[00:00:00] **Daphna:** Just then, the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting paper, and as the fly tried its wings, down came a great heavy blot.

What would it make of that? What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. This is Jim Phelan, Director of Project Narrative at The Ohio State University. And I'd like to welcome you to the Project Narrative Podcast. In a typical episode, a narrative theorist selects a short narrative to read and discuss with me. Today, I'll be talking with Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, who has selected Katherine Mansfield's short story, The Fly, which was first published in the magical modernist year of 1922.

[00:01:05] **Jim Phelan:** Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Haifa. Her main areas of scholarly interest are modernism and a modernist novel, Joseph Conrad, Mikhail Bakhtin, philosophy and literature, ethnography and literature, historiography and fiction, and literature and psychoanalysis.

Among Daphne's numerous influential publications, I'll just single out her four books. Graham Greene's Childless Fathers, 1988, Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper, 1991, The Strange Short Fiction of Joseph Conrad, subtitled Writing, Culture, and Subjectivity, in 1999, and Between Philosophy and Literature, Bakhtin and the Question of the Subject.

2014. Daphna, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the Project Narrative Podcast. And let me start by asking if there's anything you'd like to tell our listeners before you read Katherine Mansfield's The Fly.

[00:02:09] **Daphna:** Many thanks, Jim. Yes, I would like to preface this reading with a word about the personal relevance of this story for me and the reason why I've selected it for the podcast.

As your listeners would probably know, we are in the midst of a horrific war, which broke out in October 7th. And whatever one thinks of the war in terms of the causes and aftermath, this is a time of great sorrow, rage, and sheer dread for all of us, human beings on all sides of the conflict.

So this story takes place a few years after the end of the First World War and does not directly engage with the war itself. But it is, I suggest, a poignant and profound anti war story, and I hope that its relevance to the here and now and the insight it generates would be apparent to other readers as well.

[00:03:09] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, terrific. Okay. Well, thank you for that selection, and thank you for that framing. So now here's Dafna reading Katherine Mansfield's The Fly.

[00:03:20] **Daphna:** You're very snug in here, piped old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great green leather chair by his friend the boss's desk as a baby peers out of its pram.

His talk was over. It was time for him to be off. But he did not want to go. Since he had retired, since his stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday. On Tuesday, he was dressed and brushed and allowed to cut back to the city for the day. Though what he did here, the wife and girls couldn't imagine, made a nuisance of himself to his friends, they supposed.

Well, perhaps so. All the same, we cling to our last pleasures as the tree clings to its last leaves. So there sat old Woodifield, smoking a cigar and staring almost greedily at the boss who rolled in his office chair, stout, rosy, five years older than he, and still going strong, still at the helm. It did one good to see him.

Wistfully, admiringly, the old voice added, It's snug in here, upon my word. Yes, it's comfortable enough, agreed the boss, and he flipped the financial times with a paper knife. As a matter of fact, he was proud of his room. He liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there, in the midst of it, in full view of that frail old figure in the muffler.

I've had it done up lately, he explained, as he had explained for the past, how many weeks. New carpet, and he pointed to the bright red carpet with a pattern of large white rings. New furniture, and he nodded towards the massive bookcase and the table with legs like twisted trickle. Electric heating, and he waved almost exultantly towards the five transparent pearly sausages glowing so softly in the tilted copper pan.

But he did not draw old Woodifield's attention to the photograph over the table of a grave looking boy in uniform standing in one of those spectral photographer's parks with photographer's storm clouds behind him. It was not new. It had been there for over six years. There was something I wanted to tell you, said old Woodifield, and his eyes grew dim remembering.

Now what was it? I had it in my mind when I started out this morning. His hands began to tremble, and patches of red showed above his beard. Poor old chap, he's on his last pence, thought the boss, and feeling kindly, he winked at the old man and said jokingly, I tell you what, I've got a little drop of something here that will do you good before you go out into the cold again.

It's beautiful stuff, it wouldn't hurt a child. He took a key off his watch chain and locked a couple below the desk.

