesque, the fantastic and romantic interference.”²⁰ Wells himself does not have a genteel background; he knows something about how many people felt, and he makes spirited attempts to translate his perception of contemporary actualities into symbolic forms. His tea scenes in these two novels, matching his naturalistic style, are convincing and unmistakably ironic, which symbolically depict the heroes baffled by the cultural walls.

Kipps tells of the life of a draper’s assistant. An entirely unexpected legacy leaves him in possession of a house, and twelve hundred pounds a year. He determines to rise to his new position. He essays culture and labours Encyclopedia Britannica. He seeks reform of pronunciation, and makes uneasy efforts at “calling,” “dinner parties” and “Anagram Teas.” But as the title of the novel indicates, Kipps remains a shop-boy no less in manner than in soul. He shows no adaptability whatever, incapable of sloughing off even the externals of habit that has been fashioned by his instincts and earlier surroundings. His difficulties with the etiquettes and manners are vivid revealed in tea, an important social occasion for the class his money has raised him into.

He discovered Miss Coote was asking him whether he took milk and sugar. “I don’t mind,” said Kipps. “Jest as you like.”

Coote became active handing tea and bread-and-butter. It was thinly cut, and the bread was rather new, and the half of the slice that Kipps took fell upon the floor. He had been holding it by the edge, for he was not used to this migratory method of taking tea without plates or table. This little incident

ruled him out of the conversation for a time, and when he came to attend to it again they were talking about something or other prodigious - a performer of some sort - that was coming, called, it seemed, "Padrooski." So Kipps, who had dropped quietly into a chair, ate his bread-and-butter, said "No, thank you" to any more, and by this discreet restraint got more freedom with his cup and saucer.²²

Kipps comes from a lower class than Leonard Bast, and less educated and less self-conscious than Leonard. His awkward handling of tea and bread inconveniently betrays his lack of training in social skills, while his lack of awareness and knowledge of the topics of the fashionable society makes it impossible for him to mingle and engage in conversation with the others. The teas become the testing place for him, and quickly beat his ambition to enter the society that he desires. Later an Anagram tea, the popular and fashionable entertainment for social gathering makes him flee to London, where he makes a conspicuous scene in a hotel.

Learning from his failures after the Anagram Tea, Kipps feels fatally wearied and wounded. He then turns from Miss Cootes and settles down with a little serving-maid who he loved when a boy. His wife who is even less equipped with the etiquette and manners, finds herself less fit the role her new status forced on her, even after Kipps's wealth is largely reduced by a misfortune. One day, Ann has the misfortune to 'slap guests in the face' out of blunder who obviously mistaken her as a maid, because she answered door in untidy cloth in the middle of house keeping. Ann makes a tea for Kipps to make up for her terrible social failure when he is back.

"Tea, Artie," said Ann, handing him a cup.

Kipps took it.

"I put sugar once," said Ann.

"Oo, desh it! Oo cares?" said Kipps, taking an extraordinarily large additional lump with fury-quivering fingers, and putting his cup with a slight excess of force on the recess cupboard. "Oo cares?"

"I wouldn't 'ave that 'appen," he said, bidding steadily against accomplished things, "for twenty pounds."

He gloomed in silence through a long minute or so.

Then Ann said the fatal thing that exploded him. "Artie!" she said.

"What?"

"There's Buttud Toce down there! By your foot!"

There was a pause; husband and wife regarded one another.

"Buttud Toce!" he said. "You go and mess up them callers and then you try and stuff me up with Buttud Toce! Buttud Toce indeed! 'Ere's our first chance of knowing anyone that's at all fit to 'sociate with ...

"Ow was I to know about y'r old visitors?" cried Ann in a wail, and suddenly got up and fled from amidst their ruined tea, the tea of which "toce, all buttery," was to be the crown and glory.²³

Unlike the timid and good-tempered Kipps in the earlier tea scene, he is tyrannical with his little wife and totally unashamed of his bad tea manners and language, and has the guts to explode when Ann points out that he has dropped the buttered toast in anger. Of course he is mad not merely with Ann, but with the intangible but thick walls that block his way to the higher classes.

Wells employs tea in a similar way as the inter-class place that highlights the class differences, but unlike Leonard Bast in *Howards End*, who lacks the cushion of money that allows him to forget about material comforts in favor of culture, Wells produces

the opposite case in *Kipps* and *Ann*. The couple is repeatedly humiliated and bruised by their lack of culture and manners in spite of the money. Wells and Forster have, in different direction, pointed to the segregation of the classes, but Wells' naturalistic tea scenes, convincing as they are, lack the social texture and depth of those in Forster's.

In *The History of Mr. Polly*, which in many ways resembles *Kipps*, Wells continues his experiment with tea. Polly is again the 'lucky' guy who received an unexpected fortune that raised him to the well-off class. His earlier acquaintance, Mrs. Larkins, has three daughters all reached marriage age. The Larkins are far from being rich; they could not offer the daughters decent social entertainment to catch a husband. Polly has come one day to visit them, and the mother manages to invite him to their simple tea. Trying to make good use of this only social life available to them, the Larkins girls do their best to please Polly at the tea table. Of course, Polly notices the Larkins tea table that reveals their slender means.

