

Creating the Possible Worlds through Narratives: A Study of Katherine Mansfield's 'Tiredness of Rosabel' and Alice Munro's 'Carried Away'

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Abstract

A work of art has both the attributes of being an imagined reality and reality imagined. In a fictional work, the world created is the world created by narratives and a study of narrative semantics of any work gives an opening to the many hidden routes which are not visible on the surface. The semantics of possible worlds includes a study of narratives, the patterns, the words, and the plots of a piece of fictional work. Katherine Mansfield's story, 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' is a story of a young girl and her optimism. Rosabel continuously moves in two worlds one the real world and another her imagined world, the other world which like Hogwart's railway platform is just between the real world. Alice Munro's 'Carried Away' is a story about Louisa and her world. The story that has gained the reputation of 'historical fiction', is a perfect example of Munro's narrative technique, like a collage it has many voices and points of view assembled to create one picture. The paper is an attempt to study the various possible worlds of Rosabel and Louisa created by Mansfield and Munro through the skillful use of the narratives.

Keywords: Possible world, Imagination, Dream, Loneliness.

Platform number 9¾ in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is not only the gateway of entering into the world of magic, it also symbolises the presence of many possible worlds within the real world. The line between real and imaginary is never properly drawn as it is difficult to differentiate between the two. The world of literature is a creation of many possible worlds with a touch of reality. A reading of any literary text is like a walk in an enchanted forest where there are many pathways leading to new places and hidden caves invisible to outside view, and more one explore it's more magical and non-existent the world looks.

The concept of a possible world is present in human consciousness from time immemorial it is as ancient as humans themselves are. The voyages to explore the world is the concretization of believing in the existence of unknown worlds and it is the hope of the possible worlds that has inspired sailors to cross vast oceans to find new land. This same desire to create a new world provokes artists to create new works. It is the quest for perfection, fulfillment, and creation that inspires writers to create worlds of their imagination. The word 'fiction' has many variants like fictional, fictive, fictitious all are taken as synonyms and words like real, natural, historical are taken as their antonyms. One can write about fictitious or real situations, of fictive or historical events, of fictional or real objects. Such semantics leads towards the understanding of the world fictional in the broader sense, which means a mode of being, a situation that may not exist in reality, something created with imagination, and a text with this entity is called fictional work. The imaginary world created is more about the probabilities and possibilities which remained unexplored in reality.

The concept of possible worlds is originally a Leibniz concept which is rediscovered by Twentieth-century philosophers to develop semantic models for possibility and necessity. According to Leibniz's concept, infinity of possible worlds exist as thoughts in the mind of God. Of all these possible worlds, only one is actual: the best of them chosen by the divine mind. And this chosen world or the privileged world is the world where humans live, and which is called the real world or the reality.

The concept though philosophical can be applied to every individual as there are infinite numbers of possible worlds in every person's thoughts, and s/he lives simultaneously in each of them. The unfulfilled desires, unuttered thoughts, unaccomplished dreams and unconsummated relationships all become part of the

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possible world. The human mind is infinite so the creation of possible worlds is also limitless. A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a visual or linguistic medium. In its centre, there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature, anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who perform goal-oriented actions. It is the experience of these protagonists that narratives focus on, allowing readers to immerse themselves in a different world and within the mind of the protagonists.

The possible worlds are the constructs of mind and they can be classified according to the mental process through which they are originated also has termed as 'world-creating predicates'. Verbs such as to dream, to intend, to believe, to consider, to fantasize, to hypothesize are ways to present these existing possible worlds. Daydreaming, projections of belief system, fantasizing, wishing, planning of the characters are ways to create various possible worlds in the fiction.

A study of narratives of any fictional work opens immense possibilities to explore the human psyche. The possible worlds are constructs of the human mind; hence, the narratives describe the thoughts of the characters. Modernist narrative texts have more scope of exploring the inner state of characters as they usually deal with the innerscape of the characters. Modern writers have their focus more on what is going on within the mind of the characters instead of what is happening outside. This depiction of inner life challenges writers to experiment with narrative patterns for the more realistic display of thoughts and mental processes. The frequently tossing between present and past, swinging between real and unreal, and moving between steady and unsteady thoughts are exhibited through intricate patterns of narratives.

