



The Use of Epiphany in Selected  
Short Stories of Katherine  
Mansfield and Alice Munro

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## Introduction

### (The religious meaning of epiphany)

The prominent tales of epiphany in Christian mythology "is the story of Saul who was transformed into the Apostle Paul – one of Christ's disciples. While travelling on horseback to Damascus, Saul a hunter and disciple of Christians, suddenly, heard the word of God. God's word was powerful that he was struck blind, fell from his horse and was transformed into Apostle Paul" ( Mcdonald ; 2005:11).

In general epiphany means a clarification or showing forth of something usually divine being. "Epiphany commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles in the form of the Magi and the celebration of this day is in the January6"(Harmon & Hugh; 1986: 181). Epiphany is a Christian festival in the 6th January and they celebrates in this day to remember the time when the Magi came to see the baby Jesus at Bethlehem. (Cuddon; 1999: 277-278).

### The literary meaning of epiphany

It is the moment when the character realizes something and this thing makes him/her change his/her feelings and thoughts. Epiphany is the sudden and profound understanding of something. It also means , "a flash of recognition when a person is discovered or seen something or someone in a new light"(literarydevices.net). James Joyce uses epiphany "as a term to represent the moment when the soul of the popular object seems to us brilliant"(literarydevices.net). Moreover, Joseph Conrad describes epiphany as "one of those rare moments of awakening in which everything occurs in a flash" (literarydevices.net).

Other writers define epiphany as: a sudden revelation of some truth which makes an important impact on a person "in a moment of crisis. It is as if a veil is lifted and one is able to see the essential quality or unity or some idea,



event, and/or person, such a spiritual breakthrough could be triggered by something as insignificant as a sound or a gesture"(Ali; 2007: 1).

Epiphany is also defined as: the interactional moment which leaves a clear mark in the lives of people and this mark has the potential to make a transformation in feeling, expression, and thoughts. "The effects may be both positive and/or negative" (Mcdonald ; 2005 : 19 ).

James Joyce gives this term a wide currency to designate an event, to perceive the essential nature of something, a situation a person, and an object. "It is a conjectural perception of reality realized in a quick flash of recognition in which something, usually commonplace and simple, is discovered in a new light", (Cuddon; 1999: 277-278) and as Joyce explains that the epiphany's essence , "Its soul, its whatness leaps to us from the Vestment of its appearance" (Cuddon; 1999: 277-278), and "this sudden insight is the moment of epiphany". (Cuddon; 1999: 277-278). James Joyce elaborates this term in his stories as a symbol of spiritual state. Many writers especially mystics and devotional poets have transferred their experiences of epiphanies like in the poems of Henry Vaughan, Gerard Manley, George Herbert and in the Prelude of Wordsworth, also Shelley titles these imaginary occasions 'moments' and De Quincey 'involutes'. (Cuddon; 1999: 277-278) .

## **Types of epiphany in literature**

There are four types of epiphany:

1. The 'major epiphany', is a moment of shattering and changing a person's life completely.
2. The 'cumulative epiphany', is a result of a sequence events in the person's life that have built up through his life.
3. The 'minor or illuminative' epiphany, when a person face tensions, problems in a situation or relationships and these will make the epiphany reveals.



4. The 'relived epiphany', when a person remembers old events in his life, leads to a great change in his or her life. (McDonald ; 2005:19-20).

### **Examples of the use of epiphany in literature:**

1. **"Miss Brill"** by Katherine Mansfield, Miss Brill is an aging woman used to go to a specific park each Sunday. She goes alone while others go as pairs and used to look at them and spend the day in that park. The epiphany in this story leaps when Miss Brill realizes that her absence is not important. If she stays one Sunday in her home, no one will miss her in the park. "Miss Brill recognizes that she and everyone else in the park are simple actors, acting out their roles" (literarydevices.net).

2. **"A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man "**by James Joyce, here we have two examples of epiphany, we have the main character Stephen Dedalus as he was sixteen and in a boarding school. One day, he returns to his room, feels gloomy by his sins, then he decided to reform and improve his life. So, he goes to the church for confession to the priest. So, Stephen finds a new light in his life and decided to become a priest. The second moment of epiphany, when Stephen's life changed to another way, he recognizes that his life will waste by living as a priest. He wants to live his life like others, and be creative like an artist. One day, he sees some boys diving in the water and flirting beautiful girls standing in the water. They start to follow these girls. This is the moment of epiphany, it is an emotional moment which makes a realization leading to a change in Stephen's life that he leaves his work as a priest in the church . (literarydevices.net) .