There was a threadbare table-cloth on the table, and the slop-basin and teapot did not go with the cups and saucers, the plates were different again, the knives worn down, the butter lived in a greenish glass dish of its own.²⁴

As discussed in the earlier parts, the tea-table has been a key area for the understanding of the dynamics of household organization, and tea utensils are an important index to see a family's economy and sense of aesthetics. For example, the working class Mrs. Barton in *Mary Barton* feels satisfied with owning a decent set of tea things, and Fleda Vetch in *The Spoils of Poynton* shall feel ashamed of her father vulgar tea things when she has to invite Owen Gereth to tea. The Larkins' family economy is spoken by their tea things. Nevertheless Polly is comfortably flattered, though he knows what the Larkins are aiming at. His playfulness will trap him when he is carried off and begins to flirt with one of the girls:

Quite by accident he touched her hand on the table, and she answered his touch. "Why not?" thought Mr. Polly, and looking up, caught Mrs. Larkins' eye and flushed guiltily. But Mrs. Larkins, with unusual restraint, said nothing.²⁵

This comical episode is rather awkward and pathetic; the girl is simply seeking a marriage to secure herself from the awkwardness and poverty of a spinster. Polly loses his head being so enthusiastically sought after. The mother is planning to marry off her daughters, so when she witnesses the 'intimacy' between Polly and her girl she strategically keeps controlled. Her silence demands a promise, which Polly finds himself have to give and keep. He proposes the same day.

Matching his social naturalism, Wells's tea scenes are convincing details that reveal the awkward position of his misplaced characters, and propel the development of the plot. His use of tea is reminiscent of Elizabeth Gaskell's tea scenes such as those in *Mary Barton* that portray the poverty and the misery of the working class, as well as those in *Cranford* that make fun of the 'shabby genteel'. But the element of social displacement and the consequent anxiety in the narrative connect Wells to the common concern of his contemporary.

Differences are easily discernable between Wells and Forster. Stevenson argues Wells is a novelist committed to objective documentation at the possible expense of development of 'the psychology of the free human individual'.²⁶ Wells himself suggests in *Kipps* that "the business of the novelist is not ethical principle, but facts," and claims that "I had rather be called a journalist than an artist."²⁷ This apparent distaste for art in the novel was the center of a dispute with Henry James supplementing the quarrels of Woolf with the Edwardians. These writers seemed to James to place in their novels a 'slice of life' simply transcribed from reality without being 'wrought and shaped' by a technique highlighting or giving significant form to their material.²⁸ Indeed in comparison with Forster, Wells' teas

yielded little sense of a substantial inner life, but they constitute an organic part of the plot and depict the characters' awkwardness sandwiched between class walls. This difference in stylistic preference is probably one of those separate Wells from his modernist contemporaries. For example, Katherine Mansfield, whose tea scenes are examined hereafter, uses tea as a containing form for a short story. While the story evolves around a tea that accidentally connect two women from different classes, the narrative goes beneath the surface to explore the depth of the characters' inner life.

Katherine Mansfield's *A Cup of Tea* (1922)

Katherine Mansfield is one of the major figures of Modernism known for her short stories. Her stories move away from plot as the organizing principle and emphasize the discontinuity of the moments of truly existential wonder and terror. As Clare Hanson notes in *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980*, both the view of causal relations embodied in the conventional plot and the neat "finality" of the traditional ending seems, for the modernists in general and Katherine in particular, "to convey the misleading notion of something finished, absolute, and wholly understood."²⁹ For Mansfield, short story form, which is brief, unpredictable and discontinuous, and tied to no orderly way to rational or sequential experience, suits the modernist view of the discovery of meaning and of the self.

A Cup of Tea centers on a rich, fashionable, vain, "not exactly beautiful" and ultimately frivolous woman, Rosemary Fell, who decides that it will be fun to help save a girl that she comes across begging on the London Streets. Rosemary's game of sisterly solidarity, however, quickly evaporates when her husband comments that the girl is "astonishingly beautiful [...] absolutely lovely."³⁰ She consequently turns the girl out with a three-pound note.

The story is about class, as 'a cup of tea' is the fragile and temporary connection

between the upper-middle class woman and a begging girl, and at the same time indicates the inconsequentiality of the incident. Syndey Kaplan appositely observes: "Mansfield's late work [...] are cry against corruption, expressions of outrage against a society in which privilege is so marked by indifference to the misery of others that it must demean or ignore any unmediated reaction to injustice..."³¹ It is also about gender, when the husband steps into her bedroom to find her at tea with a young starved girl, Rosemary finds herself face a dilemma. She has to quickly make a decision: either to go on with her whimsical adventure with the girl, or to risk her relation with her husband? It is in this decision that the theme of the story lies. Mansfield's talent in imbuing in casual happenings the profound issues of life is well noticed. Willa Cather observes: "Mansfield's peculiar gift lay in her interpretation of these secret accords and antipathies which lie hidden under our everyday behaviour, and which more than any outward events makes our lives happy or unhappy."³² Mansfield employs tea not only to collect the two women who are otherwise unlikely to be intimate, but also to expose them to the husband who is a symbol of the patriarchy, for Rosemary to reach a vaguely grasped quasi-epiphany.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator describes Rosemary as a "young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new book," and capable of achieving "the most delicious mixture of the really important people" at her party. But stepping out of an antique shop, she experiences moments of depression: "There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea." When she decides to fill the emptiness with an extra-special tea, a girl comes to her begging for a cup of tea, which suddenly opens for Rosemary an alternative, "like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky."