And drew forth a dark squat bottle. That's the medicine, he said he. And the man from whom I got it told me on the strict duty it came from the cellars at Windsor Castle. Old Woodifield's mouth fell open at the sight.

He couldn't have looked more surprised if the boss had produced a rabbit. It's whiskey, ain't it? He piped feebly. The boss turned the bottle and lovingly showed him the label. Whiskey it was. Do you know, said he, peering at the boss wonderingly, they won't let me touch it at home. And he looked as though he was going to cry.

Ah, that's where we know a bit more than the ladies, cried the boss, swooping across for two tumblers that stood on the table with a water bottle and pouring a generous finger into each. Drink it down. It'll do you good. And don't put any water with it. It's sacrilege to tamper with stuff like that. Ah, he tossed off his, pulled out his handkerchief, hastily wiped his moustaches, and cocked an eye at old Woodifield, who was rolling in his chaps.

The old man, swallowed, was silent a moment, and then said faintly, Hm, it's nutty. But it warmed him. It crept into his chill old brain. He remembered. That was it, he said, heaving himself out of his chair. I thought you'd like to know. The girls were in Belgium last week, having a look at poor Reggie's grave, and they happened to come across your boys.

They're quite near each other, you know, it seems. Old Woodifield paused, but the boss made no reply. Only a quiver in his eyelids showed that he heard. The girls were delighted with the way the place is kept, piped the old voice, beautifully looked after. Couldn't be better if they were at home. You haven't been across, have you?

No, no. For various reasons, the boss had not been across. There's miles of it, quavered old Woodifield, and it's all as neat as a garden, flowers growing on all the graves, nice broad path. It was plain from his voice how much he liked a nice broad path. The polls came again. Then the old man brightened wonderfully.

Do you know what the hotel made the girls pay for a pot of jam he piped? Ten francs. Robbery, I call it. It was a little pot, so Gertrude says, no bigger than half crown, and she hadn't taken more than a spoonful. When they charged her ten francs, Gertrude brought pot away with her to teach them a lesson.

Quite right, too. It's trading on our feelings. They think because we are over there having a look around, we are ready to pay anything. That's what it is. And he turned towards the door. Quite right, quite right. Cried the boss, though what was quite right, he hadn't the least idea. He came around by his desk, followed the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out.

Woodifield was gone. For a long moment, the boss stayed staring at nothing, while the grey haired office messenger watching him dodged in and out of his cubbyhole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run. I'll see nobody for half an hour, Macy, said the boss. Understand? Nobody at all. Very good, sir.

The door shut. The firm, heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet. The fat body plumped down in the spring chair. And leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted. He intended, he had arranged to weep. It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave.

It was exactly as though the earth had opened, and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girl staring down at him. For it was strange. Although over six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep forever. My son, groaned the boss.

But no tears came yet. In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words, to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him. Time, he had declared then, he had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men, perhaps, might recover, might live their loss down, but not he.

How was it possible? His boy was an only son. Ever since his birth, the boss had worked at building up this business for him. It had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning. How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years, without the promise forever before him of the boys stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off?

And that promise had been so near being fulfilled. The boy had been in the office learning the ropes for a year before the war. Every morning they had started off together. They had come back by the same train, and what congratulations he had received as the boy's father. No wonder he had taken to it marvelously.

As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack of them down to Old Macy couldn't make enough of the boy, and he wasn't in the least spoiled. No, he was just his bright natural self with the right word for everybody with that boyish look and his habit of saying simply splendid But all that was over and done with As though it had never been.

The day had come when Macy had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. Deeply regret to inform you. And he had left the office, a broken man, with his life in ruins. Six years ago. Six years. How quickly time passes. It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands from his face.

He was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. But it wasn't the favorite photograph of his. The expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern looking. The boy had never looked like that. At that moment, the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into the broad inkpot and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again.

Help! Help! said those struggling legs. But the sides of the ink pot were wet and slippery. It fell back again and began to swim. The boy took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it onto a piece of blotting paper. For a fraction of a second, it laid still on the dark patch that oz around it.