3. **"Hamlet"** by Shakespeare. Epiphany occurs when, the hero, Hamlet is sailing to England. And trying to devise a plan of revenge on Claudius the murderer of his father. While thinking of a flawless plan he suddenly has a realization and says, *"there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may"* (literarydevices.net). This quote represents Hamlet's epiphany that he



now realizes that he does not have the wisdom to plan a perfect revenge and that he should just hold on to the moment and flow with it.

## The purpose of epiphany

The purpose of **epiphany** in short stories and novels is to make a change in the plot in the near future of the story or novel. Also, is used to change the opinion of the character about others , events , characters and places. After a sudden realization of the situation and also , it may be a sign of a result in the story. Epiphany may or may not change the character, the character may develop and change to a positive side , may not develop and change and stay in his/her place , or may make the character change to a negative side. (literarydevices.net).

## Katherine Mansfield, life, and style.

Katherine Mansfield regards as one of the major writers of short stories. Her pseudonym is Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp, and her married name is Kathleen Mansfield Murry. Mansfield was born in 1888 Wellington, New Zealand and died in 1923, Gurdjieff institute, near Fontainebleau, France. At the age of 19, she went to England to establish herself as a writer. She attended "Queen College" in London and she was writing to the newspaper of the college and became the editor. In 1911, she began her relationship with John Middleton Murry and they married in 1918. The death of her beloved brother "Chummie Beauchamp" was the most important event that would change her life, she wrote a poem about this event: *"By the remembered stream my brother/ Waiting for me with berries in his hands stands/ These are my body. Sister, take, and eat"*. (WWW.Wikipedia.org).

In her final years, she was seeking increasingly unorthodox cures for her tuberculosis. In 1923, she suffered a fatal pulmonary hemorrhage and she died on 9 January and buried in Avon.



In her final years she proved to have been a prolific writer and a lot of her works remained unpublished after her death, but Murry edited and published her works "in two additional volumes of short stories. The Doves Nest IN 1923, Something Childish in 1924, A volume of poems, The Aloe, Novels and Novelists, and collection of her letters and journals". (WWW.Wikipedia.org)

Mansfield was a pioneer in using interior monologue , and shifting points of view . Some of her short stories are memories of her family and New Zealand childhood. Concerning the language , she used it very careful and did not waste a word . "Mansfield wrote about a narrow range of material , children exploring the world alone, children reacting to adults , lonely women in a hostile world" (WWW.Wikipedia.org).

Katherine Mansfield is regarded as a master of short fiction , she evolved a distinctive prose style with many overtones of poetry. "She had much influence on the development of the short stories focused upon psychological conflicts have on obliqueness of narration and a subtlety of observation that reveal the influence of Anton Chekhov". ([WWW.britannica.com](http://WWW.britannica.com)).

In her fiction , Mansfield employs the technique of epiphany. She had the sense of the importance of the moment , for her , it is not only a matter of influence but rather a matter of experience of sick women who appreciate the rareness of the moment . Her alternative rule is the moment of revelation which means epiphany that sums up the whole idea and opens a wider space of recognition to the character who suffers that moment. Epiphany considers one of the major features of her art and she pays attention to the contexts and imagery of moment. (Al\_Sammarai;2006:65)



## "Je ne Parle pas Francis"

### ( The Plot )

The story is set in Paris and narrated by Raoul Duquette, a Parisian man and Dick's best friend (an Englishman who speaks French and studies French literature) who likes to sit in a specific café. He has a published book out, *False Coins*, and studies English literature.