Rosemary quickly decides to take her home for tea. As they drive to Rosemary's home, "[Rosemary] had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, 'Now I've got you,' as she gazed at the little captive she had netted." Rosemary's thoughts are inconsistent and self-contradictory, if she sees the girl as a captive, her action is suspect. Emily Eells in *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture*, marks out tea as a code for homoeroticism; in the first chapter which conspicuously name "A Gay English Tea Party," she discusses the gay activities under the cover of tea.³³ Couldn't the fashionable and well read Rosemary aims at the same adventure, while she claims that 'women were sisters.' Meaningfully the phrase is italicized in the text. Kate Fullbrook warns us that the only way to read Mansfield's stories, "is to be alert to their obliqueness, untrustworthy surfaces, and lack of overt narrative instruction for the reader at the same time as paying attention to the urgent signs of meaning that are dissolved all through the text rather than being concentrated at climactic points."³⁴ Indeed the narrative grows more ambiguous.

Arriving home, Rosemary hurries the girl upstairs to her bedroom and reminds herself that "[t]he great thing was to be natural." In her comfortable and luxurious bedroom, Rosemary persuades the girl to take a seat before the fire and helps her get off her overcoat and hat, and is irritated by the numb and embarrassed girl: "if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed." Yet the little girl doesn't become spontaneous, instead tell her that she was going to faint.

Here the class wall emerges. While tea is a ceremonious and aesthetic ritual for the leisured class, for the working class it is a meal. To Rosemary, a cup of tea is no more than refreshment, but the starving girl depends on the cup of tea for quick nourishment to keep her alive. As in many Mansfield's stories, the sufferer is nearly always placed in conjunction with another person who is emotionally incapable

of responding to her pain. The alienation here is not merely fragmented personal experience, but class wall that makes the two women unknowable to each other.

Rosemary suddenly remembers what she has taken the girl home for. She rushes to the bell. "Tea! Tea at once!" She then adds: "And some brandy immediately!" The poor girl is frightened by the calling of brandy, and cries out "I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want" then bursts into tears.

Probably Rosemary orders Brandy to keep the girl from fainting, but the girl must have imagined connection between alcohol and sexual corruption. Rosemary tries to comfort the girl, but the scene grows more uncomfortable.

The phrase that "they were both women" is repeated in the text, while Rosemary piles the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup is empty she fills it with tea, cream and sugar. She herself doesn't need tea, what she wants is the girl's feedback.

When the tea is finished, Rosemary says to herself "it was time to begin." But here comes the turn: her husband, Philip comes in and is then introduced to the girl. After a polite talk over the weather, the couple retreat to the library to discuss what is going on. Rosemary stammers: "Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don't know how. We haven't talked yet. But show her - treat her - make her feel - ." It is extraordinary the experienced hostess who is capable of achieving "the most delicious mixture of the really important people" at her party should stammer here. "It simply can't be done." Philip decides.

J. F. Kobler reads the story as a wife-husband conflict, which surfaces in this scene, and comments: "Philip stamps himself here with the mark of a traditional, rational, sexually repressed male who undoubtedly has said many times before to Rosemary's unclear and never fully articulated emotional and physical requests that they 'simply can't be done'."³⁵ When Rosemary responds, "I knew you'd say that," she seems to acquiesce, but is then alerted when Philip says slowly: 'she's so

astonishingly pretty.”

Gilbert Phelps, in discussion of Chekhov’s influences on Mansfield, acknowledges “[t]here were undoubtedly elements in her own temperament and sensibility that found a genuine stimulus in Chekhov. It came naturally to her to develop her stories by the gradual accumulation of impressionistic scenes, to use random details, casual incidents, unconscious gestures and remarks, making them suddenly responsible for the whole emotional content of a tale, as a small lever launches an unexpected weight, and to choose themes of melancholy, frustration, indifference.”³⁶ The husband’s seemingly random comment on the girl is the “small lever” here, easily reverses the accumulated ‘sisterhood’ Rosemary built in the first half of the narrative. The husband’s words touch something deep in Rosemary and sent her to quick decision.

Rosemary is immensely startled. “‘Pretty?’ Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed.” Rosemary’s reaction to Philip’s comment is excessive. Kobler interprets that Rosemary is made to realize that she really has been physically attracted to the girl and that their future relationships, so ambiguously grasped by Rosemary, might well follow a lesbian route.³⁷ This interpretation is reasonable, taking into consideration of Rosemary’s suspect action and thought. Of course, Rosemary may blush simply because she is made to realize that she is not as pretty in her husband’s eyes as the girl is in her awkward condition. Which is true we don’t know (description of the girl in the narrative is left open); the husband may try to upset Rosemary by saying so. We can neither get any prove from the description of Philip’s response when he enters the bedroom. He simply “stopped and stared” which could be explained that he was “bowled over” by the girl who was “absolutely lovely,” or simple startled by her bedraggled condition beside the “exquisitely well dressed” Rosemary.

Andrew Bennett’s analysis of these ambiguous and inconclusive moments in

Mansfield helps us understand this special approach: "Mansfield's narratives often explore epiphanic moments not as revelations but as resistance to revelation, as the displacement of meaning and the suspension of sense, as the failure of resolution and the failure of language."³⁸ This halting moment seems to be Rosemary's quick renounce of what she has done so far, and leaves space for a variety of interpretation of her action and original intentions.

In the text, Rosemary goes to her writing room to get money. She first thinks of writing a check but then decides it would be better to give the girl cash, drawing out five one-pound notes but then putting two back. Her mind echoes with Philip's words: "Pretty! Lovely! Bowled over!" Her heart beats like a heavy bell. The reverse is rather abrupt; profundity or the revelation of a secret depth or a hidden self, which somewhere in the text points to, in the end fails to express.