Then the front legs waved, took hold, and pulling its small sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. Over and under, over and under, went a leg along a wing, as the stone goes over and under the scythe. Then, there was a pause, while the fly, seeming to stand on the tips of its toes, tried to expand, first one wing, and then the other.

It succeeded at last, and sitting down, it began, like a minute cat, to clean its face, Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other, lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over. It had escaped. It was ready for life again. Just then, the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting paper, and as the fly tried its wings, down came a great heavy blot.

What would it make of that? What indeed! The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as if painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, The task began from the beginning. He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and felt a real admiration for the fly's courage.

That was the way to tackle things. That was the right spirit. Never say die. It was only a question of, but the fly had again finished its laborious task and the boss had just time to refill his pen to shake fair and square onto the newly cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed, but behold, the front legs were again waving.

The boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, You artful little b And he actually had the brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen deep into the inkpot.

It was. The last blot fell on the soaked blotting paper. And the draggled fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body, the front legs were not to be seen. Come on, said the boss. Look sharp! And he stirred it with his pen, in vain. Nothing happened, or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

The boss lifted the corpse on the end of his paper knife and flung it into the waste paper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macy. Bring me some fresh blotting paper, he said sternly, and look sharp about it.

And while the old dog, padded away, he felt a wondering what it was that he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was, he took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar for the life of him. He could not remember.

[00:19:04] **Jim Phelan:** Okay, that's that. Thank you. This is such a, so much packed, I think, into these few short pages and maybe just, we'll want to get into a lot of that, but maybe just to start, we can, begin with the observation that Mansfield sort of is working with a three part structure.

We have the opening scene with Whitterfield and the boss. Woodifield leaves, and we have the boss starting to reflect on the loss of his son. And then that's part two. And then in part three, we have him noticing the fly and falling into the inkwell. And then everything that he does in relationship to the fly, and then that ending with the boss not being able to remember what he was going to be thinking about.

So maybe just some initial thoughts on that way of structuring the story?

[00:19:56] **Daphna:** Oh, yes, definitely. There's a very definite three part structure here with three short scenes that seem to be unrelated, but they are closely interwoven mainly through the use of imagery and the thematics, of course we'll need to talk about it later on, but they add up to a very powerful thematic statement about the undercurrents of power, both in private and in public life and about loss.

and about responsibility.

[00:20:32] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:20:32] **Daphna:** So they are connected in all kinds of very subtle ways. And this is really what we need to unpack in this discussion.

[00:20:41] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Great. Okay. Yeah. So maybe we start with the first scene and the power dynamics there, Old Woodifield and the boss and some of the ways that Mansfield is, beginning that exploration of that thematic.

[00:20:55] **Daphna:** Okay

first of all it, you know, it's worthwhile noting that the boss is not named. Yes. He's called the boss.

[00:21:02] **Jim Phelan:** Right.

[00:21:02] **Daphna:** Woodifield is named, Macy is named the boss is not named. And again, this is

[00:21:07] **Jim Phelan:** And the boss, the boss's son is not named, and Woodifield's son is named Woodifield's wife is named, but yeah.

Uh huh. Yeah.

[00:21:14] **Daphna:** Yeah. Huh. And I think that is very significant, because I mean the boss is simply the boss. He's defined by his bossiness. He's defined, and the son too, as we'll see, he doesn't seem to have any personality of his own, any kind of autonomy. He is the boss's son. As far as the boss is concerned, he might have had a separate private life, but we are going to know nothing about that.

He is an extension of the boss. So he is the boss's son. All the other characters, minor as they are, even Gertrude, Woody Field's daughter is named.

[00:21:55] **Jim Phelan:** Right.

[00:21:55] **Daphna:** So this is the first thing to note. And what we have here is a kind of not even a tug of war because the forces are so unequal.

But here is the boss uh, still going strong, still at the helm, right? And old Woodfield looks up to him, admiringly and even jealously because he's younger and he's. You know, obviously, and the boss enjoys that.

[00:22:20] **Jim Phelan:** Yes.

[00:22:21] **Daphna:** Clearly. So the boss is having a great time showing off. Mm-Hmm. , you know, enjoying his success, his power, his money showing off the new furniture and

[00:22:33] **Jim Phelan:** right.