The text is written in a modernist mode, and with many shifts in the narrative. The title is written in French. It means ( I do not speak French ). The story is narrated by Raoul Dequette and it begins when Raoul enters a café and finds this sentence written on a table. At first, he talks about his life as he lives in a flat and he never dates women. Then he informs the reader about his friend Dick, how they met? how they became friends? and how he felt sad after dick's departure from France to England. After few months, Raoul receives a letter from Dick informs him that he will com back with his girlfriend Mouse. The day of there arrival comes, Raoul goes to the train station to meet his friend, and after their arrival, the three go to the hotel. In the hotel, they make the luggage up and Dick asks Raoul to write a letter to his mother. After that Dick disappeared leaving Mouse alone in the hotel. (Burgan; 1994: 134-137). During that time Mouse was in the hotel telling her story to Raoul, and informs him that their relationship is not well and begins to cry. Then Raoul finds a letter from Dick to Mouse ( his girlfriend) informs her that their relationship is over with her and ends their relationship. This makes Mouse in despair because she tells her friend that she and Dick are already married while he leaves her. Raoul does not know what to do, and how to comfort her, they set in the café together thinking about this problem. After a few hours, Raoul tells her that he will go, and she pleads to him to return and help her. Raoul promises her to return again but he never comes back, and leaves her alone in the hotel, does not know what to do, and where



to go, and how to communicate with people because she does not speak French. Raoul says that he never see Mouse again.(Burgan; 1994: 134-137) .

## **The Epiphany in "Je Ne Parle Pas français "**

It is the first sentence spoken by Mouse to Raoul and the sentence which was written on a table at a small café Raoul used to go to it. This sentence makes him remembers his English friend Dick and his girlfriend. And motives him emotionally and physically and inspires him to tell the story. Dick betrays Mouse leaving her alone in Paris and also Raoul betrays her. The epiphany in this story is Raoul's sense of agony and how he do not know what to do with his actuality. This moment makes Raoul discovers his inside, his real character, how he acts and behaves with others. He discovers the real side of himself that he is a helpless person. (Ibid 134-137) .

But then, quite suddenly, at the bottom of the page, written in green ink, I fell on to that stupid, stale little phrase: Je ne Parle pas Francis . There ! it had comethe moment—the geste! and although I was so ready, it caught me, it tumbled me over; I was simply overwhelmed. And the physical feeling was so curious, so particular. It was as if all of me, except my head and arms, all of me that was under the table, had simply dissolved, melted, turned into water. Just my head remained and two sticks of arms pressing on to the table. But, ah! the agony of that moment! How can I describe it? I didn't think of anything. I didn't even cry out to myself. Just for one moment I was not. I was Agony, Agony, Agony. ([www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org](http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org) )

## **Alice Munro, life and style.**

Alice Ann Laidlaw is the eldest girl of Anne Chamney and Robert Laidlaw and born on 1931. She and her family lived in a nineteenth century brick farmhouse at the edge of Wingham, Ontario. Munro studied in the



Lowertown School in (1978), where she was the only one in the class passing first grade. After the insistence of her mother, she was transferred to the public school in Wingham and she lives with books and imagination, she felt even more isolated from the world and during high school she worked on an unfinished gothic novel.

After World War II Munro's family failed; times were hard that the family had to burn sawdust for heat. In 1947 her father took a job as night watchman to gain money. Her mother was an elementary teacher and had been forced to abandon from her work because married women were not allowed to teach. In her mid-forties she developed a devastating form of Parkinson's disease contracted from the encephalitis virus. When she was twelve she worked as a maid for a Toronto family and had to do all the housework alone. "Her feelings toward her mother were intensely ambivalent, and there were frequent clashes" (en.wikipedia.org).

Munro attended the University of Western Ontario and in 1949 she entered the journalism program, moving to English in her second year. She held two library jobs and sold her blood to gain money. Her first story "The Dimensions of a Shadow" was published in the campus literary magazine in 1950. Then she was engaged to a fellow student James Munro. After her scholarship expired in 1951, she was forced to leave school, returning home and takes care for her ill mother. She and her husband were married at her parents' home in Wingham just after Christmas.

Many of her works receive the Nobel prize in literature. Many critics compare the small town settings of Munro to writers from the rural south of the united states. Munro's works are often compared with the great writers of short stories. Munro's works like Chekhov's, the plot is secondary and little to happen. Garran Holcombe says: "All is based on the epiphanic moment, the sudden enlightenment, the concise, subtle, revelatory detail.". Her work deals with "love and work, and the failings of both" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki).