The story then jumps a half hour to the end when Rosemary asking Philip "am I pretty?," after having done her hair, darkened her eyes and put on her pearls. She decides to settle on a fascinating little box she saw in antique shop in the morning instead of the adventure like something out of a Dostoevsky novel.

This vain ending exemplifies Andrew Bennett's observation that "[t]hings just don't happen in Mansfield: they almost happen, but don't; and, by contrast, they simply don't happen. But disappointment is also the essence of what Mansfield made of the short story, the story that, by very definition, is short, interrupted, inconclusive, something of a letdown, a falling-off."³⁹ This ending is a letdown, but open to interpretation. Julia Gunsteren argues that Rosemary feels very insecure when she throws the young woman out.⁴⁰ Such reading emphasizes criticism on the patriarchy that a fashionable woman is in fact in the shadow of the tyranny husband, which is a recurring theme in Mansfield. Rosemary's pet-like behavior in the end of the story certainly supports such reading.

Sydney Kaplan, on the other hand, argues that feminism plays a central but

satirized part in the story. Both Kaplan and Fullbrook suggest that Mansfield may be defined as a 'feminist' writer.⁴¹ Kaplan argues that whatever "definition for her own awareness she might have chosen," Mansfield's life and writing are characterized by 'an emerging feminist consciousness,'⁴² and Kaplan attempts to overcome the problem that Mansfield's feminism is largely invisible. He explains that her 'feminism' comes as a matter of course, so much so that overt discussion of it as a political principle is absent from her writing while its underlying presence is everywhere.

Nevertheless the location of feminism in the story is not at all straightforward, since on one level at least it is the object of satirical attack. Indeed, the story could easily be read as anti-female - femininity here being characterized in terms of the stereotypes of frivolity, vanity, political naivety, inconsistency, and shopping excess - as well as anti-feminism - the attempt at 'feminist' solidarity being easily undermined by patriarchal disapproval. Meanwhile it is true, as Kaplan argues, what 'might seem like antifeminism' in Mansfield's work - 'negative portrayals or criticism of women's behavior' - can be read in terms of her "frustration and anger over many women's refusal to overcome their conditioned acceptance of women's role."⁴³ In *A Cup of Tea*, a certain 'feminist' solidarity is the central target of Mansfield's irony: Rosemary's 'feminism' is indeed a fairy story.

Mansfield's concern with women life and cryptic criticism on patriarchy in tea scenes echoes Virginia Woolf's, whose approach is straighter in *The Years* by presenting a caricature of family tea at the beginning of the novel. Meanwhile Mansfield's tea scenes also join her with Forster and Wells in staging tea as the place that highlights class differences and alienation.

Not limited in these inter-class gatherings, teas are also used to reflect segmentation within the same class and social group. The tea scene in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* provides such an example.

A Counterpoint of Tea in *Point Counter Point* (1928)

The more ambitious modernist, Aldous Huxley, produces a tea scene between two of his women characters in *Point Counter Point* which constitutes an organic part of the novel that produces his whole picture of human existence.

Much has been written about the narrative method of the novel, the contrapuntal technique. Critics find Huxley's method effective in exposing the isolation of the characters, in indicating the lack of any kind of communication among them. This is coherent to Huxley's thought, which he articulates in *Sermons in Cat*: "In spite of language, in spite of intelligence and intuition and sympathy, one can never really communicate anything to anybody. The essential substance of every thought and feeling remains incommunicable, locked up in the impenetrable strong-room of the individual soul and body. Our life is a sentence of perpetual solitary confinement."⁴⁴

Huxley's aim in this novel is to form a complete picture of the human condition through his fragmented characters who were all eventually contribute to the whole picture. In this way, each character is like an instrument in an orchestra, which all take up at various points one or another of the themes and 'play' it according to the limitations of the character's own individual conception of reality.

In playing out the orchestra, Huxley usually has one or two characters (sometimes a few more) embody and vary one of the principal themes. It is for these reasons that *Point Counter Point* is broken up into what Frank Balzanza calls relatively short "scenes."⁴⁵ As Peter Firchow appositely observes that it is in this way, and perhaps in this way only, Huxley can impose an artistic order upon the great many characters and events in the work.⁴⁶

Among the scenes, Huxley designs a tea between Elinor Quarles and Marjorie Carling. The triangular entanglement of Marjorie Carling, Walter Bidlake and Lucy Tantamount opens the narrative. Elinor, Walter Bidlake's married sister,

knows from a letter on their way back to Britain from India of the condition of her brother's private life. Not only has he fathered a child with another man's wife, Marjorie, he is also madly in love with the siren of the novel, Lucy Tantamount.

Elinor hopes that her brother should do the right thing and not leave the woman with child in the lurch. In an effort to restore his brother, Elinor comes to visit Marjorie after Walter has left her. Over tea the two women discuss Walter's affair with Lucy, unexpectedly the tea reveals the disparity between them in thoughts, beliefs and perception of life, thus constitutes a 'counterpoint' against the panoramic picture of human existence. Tea manners, the silent but extremely revelatory gestures, play an active role in their 'unsuccessful social exchange.' It depicts in tiny but disturbing details the rigid and religious Marjorie, and reflects the absent third party, her rivalry for Walter, Lucy.

Through Elinor's observation Marjorie is shown to be an inexperienced hostess. Diplomatically Elinor tries to soothe Marjorie and find fault in Lucy. She attributes Walter's involvement with Lucy to Lucy's bad reputation. Marjorie reacts:

'But is that attractive? A bad reputation?' The tea-pot hung suspended over the cup as she asked.