[00:22:33] **Daphna:** And, old woody field is just sitting there kind of obligingly admiring. or blindingly envying the boss as the boss has meant him to. So, this is true for as long as Woodifield doesn't speak of the sons, of the dead sons, both of them had lost their sons in the war.

[00:22:57] **Jim Phelan:** Right.

[00:22:57] **Daphna:** It's not called the Great War for nothing. A whole generation of young men was wiped out. and both of them lost their sons and they're both buried in Belgium. And Woodifield says, They're lying near each other. They are buried near each other. And that nearness is a kind of leveling

[00:23:18] **Jim Phelan:** yes

[00:23:19] **Daphna:** of the situation.

So I'm not sure if Waterfield himself is aware of it, but there's some slight and subtle shift in the power relations, as Waterfield tells him about his girl's trip to the graveyard in Belgium. And in a way, Implying. Powerful as you are, you have lost your son, just as I did.

[00:23:43] **Jim Phelan:** Yes, there's also the interesting thing that in the part one where, maybe we'll talk a little bit more about this, but where there's so much free and direct discourse and sort of vocalization through the two characters, right?

But then we have that paragraph about the boss did not draw Old Woodifield's attention to the photograph over the table. It's like the narrator's inserting something there, and, and there, there's like, okay there's something else going on in this situation here. And it's like the first opening into that.

[00:24:15] **Daphna:** Yeah. Absolutely. I think, the use of free and direct discourse is something that we need to kind of articulate maybe more broadly because Mansfield is absolutely a genius in her use of free and direct discourse. Free and direct discourse, in fact, borrows the inner discourse of the character.

So it looks like third person narrative, but it uses the inner language. of the character. Now, it is very often used to tell us a great deal about the class or the education of the character, but also gives us a very direct experience of the character's state of mind.

[00:24:57] **Jim Phelan:** Yes.

[00:24:58] **Daphna:** And result is that it often seduces us into some sort of identification with a character and elicits an almost automatic emphatic response on our part, as readers.

Because we are taken into their mind, as it were. So

[00:25:17] **Jim Phelan:** it's

[00:25:18] **Daphna:** almost automatic.

[00:25:19] **Jim Phelan:** Traveling with them as they process their experiences, and that creates this sympathy.

[00:25:24] **Daphna:** Perceiving things through their eyes. Kind of filtering through their emotions. Now Mansfield deploys this narrative technique brilliantly.

But at the same time in let me give an example of, Woodifield, for instance. There's something amazing here. I don't know if the readers have the text in front of them, but in the written text, since he had retired, since his three dots Ellipsis, that is, stroke. Now, the ellipsis tells us so much, because he's not actually talking, he's thinking these thoughts.

But, there's an ellipsis before the word stroke, which he He doesn't even dare to think to himself. He doesn't formulate the issue even to himself, it's so frightening for him. And of course there are many more instances of that. and Mansfield allows us for a moment to get into this mind of this frail old, man who is, scared of dying, who knows he's, going to die soon and he's entirely powerless entirely without agency.

So we tend to identify, but Mansfield doesn't let us be drawn completely into this empathetic position. Okay she actually requires that we read over the characters shoulders, as it were, that we relate not only to their perception of the situation, but also to the actual situation. and what, is the truth of the situation in a way we see, in other words, what they themselves cannot

[00:27:06] **Jim Phelan:** see, see.

Right. Okay.

[00:27:07] **Daphna:** And this is I think really a stroke of genius on Mansfield's part. We step back, we have this kind of empathy because of free and direct discourse, but then we had to step back and become as it were, suspicious and therefore active readers.

[00:27:25] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. And that's especially true in the handling of the boss and his, the free and direct discourse with, with him.

And even, we could talk about this later too, it's switching from indirect discourse to direct discourse with some of it when we get inside his consciousness and that, and the direct discourse itself being sort of a window where we see more than he sees.