The short story is taken as a subsidiary branch of novels till the late Eighteenth century, it is at the beginning of the Nineteenth century when writers realize the vast possibility of experimentation in this form giving it independent identity and status of a separate genre. Katherine Mansfield and Alice Munro, these two women writers have chosen short stories as their medium of expression and have given heights to it, so much they perfected it that these two names are now synonymous with the short story. Both have more contrasts than similarities, the different era to which they belong to different country, the family background to totally different temperament, these two writers have one thing in common that is their unique narrative technique, the technique developed by Chekhov of describing certain moments of life and leaving all the rest, what Joyce has called 'Epiphanic moments', the 'Slices of Life'.

The stories taken under study are Katherine Mansfield's 'Tiredness of Rosabel' and Alice Munro's 'Carried Away'. The protagonists of both the stories created their perfect possible worlds and continuously move between the real and the unreal. This pendulum-like movement between real and unreal, present and past, and anticipation of the future is intricately created through the skillful use of narratives by both the writers. Mansfield's Rosabel, a salesgirl, fantasizes about her life, recreates and dreams about the life she doesn't have. Munro's Louisa, a librarian, creates and imagines incidents and characters to the extent that everything is blurred in the end and the readers are intrigued with the ending. Present paper is an attempt to study in detail the narrative patterns used by Mansfield and Munro to create the possible worlds, the manner in which Rosabel and Louisa both live in the real as well as in their possible worlds.

Mansfield's romance with writing starts at a very early age, she, though born in an affluent family surrounded with all the comforts has a restless soul. This restlessness remains throughout her life and her writings are the expressions of this inner turmoil and emotional insecurities. Her writing is her way to create many different worlds that exist in her waiting to be actualized. Her short stories are the kaleidoscopic presentation of the lives of girls and women in all their vibrant shades. Her girls and women are not unreal creations, they are real people with all their dilemmas, pains, frustration, happiness. Ma Parker's grief, Colonel's daughters' indecisiveness, Laura's hesitation and dilemma, Linda's indifference, Beryl's romantic imagination or Kezia's innocence every character has something real and familiar to the readers. Her characters are not heroine with all the charm and beauty, instead they are ordinary women with ordinary life, it's her art that makes them extraordinary and captures their moments of realization through unique narratives.

Mansfield's 'Tiredness of Rosabel' is part of one of her earlier works *Something Childish and Other Stories*, the phase when she has been experimenting with her narrative technique and themes to gain a perfect balance of the two. The story has been told from Rosabel's perspective, a young and beautiful girl who works at 'millinery establishments'. The beginning of the story is in Mansfield's style in the middle of the scene, Rosabel returning after 'hard day's work' purchasing 'a bunch of violets' that cost her, her lunch. Mansfield from the

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first line very subtly tells the romantic temperament of Rosabel. Mansfield's narratives enchant the readers and unconsciously they take a ride in the bus along Rosabel, see objects and things from her eyes, the violet flowers, the girl engrossed in some romantic book, other passengers, rains, and her wet skirt. Rosabel's ride is not just an outward journey, there is a whole world within moving within her that emerges the moment she purchases the flowers. She has not taken proper lunch to buy flowers and therefore her thoughts are preoccupied with delicious delicacies, "roast duck and green peas, chestnut stuffing, pudding with brandy sauce - something hot and strong and filling" (*The Collected Stories*, 433). On the bus she sits next to a girl who is reading *Anna Lombard* in a cheap, paper edition, the girl is completely immersed in the romantic world of the book, unaware of the real world around her. Rosabel's possible world emerges as she looks out of the window to the 'blurred and misty' streets that she imagines as 'opal and silver' when lightning strikes the panes, and the jewellery shops look like some fairy place to her. The wetness of her dress and feet, the black and greasy mud on her skirt and petticoat diverts her attention from fairy place to the passengers inside the 'sickening smell of warm humanity' (*The Collected Stories*, 433) coming out from the passengers sitting with expressionless faces. Mansfield with minimum words shows the contrast between Rosabel and other passengers, the liveliness of Rosabel and the mechanical lifelessness of others.