'Of course. It means that the woman who enjoys it is accessible. No sugar, thanks.'

'But surely,' said Marjorie handing her the cup, 'men don't want to share their mistress with other lovers.'⁴⁷

This tea gives Elinor the chance to observe Marjorie really closely. Keeping "the tea-pot hung suspended" inconveniently reveals the shock Marjorie receives from Elinor's comment on Lucy, and she is certainly earnest to take the words serious. While their 'tea gossip' continues, Elinor gradually reaches her judgement of Marjorie by observing her awkward tea manners and her lack of aestheticism and

self-consciousness. Elinor disapproves her taste in clothes and general person, and finds her “dangling, sham jade earrings,” her voice and earnest manners “dreadful.” She is profoundly annoyed, but Marjorie, deep in her own troubles and too busy in reflecting Elinor’s remarks, fails to notice the other’s feelings. Exactly in contrast with Lucy who has a ‘bad reputation,’ Marjorie “had been brought up to believe in the ugliness of vice and the animal part of human nature, the beauty of virtue and the spirit. And cold by nature, she had the cold woman’s utter incomprehension of sensuality.”⁴⁸ Her lack of the knowledge of the wider world and her incapability of catching what Elinor implies become a barrier in their communication.

Marjorie agrees the adulterous men are but ‘pigs,’ which Elinor kindly helps her form into words. She is still hoping that Walter would return to her, for her moral vigor had been what attracted him. But confronting Lucy’s ‘masculine detachment’ that triggered Walter’s animal instinct, the ‘virtuous’ Marjorie shudders and exclaims: “What a horror!” “Elinor observed the shudder and was annoyed by it into contradiction.”⁴⁹

It is reasonable for the more liberal Elinor to feel Marjorie formidable in her rigid morality, while the other is totally unaware of her real feelings. It is probably Huxley’s intention that the characters can only observe and perceive from their own perspectives, as examples being “locked up in the impenetrable strong-room of the individual soul and body.” The ‘intimate’ tea has actually enlarged the gap between the two women. Yet Elinor is still to be disturbed by the latter’s unbecoming tea manners.

‘...May I take another piece of bread and butter?’ She helped herself. Out of politeness Marjorie also took another slice. ‘Delicious brown bread,’ Elinor commented and wondered how Walter could have lived with anyone who crooked the little finger of the hand that held the tea-cup and who took such

horribly small bites from a slice of bread and then chewed only with the front teeth, like a guinea-pig - as though the process of eating were an indelicate and rather disgusting affair.⁵⁰

The disparity in Elinor's works and thoughts shows her a more experienced social woman than Marjorie; her criticism of the other's tea manners is a cryptic and more general criticism on her unnatural view of life and denial of human desires and sexuality. Her reflection on Walter's impossible relation with the woman partially justifies Walter's desertion of Marjory; Marjory's stoicism is partially responsible for Walter's indulgence in Lucy's 'masculine detachment.' The tea that zooms into life details of the unfortunate woman helps to find reason for her unhappiness. More symbolically the unforeseen and unintended incompatibility between the two women exemplifies Huxley's technique of counterpoint, which Firchow appositely argues that while musical counterpoint is to achieve harmony, Huxley's literary counterpoint, from the point of view of satire "is most appropriate, since it is precisely out of the dissonance that the satire arises."⁵¹

Nevertheless Elinor's unfavorable observation of Marjorie seems to be her individual judgment, for Rachel Quarles, Elinor's religious mother-in-law, who has also suffered husbandry infidelity, considers Marjorie a person with "a genuine love of the good, the true and the beautiful," combined with "a genuine desire for self-improvement." It is on the basis of these aspects of Marjorie's character that Rachel can tolerate her defects. To Rachel, at least, her stupidity is "so good and well meaning"; as for her lack of humor, it is the "mark of such earnestness," and even her "intellectual pretensions" do not displease her.⁵²

Elinor's tea scene and Rachel's generous observation are part of Huxley's design of the general human picture and devices of his narrative simultaneity. Peter Firchow argues that Huxley's *Point Counter Point* is 'the first real approximation'

to a truly systematic aesthetics of simultaneity.⁵³ Firchow observes that to Huxley the idea of simultaneity is essential to a proper understanding of human nature, because man is composed of simultaneously a variety of selves: spiritual, social, biological, economic, national, historical, etc. So the different opinions of Elinor and Rachel on Marjorie can be both true as different aspects of the person.

In one of the essays from *Music at Night* (1931), Huxley remarks, while referring specifically to the contrapuntal technique of *Point Counter Point*: “Our life is spent first in one water-tight compartment of experience, then in another. The artist can, if he so desires, break down the bulkheads between the compartments and so give us a simultaneous view of two or more of them at a time.”⁵⁴ The kind of juxtaposition, as Huxley is fully aware, produces discord, not harmony. The aesthetics of simultaneity, as he understands it, is also an aesthetics of satire, necessarily so in an imperfect world.

Firchow also attributes the development of Huxley’s contrapuntal simultaneity to his intimate knowledge of modern scientific developments, both theoretical and practical, especially Einstein’s relativity theory. The theory of special relativity that overturned the ruling Newtonian conception of a universe bounded by absolute space and time, in favor of one in which the only absolute is the speed of light and in which neither the observer nor the observed is fixed.⁵⁵

What this redefinition means is that there is no such thing as a privileged observer in fiction, and that consequently a story could not be told from a single perspective and remain scientifically valid.⁵⁶ *Point Counter Point* contains no privileged observer but only a series of imperfect observers whose points of view are set counter to each other such as Elinor and Marjorie in the tea scene, and the different opinions of Marjorie by Elinor and Rachel. Their imperfect observation, when put together, will produce the picture closest to the reality.