[00:27:47] **Daphna:** Exactly. Yeah. Exactly. That's precisely, there's a kind of interplay, which is amazing, I think, between free and direct discourse, which reflects his perception of himself, and in direct discourse and action, of course, the torture of the fly, which give us a more objective, I would say, reliable view of, who we're dealing with and who this character is.

So, the boss tells himself, for instance, and others, that all these years he had denied himself for the sake of his son that he will never recover from his grief the loss because his son had given meaning to his life and so on and so forth, but this self perception Which is based on the conventional figure of the bereaved father.

[00:28:42] **Jim Phelan:** Yes.

[00:28:42] **Daphna:** And we can easily identify with that. I think each and every one of us is sharply contrasted. not just with the final scene, but with his evident enjoyment of it. of his power and his material success. He tells himself that nothing has any meaning anymore. The business has no meaning, and so on and so forth, but he's enjoying himself enormously when he shows off to Woodifield, new chairs, and heater and everything.

[00:29:11] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, his life in ruins, there's this contrast between him thinking of, okay, he left the office after getting the message about his son, and his life is in ruins, and yet we see him. making this display of how

[00:29:24] **Daphna:** successful his

[00:29:24] **Jim Phelan:** life is. Yeah.

[00:29:25] **Daphna:** And there's also something about his physique, his stout, he's heavy.

He's kind of domineering the fat, fat

[00:29:33] **Jim Phelan:** body. Plumped down in the spring chair. We get that phrase. Yeah.

[00:29:37] **Daphna:** Yeah. Yeah. Well Mansfield doesn't bother with know, political correctness. Thank goodness. Uh, but he's thoroughly enjoying his life. He's succeeded himself and being a bereaved father is, a kind of role that he's playing.

[00:29:53] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, okay, good, good. Yeah, yeah, and I think when we make the transition to, part two, right, there is that sense of, okay, now I've got to do the role, right? I've preparing myself for grief, right?

[00:30:05] **Daphna:** Yeah, yeah.

 most readers kind of are taken aback in my experience, students and certainly myself when, he had wanted, he intended, he had arranged to cry.

Right,

[00:30:18] **Jim Phelan:** right, right, right. Who,

[00:30:19] **Daphna:** who needs to arrange for crying? Yeah. Isn't it something that just kind of overwhelms you? Exactly. If you're, if

[00:30:27] **Jim Phelan:** you're in the middle of grief, then grief takes over. Right. Yeah.

[00:30:30] **Daphna:** Absolutely. Exactly. So here is kind of arranging to cry because it's part of the role he has, he sees himself in.

Here he is and he sits down and says nobody for half an hour even kind of sets the time frame for before he's yeah. And he doesn't manage even that, he doesn't manage to cry. Right. Okay, so

[00:30:52] **Jim Phelan:** Right. Right. And then we get to, yeah, he wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. So, you know, he decides to get up, look at the photograph, doesn't like the photograph, and then he's distracted.

[00:31:03] **Daphna:** Yeah, right. We go to part three. I think it is really interesting here in this part is that when he thinks of the boy again, it's only as in relation to himself, to his business, the boy's role in, supposedly carrying a burden. out father's instructions and, following in his footsteps.

There's absolutely no reference here to anything that the boy might have wanted for himself. Exactly. Yeah, kind of private and autonomous existence. Well, for the boss, he was an extension of himself entirely.

[00:31:39] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right. And that's that's in the way in which the boss can't imagine him As having a independent existence, right?

Yeah.

It's all been about me and my, he's going to be boss 2. 0. He's going to be, carry on, yeah.

[00:31:56] **Daphna:** And the boy, again, we have no evidence whatsoever to indicate what he was really like, as a person. Because he must have been an obedient son and his usual response to everything simply splendid, that's it.

So he never objected, he never wanted things to be different. From what they were, so Right, and we

[00:32:19] **Jim Phelan:** don't know, to what extent is he playing a role, right? I mean, we just, because really our vision of the son, is totally controlled by the boss's vision of him, which is, as you say, this extension of himself.

[00:32:32] **Daphna:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think that the word control is really a keyword here. Okay. The boss controls everything. wants to control everything the need for power, the need for control is really the prime mover here.