Rosabel's imagination sees beauty in every sight and scene, Westbourne Grove looks to her like Venice, "mysterious, dark even the hansoms were like gondolas dodging up and down and the lights trailing luridly - tongues of flame licking the wet street-magic fish swimming in the Grand Canal" (*The Collected Stories*, 434). Her dream world hits the real moment when she reaches her street and where she has to climb four flights of stairs to reach her room, she thinks about the possibility of having a lift or electric staircase to make the climb comfortable. She climbs the stairs imagining it like 'bicycling up a steep hill' only difference is there is no feeling of flying down to the other side, here she has to climb and climb. Mansfield's description of Rosabel's apartment is again a skillful piece of writing as with so little description her poverty is shown. She enters her room, turns the gas and changed her clothes, goes to the wash stand, there is water only to soak the sponge, the enamel of the basin coming out all these details reveals her destitute state, a life deprived of even the basic needs of food, water, and cleanliness.

Rosabel's possible world which is there from the beginning of the story finally comes to the center stage once she reaches her room. Once the outer action ceases the inner world emerges, Rosabel putting blind up and turning the gas, "knelt down on the floor, pillowing her arms on the window-sill..." (*The Collected Stories*, 434) while looking at the wet world outside, she enters into her inner world. Her thoughts become reflective and she recollects the events that occurred during the day, the 'awful woman', the indecisive girl who has tried every hat on the shop, and the beautiful red hair girl accompanied by an immaculately dressed young man. The girl is so dependent on the man that it's he who decides which hat she wants, Rosabel satisfies her with the perfect hat she wants and she leaves the shop leaving the young man to pay. Rosabel vividly remembers every detail of the good looking man, his fine straight eyebrows, his smile and his voice with a tinge of familiarity asking her while looking at her small beautiful hands, "Ever been painted?" (*The Collected Stories*, 435).

Rosabel is so charmed with the man that he appears to her the prince from some fairy tale, she recreates the whole scene in her imagination replacing the red hair girl and visualizing herself at her position. The dream Rosabel sees from her eyes open has included everything she lacks in her real life. The elaborate description of the bedroom with all the beauty and luxury, the waiting of young man (Harry), her getting ready, Harry giving her sprays of 'Parma violets'. She dreams of exquisite lunch on the beautiful table covered with flowers, a band playing in the background, the food on the table, "the soup and oysters, and pigeons, and creamed potatoes, and champagne, of course, and afterwards coffee and cigarettes" (*The Collected Stories*, 435). Her evening life, table filled with invitations, her preparation for attending the ball, her beauty enhanced by beautiful attire, her becoming the center of attraction at the ball. She is appreciated by all and her life comes to full circle when she gets engaged to Harry that is announced in the Court Circular, her imagined marriage and her honeymoon to Harry's ancestral home. Here the 'real Rosabel' gets up in a dreamy stupor changes her clothes and slips into the bed to continue her dream. The dream continues even in sleep and she smiles often extending her hand to touch some invisible object. The next day, she wakes up and cold reality touches her, her 'tragic optimism' is all that she has or else is just a beautiful sandcastle. The story ends with Rosabel's still half-sleep, sitting and smiling.

Mansfield's stories like Frost's poetry are deceptively simple on surface but always end with revealing some hard truths of life. Here Rosabel's living in penury, a life of anonymity and non-entity is imagined contrasting life in her imagination. The real Rosabel and the imaginary Rosabel are two extremes that can only exist in a possible world. The life she has observed of rich girls frequently visiting her shop becomes her idea of perfect life and world. Mansfield has masterly used simple sentences and straight statements that open hidden doors of Rosabel's life. The warmth she feels suggests the coldness she is experiencing, the description of dirt and mud on the dress and then passing reference to "The jug had not been filled again today" (*The Collected Stories*, 434). Shows insufficient means in her life. Rosabel is an unknown figure, no one notices her and her beauty, she remains totally unnoticed on the bus, she fulfills this desire by imagining that she is the most exquisite beauty and 'English Wonder'. The scene that points out another deficiency in her life is clothing, she has limited clothes and therefore in her world, she has the most beautiful and colourful clothes. Mansfield by simple narration has highlighted the missing things in her life. Therefore, the possible world created by Rosabel has all that she doesn't have in reality.