Tea in *Sunday Afternoon: Moment of Abyss*

Huxley's tea scene neatly serves his experimental technique and theme, as well as an organic part of the plot. In Elizabeth Bowen's war story, tea plays a central role, not only provides the containing form for the story, but also achieves a symbolic meaning at the transit of history.

Bowen's war-time novels and short stories are among the best that grasp the spirit of the time. Yet she has no time for the invention of a national heritage located in the Victorian era: "England dwells on a picture of exuberance in a settled scene - unspoiled country-sides, tribes of ruddy-faced children raised in manors, parsonages, farmhouses, cottages with roses over the porch." History, she points out, provides a more disturbing account of the past; nostalgia ignores not only the "millions [who] went under leaving behind no trace" but also "the dismay, the apathy, the brutalizing humiliations of people for whom there was no break."⁵⁷

But Bowen's stance is not a clear-cut divorce from the past. Her experience of the decline of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy coupled with the Second World War produced a split in Bowen. John Coates argues Bowen is keenly aware of the growing social moral and psychological dislocation of the twentieth century, which becomes one of the chief themes of her novels.⁵⁸ Her experience of the decline and fall of the Anglo-Irish prepared her imaginatively and intellectually for what the twentieth century was to do to many other groups and individuals. She was fully aware of the losses and misery in which even an inevitable social and moral change resulted. Even if an order was flawed its destruction might still be tragic. At the same time, she refused the 'prevailing mood' the twentieth century upheavals often nurtured, the nostalgia in which the past was called 'better days.'

In *Sunday Afternoon* this split comes to the fore. Harold Bloom observes that "All that matters in the story is her own surrogate, Henry, loyal to indomitable, blitzed London, and loyal to Mrs. Vesey and her circle, to a view of life that can make

every fate an extraordinary one, as Henry's is and will be, and as he fears Maria's will not be."⁵⁹ In the story, Henry is set between two generations, his aesthetic aristocrat elders and a younger generation represented by Maria, who is impatient for the war-time London. *Sunday Afternoon*, like her war time novel, *The Heat of the Day*, is about entangled loyalties and treacheries, in war, in value, in relationships across generations. It is generated out of a radical sense of the destabilizations or erosions of identity consequent on wartime displacement and disorientations.

The story is set in a country house far from the blitzed London at an afternoon tea. This typical aristocrat occasion with its symbolic significance of cultivation and culture sets off the deeply-felt conflicting moment of war and devastation, change and survival. Bloom acknowledges that "Bowen may be the most distinguished British writers of short stories in our time," and recommends *Sunday Afternoon* as one of her best. Bloom finds that "the stories are in the mode of Henry James, in which what never quite happens is more nuanced and vital than anything that does take place."⁶⁰ Like the master of novels of manners who evolves the narrative around the tea table and inventively gives tea the metaphorical meanings in his *The Awkward Age*, Bowen treats the small yet significant gestures and signs in tea with far-reaching symbolism.

It opens with the arrival of Henry Russel at an Irish country house, on holiday from his ministry in London during the Blitz, and from his bombed-out flat. He is visiting Mrs. Vesey and her friends, in whose shadow he has grown up, and who have taught him their aesthetic of living, now uneasily vanishing from him even as he feels nostalgia for its charm.

An afternoon tea in a country house sets the leisured and peaceful atmosphere of the prewar time, but 'a breath of coldness' is already there even before the coming of Henry. "The coldness had been admitted by none of the seven or eight people who, in degrees of elderly beauty, sat here full in the sun, at this sheltered

edge of the lawn: they continue to master the coldness, or to deny it, as though with each it were some secret malaise." The older people's efforts to master the 'coldness' makes Henry instinctively know that "he was to tell, but not much."⁶¹

A third generation enters the story with Maria, Mrs. Vesey's niece, an ardent young woman, impatient for life, for war, for heroes, and so for London. Thus uncomfortably set between the two generations, Henry engages in low-key exchanges with his friends but still they unavoidably reveal the immense difference in their life.

Tea is the conventional ritual to entertain people, and also the evocative clue that unites the partakers temporarily into the 'old day' memories which will make the later split more deeply felt. It is also the symbolic ritual that locates this single moment into sequence that has a past and a still unclear future.

The party is talking about Henry's loss of all his "beautiful things" in the Blitz - some piece of glass and jade and a dozen pictures. To Mrs. Vesey and her friends, the loss of these emblems of the aesthetic of living is the loss of life. Henry, in perfect understanding of the strength of their vision, nevertheless says: "but, in fact, I am very glad to remain. To exist."⁶²

His remarks open the gap between the two generations concerning their concept of life and things. John Haperin argues that Bowen is an author, a watcher, a dedicated recorder of what she sees⁶³; Bowen herself describes her fiction as transformed biography, feeling that the novelists should tell stories that are "true." Resembling Henry James in many ways, Bowen shares James's idea that fiction is greatest when it most closely resembles biography in its revelation of the "real" lives of its personages. Like James, Elizabeth Bowen thinks of her characters as persons in "real" life and the underpinnings of her realism cannot be separated from the importance to her of "things." In an early novel, *The Death of the Heart* (1938), Bowen declares through her character: "things are what we mean when we

speak of civilization," as she writes of the "solicitude for things. One's relation to them, the daily seeing or touching, begins to become love, and to lay one open to pain."⁶⁴

But here Henry, if indeed a surrogate of the author herself as Bloom observes, declares a new stance in the middle of the war devastation. His remarks are quickly backed up by the younger generation of Maria.