[00:32:49] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:32:49] **Daphna:** And that I think reflects on the general issue of the war.

And I'll, get back to that I think towards the end, maybe, of our conversation. But, Mansfield, I think here takes a jab or, takes a very harsh view of the sentimental clichés that we all live by.

[00:33:11] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:33:11] **Daphna:** Because, I know, at least, in my immediate environment, a bereaved father, you, keep away, you revere bereavement, especially if it's the fallen there's a kind of automatic respect that doesn't allow you to be critical.

[00:33:30] **Jim Phelan:** Mm hmm.

[00:33:30] **Daphna:** And I think Mansfield here doesn't allow us to get, into this kind of reverent state of mind. she's saying, yes, it's a cliché, and the role is a cliché, and some fathers are indeed broken, and their lives have no meaning, but it's not true for everybody, and it's certainly not true for this boss and so we are actually forced to step back from this.

Yeah, and,

[00:33:57] **Jim Phelan:** and Waterfield too, even, right, when we think of the glimpse of, we get of his own relationship to, to Reggie, it's also like, he doesn't focus on Reggie and the loss. He focuses on the, well kept grounds and the, cost of the pot of jam and those kinds of things.

[00:34:13] **Daphna:** He gets you know, when he speaks of Reggie, it's poor Reggie and that's, it. That's as far as he goes. Yeah. But then he speaks of the loss. Cemetery with a nice lawns and paths, gets really animated only when it comes to the question of how much they had to pay for a pot of jam.

That's what gets him really all excited and so, you know, Woodifield too, he's actually forgotten his son.

[00:34:40] **Jim Phelan:** he can't keep the main thing the main thing,

[00:34:42] **Daphna:** yeah, yeah, yeah,

[00:34:43] **Jim Phelan:** yeah. Okay. So maybe now we could turn to part three, and this issue of control and the relation between the action and the thinking, and those kinds of things.

Yeah.

[00:34:53] **Daphna:** Okay. part three is really the main part of the story. Okay. The story is also titled after it. But what happens here is really fantastic in terms of the imagery.

[00:35:06] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:35:07] **Daphna:** Because Mansfield doesn't explicitly make the connection between the three parts of the story.

But the imagery does that.

[00:35:16] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:35:16] **Daphna:** she works wonders with, the imagery. The inkwell into which the fly had fallen is described in terms very similar to the muddy trenches. Okay. of the war, okay? It is wet, it is slippery, and he tries to clamber out and, slips back again.

[00:35:37] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:35:38] **Daphna:** Okay, so that's the first thing. And then when the boss actually pulls him out and puts him on the blotting paper, the ink oozes around him. And this is a collocation which is immediately associated with blood oozing. Right, of course, yeah. the verb we normally associate with blood. Okay?

And also the entire discourse here, the boy talking to the, The fly. He's using the kind of military language. The wise talking to the fly. The wise talking to the fly, yeah. Yeah, he talks to him and he says to him to him, to it, okay? Come on, look sharp! Okay? Oh, that's the spirit?

Okay?

That's the that's the way to tackle things? That was the right spirit? Never say die? Okay, so, when he ostensibly tries to encourage him to fight on for his survival, he's using the same terminology that might be used on the battlefield, or that he might have used if he could talk to his son.

[00:36:47] **Jim Phelan:** Mm hmm, mm

[00:36:48] **Daphna:** hmm. Okay? Yeah, all these imperatives,

[00:36:50] **Jim Phelan:** and the control, and the power is all with me, and I'm directing you, and Yeah, I can encourage you a little bit, but I'm also going to tell you what to do.

[00:37:00] **Daphna:** Challenging, yeah, challenging him. Okay, that's it. show me how brave you are. Yeah. Okay. So, this is so powerful because it, kind of brings to the surface the relationship with the son.

[00:37:14] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:37:14] **Daphna:** Okay. And he's, in fact, angry with his son for having been killed. He's angry because that means that he didn't try hard enough. Okay. He wasn't a plucky little devil. He didn't show the right spirit. So in fact, he's angry with his son. Of course, he is not aware of this analogy. We'll talk about it maybe a little later, but we are aware of it because of everything, the discourse, the imagery, everything surrounding this scene.

is really, a battle scene. And the fly proves itself to be very brave when he tries again and again, desperately to clean itself and to, survive. And the boss doesn't let him. Again and again and again. Right, right. And, you know, and Mansfield again here uses this kind of bodily description.