Rosabel's world is the world of fairies and fantasies, she from the beginning is in her own world of beauty, the flowers, the colours and food. Her thoughts continuously oscillate between the two worlds, it the imagination that keeps her happy and cheerful not for a moment there is any trace of unhappiness and sadness. Mansfield's narratives have the quality of making a simple story profound and underlining the crucial thoughts by undermining it. Rosabel's real life and her created life are at the two extremes, the possible world she has created is an escape from the grim realities of life. The recreation of incidents according to her wishes is simply a way to forget the harsh truth and to live a comfortable life for some time.

Mansfield has used third-person narration in the story, the narrator is describing the events and the story is told from Rosabel's point of view, the focalization is on Rosabel, the readers' attention moves with Rosabel's consciousness. Comments in parenthesis show the narrator's intervention. At two places narrator has intervened in the thought process of Rosabel, First when her body is stiffened due to sitting in the same posture for a long time, and second when she is imagining an intimate and romantic scene with Harry. At both places Mansfield has used parenthesis to add comments by narrators that show that though the focalizer is Rosabel still the narration is controlled by the narrator.

Alice Munro, the Nobel laureate, is popularly known as the 'Canadian Chekhov'. She has given new flavour and texture to the short stories by developing many new strategies in narratives to explore the human consciousness. Her style has paradoxical expressions and her stories are filled with minute details of simple and ordinary life. She is interested in creating real life characters, the way people live life. Her stories are always based on her region, Ontario.

'Carried Away' is from Munro's eighth short story collection *Open Secrets* published in 1994. 'Carried Away' is a lengthy story of nearly fifty pages, it is the first story of the collection and reveals itself within its first two or three pages as a masterpiece. Munro's narratives have layers of meaning within; there are both spatial and temporal elements in them. The layered stories provide space in which figures, characters appear, disappear, and re-form in different shapes. 'Carried Away' is a story that captures the life rhythms of the main protagonist Louisa; the various worlds she has created in her life-time and all the different worlds and figures merged in each other in the concluding part of the story that neither Louisa nor the readers can differentiate between the real life characters or life like imaginary characters. The narrative of the story is divided into four sections, each one titled and each moving the story forward chronologically. The story has earned the label of 'historical fiction' as it covers a long period from 1917 to the 1950s, the time of World Wars and the Spanish Flu. It also deals with the Old and New World in Canada.

The story's first section is titled 'Letters' and it begins with the opening of the letter by the character who likes a ghost will remain throughout the story but will never appear in concrete shape. The story opens in a typical Murovian pattern of describing a very mundane-looking incident that has deep implications in the life of the main character. "In the dining room of the Commercial Hotel, Louisa opened the letter that had arrived that day from overseas. She ate steak and potatoes, her usual meal, and drank a glass of wine" (*Open Secrets*, 3). Louisa, the town's librarian, an unmarried woman living an unnoticed and lonely life enters into an epistolary romance and creates a possible world. The letter from Jack Agnew, a soldier from the town, appreciating her efforts to organize and arrange the city library leads to a regular conversation between the two people struggling from their loneliness, with every letter their intimacy grows and Jack confesses his love

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for Louisa and Louisa starts expecting his return and their life together, however, her expectations are repeatedly frustrated. The hope of Jack return makes Louisa curious about the war and she reads every bit of information about it, Munro when the love between Jack and Louisa is growing interjects a twist in the story in the form of Louisa beginning to meet with the Red Cross women in their war-effort knitting sections to knit a muffler for a soldier-friend. Here Munro changing the focalization from Louisa to objective narrative and telling something to the readers that Louisa doesn't know giving narratives an omniscient perspective. The objective narrator distinguishes one of the young girls from the knitting group and tells the name Grace Horace, and reveals "She had been engaged to Jack Agnew before he went overseas, but they had agreed not to say anything about it" (*Open Secrets*, 13). Louisa unaware of this has constructed her possible perfect world.