Maria gave Henry an askance look, as though, after all, he were not a friend. But she then said. 'Why should he wish he was dead?' Her gesture upset some tea on the lace cloth, and she idly rubbed it up with her handkerchief. The tug her rubbing gave to the cloth shook a petal from a Chinese peony in the center bowl on to a plate of cucumber sandwiches. This little bit of destruction was watched by the older people with fascination, with a kind of appeasement, as though it were a guarantee against something worse.⁶⁵

Maria's behavior here is watched by her generation with special watchfulness, and her negligent 'destruction' of the delicate arrangement of the tea is to them of symbolic meanings: the young girl is indifferent to or even impatient with the tea, the embodiment of the aesthetics and mannerism of the older generation. In *Death of the Heart*, Bowen says through her character that "society is people making little signs to each other."⁶⁶ What Bowen means by this is manners, for her manners form the texture by which society is bound together. Bowen is fascinated by what underlies social behavior, what constitutes it. We will see the society of the older people in the story is closely bounded by such manners, calmly manifested in their tacit effort to carry out the tea in the old way. Henry has been part of it, though transformed by the war, he notices and acknowledges their little signs, and is sensitive to his elders' response to his and Maria's remarks.

'Henry is not young and savage, like you are. Henry's life is - or was - an affair of attachment,' said Ria Store. She returned her eyes, under their lids, on Henry. 'I wonder how much of you has been blown to blazes.'

'I have no way of knowing,' he said. 'Perhaps you have?'

'Chocolate cake?' said Maria.

'Please.'

For chocolate layer cake, the Vesey cook had been famous since Henry was a boy of seven or eight. The look, then the taste, of the brown segment linked him with Sunday afternoons when he had been brought here by his mother; then, with a phase of his adolescence when he had been unable to eat, only able to look round. Mrs Vesey's beauty, at that time approaching its last lunar quarter, had swum on him when he was about nineteen. In Maria, child of her brother's late marriage, he now saw that beauty, or sort of physical genius, at the start. In Maria, this was without hesitation, without the halting influence that had bound Mrs Vesey up - yes and bound Henry up, from his boyhood, with her - in a circle of quizzical half-smiles. In revenge, he accused the young girl who moved him - who seemed framed, by some sort of anticipation, for the new catastrophic outward order of life - of brutality, of being without spirit. At his age, between two generations, he felt cast out. He felt Mrs Vesey might not forgive him for having left her for a world at war.⁶⁷

Indeed Henry's life is 'an affair of attachment'; the chocolate cake, like the piece of madeleine tipped in tea in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, quickly triggers Henry's memory of the days he spent with his aesthetic teachers and his adolescent sentiment for Mrs. Vesey, which consequently opens his eyes to Maria coming of age. Maria inherits her aunt's beauty, but her beauty is formed into a new

expression by the new age, which Henry has to duly notice. Like Mr. Longdon in *The Awkward Age* meets Nanda who reminds him of his old love, Nanda's grandmother, the young girl constitutes a similar challenge to Henry's values and feelings. In the beauty of Maria the old-fashioned demure that Henry found attractive in his adolescence in Mrs Vesey is replaced by self-assertion, which his war-time experience would urge him to recognize. Dramatically this contrast is enforced by the traditional feminine activity of tea-making and -drinking. Confronting these two incoherent orders that he can both acknowledge, he begins to feel cast out, and experiences the abyss not only between him and the older generation, but also between him and Maria, the next generation.

John Haperin argues that Bowen and James "share as writers a strikingly similar community of interests in, for example, the shocking moment of psychological insight, of sudden and total vision,"⁶⁸ they both deal in their fiction with people of highly intelligent, and in their works the tiny gesture may be all-expressive, with apparently small actions carefully discriminated and people's motives minutely scrutinized. Henry in this symbolic moment has recognized the transit of the history, in spite of his own nostalgia triggered by his visit after a long absence among the studied indifference his elders revealed to the changing outer world. Maria's behavior and remarks at the tea table are the symbol of changes already penetrated into their aesthetic world, they can only hope 'it were a guarantee against something worse.'

The tea goes on, but it is Mrs Vesey who prepares the tea and Ronald Cuffe offers his assistance, a joint effort to carry out this aesthetic ritual.

Mrs Vesey blew out the blue flame under the kettle, and let the silver trapdoor down with a snap. She then gave exactly one of those smiles - at the same time, it was the smile of his mother's friend. Ronald Cuffe picked the petal from the

sandwiches and rolled it between his fingers, waiting for her to speak.⁶⁹

Mrs Vesey's tea-making is ceremonious and graceful, helped by the chivalrous Cuffe with his careful treatment of the dropped petals, a picture reminiscent of the pre-war aristocratic life. The young people's absence in the performance of tea, especially of Maria, the young girl at home who is usually expected to do such duties, foreshadows the tea and its future. To read in this way, the older people's persistence in this mannered tea is their symbolic gesture toward the aesthetics of life, which they saw clearly were to go with them. Meaningfully Henry notices "those smiles" Mrs. Vesey gave at the finish of the tea that had fascinated him are now "the smile of his mother's friend."