His thick wrist.

[00:38:11] **Jim Phelan:** Mm hmm. Okay? Mm hmm.

[00:38:12] **Daphna:** Lying on the blotting paper. Okay? So the boss is there, all powerful, and he's playing with the life of this poor fly. Right, right. In a challenge. and this of course, suggests, an intertextual relation with King Lear. King

[00:38:30] **Jim Phelan:** Lear, absolutely,

[00:38:31] **Daphna:** yeah.

 Yeah, where Gloucester says, As flies to wanton boys, we are to the gods. They kill us for their sport. Okay? And I think this is worth exploring. I don't know if anyone did but it's worth exploring this intertextual relation because King Lear too is about paternity, but it is also about power, and it's about the desire for power, and the abuse of power, and the disassociation of power from responsibility.

[00:39:05] **Jim Phelan:** Yes, yes.

[00:39:06] **Daphna:** So, in a way, it's very subtle, but I think it's definitely there. As flies can to, to the wanton boys want boys. Boys. We are to the board and the guards, they are presented as wanton boys. Exactly. Yeah. And obviously the boss is one of those. He's wanton. He's no longer a boy, but he's cruel and he's sadistic and right,

[00:39:31] **Jim Phelan:** right.

I mean the, the sudden, shift right from. Okay, the initial observation of the fly falling into the inkwell, coming out, cleaning himself, the minute cat, all that. Alright. The horrible danger was over. The fly had escaped. It was ready for life again. And then, just then the boss had an idea. And what's his idea?

His idea is to Subject them to this torture, torture again. Absolutely. Yeah.

[00:39:56] **Daphna:** Yeah. Yeah. And again our initial sympathy, or empathy with a boss. dwindles into nothing. Yeah.

[00:40:04] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. And a pretty harsh judgment of of him yeah. Of him as a wanton God as, yeah.

As, but

[00:40:11] **Daphna:** I think this scene does more than that. It does more than alter our relation to this character. It tells us something about the war. And this is why I think it is such a strong anti war story. Because it tells us that wars very often break out because of people who desire power, and, who are power freaks and control freaks and don't care about human lives at all.

And after the war, there was an enormous ideological, political, social crisis because people had rightly lost their trust in Their leadership and political leadership and here is Mansfield saying yes, you're right not to trust them and in fact, she's saying to the boss it is you and your like that are to blame.

for the death of these young people, your son included.

[00:41:14] **Jim Phelan:** So, it's

[00:41:15] **Daphna:** not just a shift in our relation to a particular character and our perception of that character. It's also a very powerful critique of the dynamics of power behind wars.

[00:41:29] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. And I think just sort of picking up on that, the way in which, she's using the short story form to go from this half hour, right, of action and that in itself the action is not at all on the scale of war or anything like that and in this confined space, And yet, she's using that to get to these bigger things, right? we have some, additional thoughts on that?

[00:41:57] **Daphna:** Oh, absolutely. I think it's true for almost every good short story, which really cannot take place over large expanses of time or space. And it's very limited by its very nature to a particular place at a particular time, which may be, I don't know, half an hour, five minutes, or a day.

But it's like a, keyhole through which we may get a glimpse of a much broader panorama. Yeah, yeah. And the panorama here is really the panorama of the war.

[00:42:29] **Jim Phelan:** Right,right.

[00:42:30] **Daphna:** And the way it, it all works. Yeah. There are those politicians, fat, okay, enjoying life, enjoying their power and their success, kind of moving young people like puppets.

[00:42:44] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:42:45] **Daphna:** So.

[00:42:45] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. And that sends in the panorama, too. Maybe we could just touch on the fact that, okay, we have a focus on fathers and sons, and so we can think about, gender and the masculine side of it and so on. But we also have Gertrude, the girls come in.