The second section of the story is titled 'Spanish Flu'—reminiscent of that era. Here, the focalization shifts alternately between Louisa and Jim Frarey, a travelling salesman. Two years have passed and it's 1919, Louisa is still living in the hotel and has not heard about Jack Agnew for some time and when every institution has closed its doors due to flu Louisa in hope of Jack keeps on opening the library. She is obsessed with his return, her imaginary world becomes so prominent that she sails far away from the real world, her world comprised of endless waiting and nothing else. One day she reads the news in the local newspaper of Jack's getting married to Grace Horace and after few days a note on her desk carrying the words "*I was engaged before I went overseas*" (*Open Secrets*, 18). Louisa carried away and tells everything to Jim Frarey. The free indirect speech of Louisa creates an impression of her disclosing more to the readers than to Jim, as if she is collecting pieces of her shattered possible world and trying to put it aside, "Do you think it was all a joke on me?" Louisa said, "Do you think a man could be so diabolical" (*Open Secrets*, 18). Munro in a subtle manner captures the shifting degrees of understanding that people have of themselves and each other. The understanding between Louisa and Jim leads to their sleeping together as both are a bit carried away but Jim retreating rapidly leaves Louisa.

The story can end here but in Munro's world nothing can be predicted, the third section titled 'Accidents' takes the story into the 1920s and this part is more about Jack Agnew, who appears on the scene again but again as an abstract image. The section begins with Jack's accidental death at the factory where he works – Douds. The owner Arthur Doud is introduced here who when pays a condolence call to Jack's house his widow asks him to return some of the library books. She also tells that Jack visits the library every Saturday night. Munro after using omniscient perspective shifts point of view to factory – owner Arthur Doud, who takes the books back to the library and meets Louisa there. Arthur's world is the world of pretension, his wife dies of Spanish Flu, he a lonely figure whose possible world is his real world, rarely he realizes that the thin line between real and unreal has vanished from his life a long time ago. It's only when he starts visiting the library that relieves him of the pressure to maintain appearances in public. "For years after his father's death, he had felt like an imposter. Not steadily, but from time to time he had felt that. And now the feeling was gone. He could sit here and feel that it was gone" (*Open Secrets*, 32). His frequent visit to the library results in him suggesting marriage to Louisa. In this section, Jack like a ghost remains in the background and emerges occasionally, he is that transparent and invisible thread that has connected everyone and everything in the story. His presence is never forgotten even though he never appears in real. Here it's more the world of Arthur than Louisa that Munro has presented, though the center consciousness is of Louisa and from the readers perspective Arthur enters in the world of Louisa, and it's only in the last section Munro reveals that Louisa during Arthur's visits to the library has begun creating an imaginary world of 'normal life' with Arthur.

The fourth and final section of the story is called 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', story moves in mid-1950s, Louisa now a widow has taken a bus from Carstairs to a much bigger town of London, to meet a heart specialist. The name of Jack Agnew appears again, in reference to a ceremony in a local park where Jack Agnew from Toronto is the featured speaker. The narratives now enter into the internal world of Louisa where Jack Agnew still lives, she lost all her awareness of conscious and unconscious and imagines her possible world and characters coming out in her real world. In this section Louisa in delusion sees Jack Agnew and enters into conversation with him, her imagined conversations are more what she has intended to say to Jack whom she never forgets and keeps somewhere in closed closets in her heart. Jack is part of her perfect world, the world she has created as an escape from her loneliness and monochrome life. The Jack of her world walks into her present world and talks to her, Munro's narrative acts more like the character in this scene, Louisa seeing Jack and talking to her, her confusion, the muddle and exhaustion she feels, her chaotic mental state where things, objects, figures are blurred like in some photographic trick, "It was anarchy she was up against—a devouring muddle. Sudden holes and impromptu tricks and radiant vanishing consolations" (*Open Secrets*, 50). Louisa

