*The fly*, by Kathrine Mansfield, is a representative modernism short story without clear plot but only a combination of a conversation, a monologue, and a murder of a fly. It remains a question why the boss killed the fly after failing to mourn on his son’s death during the past six years. This passage is attempting to provide some of my immature opinions on the relationship between the death of the fly and the son, in order to explain the psychological state of the boss.

One explanation drew from the Lacon and Zizek’s psychological analysis theory is that the boss was originally escaping from the “traumatic reality”, and attempting to go back to the Real by killing the fly. Psychological analysis claim that the world has three phases, the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real, while the latest one covers any physical stimulations like the death. According to Zizek, “if what we experience as ‘reality’ is structured by fantasy and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real.”[[1]](#footnote-1) By mentioning the boss’s thoughts, that it has been six years since his son’s death but “it might have happen yesterday”, the author describes the exact psychological status as Zizek suggests, being extremely sorrowful that his mind had to create a fantasy to protect him from the raw intruding of the Real (his son’s death). The further evidence that the boss was unable to shed tears is a symptom of escaping from the Real as well. These evidences offer a proper explanation to his deed of killing a fly, a tiny and weak creature: by playing the role as the Death, he experienced again the raw intruding of the Real which leads to the break of the fantasy that his son was “lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever”, and was finally able to be “positively shocked”. Though, this might not serve as an evidence that he was back to the Real until now.

I speculate that Mr. Woodfield and the boss as the symbols of two sides of a same person, given that there is a contrast between their characters, language styles, wealth states and attitudes towards their children’s deaths. Mr. Woodfield is another voice in the boss’s mind, who insists in persuading him giving up the vanity and face directly towards the reality. With this speculation, the effect of Mr. Woodfield’s occurrence on the boss’s killing the fly might not be as vague as we thought before. A biological study of Mansfield suggesting that the boss symbolizes her father and Mrs. Woodfield symbolizes her mother might also support this.

As my first attempt of reading modernism novel, The Fly provides a vague answer to the question we heard on class, that what will a story be composed of if without any plot. Memories, monologues and extremely detailed descriptions of some moments occupy the dominant part of this short story, and I guess that might be what the modernism is characterized for.

(Word count: 514)

老师对不起，这篇文章读了两星期还是没读懂，一直写不出来，最后写得很仓促呜呜呜，我自己也不是很满意，不过还是希望老师不要读得很难过! ☹

1. Spectrality in the Short Story ‘The Fly’ by Katherine Mansfield.Jacques Sohier. <https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/1360> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)