And, uh, we have the boss saying about, oh. this thing about what Woodifield's wife and children will allow him to do, etc. So what about the gender dynamics and how that might relate to this larger panorama?

[00:43:15] **Daphna:** I don't think it really plays a role here because the women here do not offer any kind of counterexample. I mean, they're not softer, they're not more sympathetic such as they are. We hardly see them, but the wife and the girls are kind of disparaging about Woodifield.

[00:43:36] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

The girls care mostly about the price of a pot of jam and steal the pot of jam to teach them a lesson. Yeah. And so on.

So there's, this Kind of pettiness.

Okay.

[00:43:46] **Daphna:** about the women too.

[00:43:48] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah.

[00:43:49] **Daphna:** And I think that is true about Mansfield's work in general.

[00:43:52] **Jim Phelan:** Okay, yeah, yeah.

[00:43:53] **Daphna:** unlike Virginia Woolf, for instance, she doesn't really grant women any greater sensitivity.

[00:44:00] **Jim Phelan:** Okay.

[00:44:01] **Daphna:** Than she grants her male characters.

[00:44:04] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, good. Maybe we should just as we come to the end look at the, conclusion of the story itself. Right. So we see him, put the fly, through the torture, and he finally kills him. And then, he becomes aware of that but then he has this experience, such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. What do you make of that as a response?

[00:44:34] **Daphna:** Oh, it's really, again, a fantastic instance of, Mansfield's subtlety. Because on the one hand, Why is he wretched? Is he wretched because he feels guilty about the fly or because he recognizes something that is just below his consciousness? Maybe something unconscious, some kind of unconscious recognition which he wouldn't allow to surface.

 he's actually sweating. He's using his handkerchief to wipe his neck. And he's wretched, absolutely wretched. He knows that he killed a fly, but, killing a fly wouldn't really bother him if it weren't for the maybe some kind of unconscious awareness.

 Mansfield, again, doesn't let this go too far, because The moment after he being very bossy towards Old Macy and he tells him bring me some fresh blotting paper, right? He wants to blot out everything, obviously. A blotting paper here is not accidental. And he wants to blot out everything and he cannot remember what he was thinking about, which is fantastic because, yeah, okay, that's how the unconscious works. Okay, we don't want to remember. So that's it. It's blotted out. And I think like many modernist works of fiction, the recognition in the end is more on the part of the reader than of the character.

[00:46:05] **Jim Phelan:** Right, right, right. So, yeah, he had arranged to weep and, and this is where it ends up, right? He can't even remember that he arranged to weep, right?

[00:46:14] **Daphna:** Absolutely, yeah. So, you know, if you think about, say, a portrait of the artist, this is a very modernist trait, I think. Modernists do not go in, I think, for grand recognitions, and even Joyce with his epiphanies, if we think about A Portrait of the Artist, every epiphany that Stephen has in, at the end of each chapter is kind of ridiculed or flattened in the following chapter.

[00:46:40] **Jim Phelan:** That's right, yeah,

[00:46:41] **Daphna:** yeah. You know, there's no real epiphany, the epiphany, if it's there, it's ours only, and we have to work hard to, get at it, it makes us uncomfortable sometimes which is part of the, challenge, I think, of, modernist fiction.

[00:46:57] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, yeah. you've done a great job of sort of showing us that if we do the hard work, it pays off in this story in particular.

Yeah, yeah. So, is there anything else that you'd like to touch on that we haven't really addressed?

[00:47:14] **Daphna:** No, I think that's, more or less it. yeah.

[00:47:17] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah. Well, this was a very good conversation. I want to thank you very much for

[00:47:21] **Daphna:** Thank you, Jim. Thank you very much. It was a pleasure.

[00:47:24] **Jim Phelan:** Yeah, and I want to thank our listeners and to remind you that we're happy to get your feedback, which you can send to us at our email address, projectnarrative@osu.edu, on our Facebook page or on our Twitter account, which is @PNOhioState. I'd also like to remind you that you can find more than 20 additional episodes of the Project Narrative Podcast at our website or on Apple Podcasts. Thank you all.