Bowen's heavy-mannered tea scenes in the middle of the war effectively evokes the prewar life that reaches down to Forster and James, and thus becomes the symbolic watershed in history and private life. In the after-war tea scenes such as in *Angus Wilson* and *Barbara Pym*, teas become a much simplified affair, though sometimes connect to the pre-war life and tradition, they embrace and assume new meanings.

Conclusion

The tea scenes examined here present kaleidoscopic patterns over the half century that saw the huge social transformations. These 'inconsequent' social teas are easy for the reader to recognize and reach for the significance and sometimes symbolism hidden within. They borrow the reader's common knowledge of such occasions to produce the dramatic effects, and materialize the abstract metaphysical changes in concrete ways, because they are felt and thought through life details.

David Galef appositely observes: "the novel is a historical document, the

product of its era" which registers "the impact of society on the individual, the genre functions as both a record and a critique...."⁷⁰ Galef's argument is general observation on literary works, but explicit here about the role tea scenes played in literary works and its metaphorical reflection on contemporary society. The scenes examined here, while containing the conventional elements, neatly capture the historical trends of the time by staging the teas as the mixing place of people - people meet but do not conciliate.

This imaginative use of tea is the author's intellectual response to their times. Teas bring people of diversified social classes and groups together. It seems to verify that the class wall grows thinner, almost penetrable, but the inherent difference are intact, so their conflict and alienation, their confusion and incommunicativeness to each other that sometimes reach antagonism provide a reinvigorating perspective on the real. In the works of Huxley and Bowen, even people of the same social class and group are segmented, which reflect the depth that the quick and sweeping social changes had worked on human minds.

What makes tea scenes special is that profound and metaphysical changes are all able to be projected into the small details of tea through different channels than forged in the long history tea had in British culture: the decoration of the place, people's tea manners and habit, the actual preparation and distribution of tea, the conversation and observation, are all useful in revealing and reflecting the difference of the subjective world.

Apart from the long presence of tea in British national life that has give tea its multiple cultural meanings and functions, tea has also gathered significance in the imaginative dramatization in literary works by generations of writers. From the remote Restoration Comedy through realist novels by Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell to James and Wilde, a literary tradition of tea scenes run in parallel with the leaf's prosperity in cultural life. From the tea scenes examined here we are

able to recognize patterns existed in earlier writers' works, but they at the same time address situations and concerns of the new times. If these tea scenes inherit and re-invent the convention, we will also see new teas in later novelists, for example in Angus Wilson and Muriel Sparks, which tackle the more sensitive topic of homosexuality in the comic and cryptic tradition of tea, and it is in this spiral reinvention tea scene maintain its vigor.

Notes:

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3. See my article, "The Mockery of Tea: Tea Scenes in Virginia Woolf's Novels" 『リ－ディング: 東京大学大学院英文学研究会』 27号 (2006), pp.99-112.
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20世紀前半イギリス小説および短編小説におけるお茶の場面

戦 海燕

本論では20世紀の前半に活躍した、5人の小説家の作品に出てくるお茶の場面を考察する。文学表現手段の一つとして登場するお茶の場面は、異なる社会階級の人々を繋げる社交場としてよりも、むしろ激しい社会変動の中を生きる人々の困惑、埋められない社会階級間あるいは社会グループ間の衝突や摩擦を細部から描くという役割を果たしている。お茶の場面という日常的な描写は、20世紀前半の世界大戦などの大きな社会変革が人々の生活にもたらした影響の強さと広範さを伝えている。

茶を嗜むことはイギリス人にとって日常生活における馴染み深い文化である。喫茶のマナーは、個人の出身階級、趣味、審美的感覚などを表す。19世紀末のヘンリー・ジェームスやオスカー・ワイルドなどは、喫茶のマナーを一つの文学的表現手段として用い、小説やドラマに取り組んでいた。それらは時に喜劇に見えるが、当時没落した貴族、中上流階級の生活を暴露している。

20世紀に入ると、含意に富む文学的表現手段としてのお茶の場面の活用法を受け継いだ作家たちが当時の社会状況を描くようになった。例えば、E.M.フォースターとH.G.ウェルズは第一次世界大戦前の社会分裂を痛感し、社会階級の融合と調和を呼びかけた。彼らの作品に取り込まれたお茶の場面は社会階級間の違和感と不信感を表現し、コミカルにも見えるが、その内に潜む社会批判は実に辛辣である。キャサリン・マンズフィールドの短編では上流階級の貴婦人と乞食の少女との間に、一杯のお茶によってある関係が成立するが、一瞬繋がる運命は貴婦人の夫の一言で潰えてしまう。貧富の差、階級間の無関心、ジェンダー問題などが交互に浮上する。オルダス・ハクスリーは『恋愛対位法』の中に、小説全体のテ

クニックの一環として、お茶の場면을登場させる。この場面での二人の女性の矛盾する会話と、意識の差から断片化した人間の存在は、ハクスリーが描く人間存在の全体像の一部になる。エリザベス・ボウエンが第二次世界大戦の時代を描く短編では、午後のお茶はその中心的役割を果たし、衰退していく貴族の耽美的な生活、そしてその生活スタイルと分裂する新世代を描写する、歴史的変遷を表す象徴的な一場面となる。

様々なお茶の場面はめまぐるしく変化していったイギリス社会を様々な角度から映し出す。社会状況に基づき、茶を嗜む習慣が持つ文化的意味を活用し、作家たちの想像力によって再構築されたお茶の場面は、20世紀前半の激動の社会変貌を、生活の細部を描くことから表現しているといえる。