Some of the critics have asked "whether Munro writes short stories or novels" ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki)) because her stories have the literary and emotional depth of novels. Alex Keegan gave a simple answer " Who cares ? In most of Munro's stories, there is as much as in many novels." ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki)).

Munro's opinion about her works is " The crucial moments in life are often the coincidences not the moments of decision and action that we think of as the real core of our lives, stories should often thus focus on these moments in order to understand and cope with them"([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)). So, Munro is a good guide to the unexpected turn that change everything in life. ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)).

## **"The Bear Came Over the Mountain"**

### **(The Plot)**

The story set in Canada and opens when Grant Pin an aging former college professor and Fiona's husband and Fiona Christie an aging woman, suffers from Alzheimer, they are young university students, who have decided to get married, but the decision seems to be on a whim. One day, they were on the beach and Fiona asked him " Do you think it would be fun if we got married?" ([shortstories.about.com](http://shortstories.about.com)), Grant thought that she was joking but she was not and they got married.

The time passed to Fiona and Grant as an old couple because the story focus on Fiona's state in the nursing home. The couple live in rural Brant, Ontario, she begins to lose her memory and suffers from Alzheimer .

Throughout the story, Grant's infidelities leads to a reflection on his marriage and influence his decision about Fiona's life and happiness. Fiona feels that she becomes a hindrance to herself and her husband, and she decides to go and stay in a nursing home. One of the rules of this home is that the patient must stay 30 days alone and no one can visit him. After 30



days, Grant goes to visit Fiona and he finds her forgot him and her life completely, her attention turned to a temporary resident Aubrey Murphy who is an aging and mute man, suffers from Alzheimer in a wheelchair has become her partner in the home, and Grant becomes unhappy voyeur. As the time passed and Fiona still forgetting her past, Grant wonders whether she is acting to punish him for his past affairs. After that, Aubrey's wife Marian comes and takes Aubrey from the home. This event makes Fiona sinks in a deep gloomy and sadness ,and Grand is touched by this sadness. So, he decides to go to Marian in an effort to let Fiona see Aubrey again. (shortstories.about.com).

He would rather see his wife happy with another man than alone and unhappy. At first, Marian refuses Grant's order and the meeting ends with an affair between them, eventually, Grant succeeds in bringing Aubrey to visit his wife, but in this moment and before she sees Aubrey, Fiona suddenly remembers her life and husband and her love for him. The story ends with Grant embraces Fiona. Grant's character is ambivalent, he betrays Fiona several times before and he never stop it. Even when Fiona was in the hospital, he betrays her with Aubrey's wife while he was trying to help her and make her happy. (Ibid).

## **The Epiphany in "The Bear Came Over The Mountain"**

The epiphany in this story lies on Fiona's reaction. At the beginning of the story she forgets her life and husband and seems to have an affair with another one 'Aubrey'. After his departure, Fiona feels sad and cut herself from the outside world but soon, when Grant visits her, she remembers him and her life. This sudden insight change Fiona's life and leads her to another man not her husband and creates a new world inside Fiona. But this moment changes with Grant's arrival. (shortstories.about.com)

"Fiona, I've brought a surprise for You". Do you remember Aubrey? She stared at Grant for a moment, as if waves of wind had come beating into her face. Into her face, into her head,

pulling everything to rags. All rags and loose threads. "Names elude me," she said harshly. Then the look passed away as she retrieved, with an effort, some bantering grace. She set the book down carefully and stood up and lifted her arms to put them around him. Her skin or her breath gave off a faint new smell, a smell that seemed to Grant like green stems in rank water. "I'm happy to see you," she said, both sweetly and formally. She pinched his earlobes, hard. ""You could have just driven away

she said. "Just driven away without a care in the world and forsook me. Forsook me. Forsaken" He kept his face against her white hair, her pink scalp, her sweetly shaped skull. He said, "Not a chance." ([http:// www.Condenet.com](http://www.Condenet.com)).

## "Runaway"

### (The plot)

The story of runaway centers on woman's feelings and thoughts about herself and her situation and it is about women acquiring knowledge and the consequences and also knowing herself.