confesses in this imagined conversation that she marries Arthur to 'get into a normal life'. (*Open Secrets*, 48). Louisa's every created world merges into one and all the figures from different worlds come out she fails to distinguish between the illusion and the reality, she sees a group of people oddly dressed, and in between them she sees Jim Frarey, "Oh, what kind of a trick was being played on her, or what kind of trick was she playing on herself! She would not have it. She pulled herself tightly, she saw all those black clothes melt into a puddle" (*Open Secrets*, 49). The narrative leaves Louisa here in her bewildered and perplexed state.

Munro plays with time in her stories, for her characters there are no limits and lines between past, present and future. 'Carried Away' ends with reporting of the event which is earliest chronologically but it is last to be told. Working as a commercial traveller, Louisa visits Carstairs and having heard about a vacant post of a librarian in the city library has applied for the post. She gets the job and for her, it is again a fresh start, "She made fresh starts before and things had not turned out as she had hoped, but she believed in the swift decision, the unforeseen intervention, the uniqueness of her fate" (*Open Secrets*, 51). Most subtly Munro through Louisa has explored the life of every individual, that how the whole panoply of facts, truths, tricks and humiliations that shapes the life of an individual is undetectable from one point and once seen backward reveals the whole pattern and changes the perspective.

A narratological study of any story is studying the mode of representation of the events and incidents, it moves from a starting point to its end bound up with space and time. Mansfield and Munro's narratives are 'dechronologized' means the time and space sequence is not regularized. Their narrative technique has not followed any particular theoretical framework. Both have experimented with various narrative techniques, mostly there is no traditional pattern in their stories. Like Chekhov, their stories do not follow any vertical progression but they are horizontally developed and events are juxtaposed one against the other. This makes the story appears fragmentary and disjointed. Mansfield and Munro both have used Free Indirect Discourse in their stories in which the voice of the character is embedded with the voice of the narrator.

In these two stories, Mansfield and Munro both use the narratives to create the possible world of the characters. It's the work of narratives that the unreal becomes real and *vice versa*. Rosabel reposing on the floor of her room surrounded with all types of deficiency dreams about every possible luxury and comfort. Her created world is the world of fairy tales and she is the princess loved and cared for by people around her. Mansfield's use of simple patterns and structures gives the desired effect to the story. The narrative-like swing of the pendulum moves smoothly between the real and dream world of Rosabel. The use of Free Indirect Discourse in narrative connects the readers to Rosabel's consciousness. In the same manner, Munro in a more complicated manner created Louisa's many worlds and each world is different from the other. Both the stories are different in length, in plot and treatment of the characters still they are similar in terms of narratives and the imaginary world created through it.

Munro's story is lengthy and more complicated in terms of plot and characters while Mansfield's story is short and has one plot with Rosabel as the main character and main focalizer. In Munro's story, the focalizer, narrator and perspective change, it is more intricate in terms of narratives. Rosabel's world is a dream world, while Louisa's imagined world is more complex and it's not a dream world but a world of anticipation, desires and frustration and hope. There is a difference between Rosabel's imaginary world and Louisa's anticipated world, for Rosabel her world is a fantasy an escape from the bitter truth of life, she knows that it is unreal and transitory while Louisa's created world becomes her reality, at every different phase and with different people, she has constructed a world and that remains in her subconscious not as some dream but more like concrete reality.

Every individual is a world and within that world, various other worlds exist. Our consciousness continuously moves in various time zones and levels of awareness. The inner life though finds its expression through outer actions but it's the narratives that truly bring a person's inner world to the surface. In a narratological study, every word and a full stop have significance and it has different connotations. Any fictional work is a creation of the possible world, the near-perfect world giving evidence of the existence of such a perfect world in the mind of every individual.

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