**Runaway** wins the Nobel prize in literature. Here, we have runaway for emotions, people, and animals. The story talks about the wife Carla and how she ran away two times, the first one when she was 18 at the college, ran away with her lover Clark and married him against her parents' wishes. The second her runaway from her husband. ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

Concerning the animal's runaway, we have Flora, Carla's beloved white goat, Flora has disappeared twice in this story the first one before the beginning of the story and the second one at the end and seems that her husband Clark has trying to get rid of his wife's goat. After the second



runaway, Carla returned to her husband, she does not know what to do, whether leaves him, or returns to him, and finally decides to return to her husband. In the night of her return, her husband found the goat but he did not return it to his wife, and no one know what he did do with it but it seems he killed her.

**Munro wrote about Carla's runaway:**

"While she was running away from him-now-Clark still kept his place in her life. But when she was finished runaway, when she just on, what would she put in his place? What else—who else—could ever be so vivid a challenge?". ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

Munro means by the word challenge Carla's ability to hold out against the temptation to go to the place where the buzzards there and be sure that Flora was killed there, she does not want to realize the truth about her goat Flora, so she goes to her home leaving the truth behind her.

"At first, she had been Clark's pet entirely, following him everywhere, dancing for his attention . She was as quick and graceful and provocative as a kitten, and her resemblance to a guileless girl in cove had made them both laugh ". ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)).

Though the above quotation describes the goat's behavior yet in a way or another it mirrors Carla's relationship with Clark. Carla's first escape from her family to marry Clark parallels Flora's escape and Clark suggests that "Flora might have just gone off to find herself a Billy"([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)), because Carla and Flora are still alive while in the second escape Flora seems to be killed by Clark and "Carla is going to be in a much more dangerous position for her having returned to Clark" ([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com)).

Concerning the last part of runaway (Runaway for emotions), when Carla's emotion toward Clark changed and she was wondering if she loves him or not. She runs away, leaving everything behind her and her neighbor Sylvia

helps her, but in the station when the bus stopped for a while, she asked the driver to leave the bus and she phoned Clark to come and take her.

## The epiphany in "Runaway"

Carla's epiphany, when she leaves her husband because of his bad treatment after their marriage and he changed with her. But when she was in the bus, she changed her mind and stopped the bus to call her husband and she was crying and asked him to come and take her. She thinks that she does not love him and can leave him but soon she remember her old life and how they meet and finally discovers that she cannot leave him.

Already the bus had loaded on the few passengers and parcels that had been waiting in this town. A woman and a baby in its stroller were waving goodbye to somebody. The building behind them, the café that served as a bus stop, was also in motion; a liquefying wave passed through the bricks and windows as if they were about to dissolve. In peril, Carla pulled her huge body, her iron limbs, forward. She stumbled. She cried out, "Let me off"

The driver braked. He called back irritably, "I thought you were going to Toronto." People gave her casually curious looks. No one seemed to understand that she was in anguish.

I have to get off here""

"There's a washroom in the back"

"No. No. I have to get off"

"I'm not waiting. You understand that? You got luggage underneath?"

No. Yes. No"."

No luggage""

A voice in the bus said, "Claustrophobia. That's what's the matter with her".

"You sick? the driver said"

"No. No. I just want off"

O.K. O.K. Fine by me"



"Come and get me. Please. Come and get me".

"I will"

([www.newyorker.com](http://www.newyorker.com))

## Conclusion

Katherine Mansfield and Alice Munro use the technique of epiphany in their fictions to show us the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, the changes which happen with the characters and the transformations inside his/her mind.

The moments of epiphany make the character changes to positive or negative state or will become another one, or, discover something in a new light.

Katherine Mansfield used the type '**relived**' in "**Je ne pare pas francais**", when Raoul discovers the real side of himself as helpless person. This discovery does not change him but makes him knew the hidden side of himself.

Alice Munro used the type '**minor**' in "**The bear came over the mountain**" when Fiona's memory restores and finds that her real feelings towards her husband not Aubrey, and this leads to a little change in her life.

While in **Runaway** she used '**cumulative epiphany**' when Carla's second run away makes her discover that she loves her husband and cannot live without him. We can conclude that all of us had epiphanic moments in our lives and these moments make us realize something we did not know before or, discover something in a new light or, make us change our mind totally.



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