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Kathleen Beauchamp, better known as the writer Katherine Mansfield, was born in Wellington, New Zealand, on October 14, 1888. Mansfield showed an early interest and talent for literature. At nine years old, attending the village school in the township of Karori in the New Zealand inland, she won the first prize for English composition. At the age of fourteen, Mansfield and her two sisters were sent overseas to be educated at Queen’s College in London, a three-year long education during which she also edited the college magazine.

Mansfield’s first book, *In a German Pension* (1911), is a collection of stories which she wrote when convalescent in Germany. But it was not until the collection *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) that Mansfield’s literary career took off. The book included some of her best short stories, such as ‘Bliss’, ‘Prelude’ and ‘Je ne parle pas français’.

During the period 1910-1911, Mansfield wrote for the *The New Age* and its editor R. A. Orage. In December 1911, Mansfield met her future husband, John Middleton Murry, an Oxford undergraduate who at the time edited a ‘youthful literary magazine’ called *Rhythm* together with Michael Sadleir. In this magazine Mansfield started to write regularly.¹ According to Murry, her first contribution was ‘The Woman at the Store’ (1912), which

caused ‘a minor sensation’ (Murry (ed.), *The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, vi.) In the last year of *Rhythm* (the last three numbers of which were called *The Blue Review*), Mansfield and Murry edited the magazine together. In the winter of 1915, Mansfield, Murry and D. H. Lawrence started a small literary magazine called *Signature* which was written by themselves, but the magazine died within two months and three numbers. In 1919, Murry became editor of *The Athenaeum* where Mansfield wrote weekly criticisms of novels, and, after a short time, also contributed monthly short stories. In the period 1918-1919 ‘Je ne parle pas français’ was printed and published by Murry and his brother for private circulation, and in 1918, ‘Prelude’ was published as a separate piece by Virginia and Leonard Woolf at their Hogarth Press.

Mansfield’s contribution to *The Athenaeum* was becoming recognized, and publishers started to ask her to collect her stories. After *Bliss and Other Stories*, the next collection, *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, completed while she was based in Switzerland in the autumn of 1921, established Mansfield as ‘the most remarkable short-story writer of her generation in England’ (Murry, ix). Volumes published posthumously are *The Doves’ Nest and Other Stories* (June 1923) and *Something Childish and Other Stories* (1924). Mansfield died in January 1923 at the Gurdieff Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in France, after nearly five years of suffering from tuberculosis.

In this thesis, I will argue the case for what I will call Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism. Using Christopher Butler’s study of Modernist art, *Early Modernism – Literature, Music, and painting in Europe, 1900-1916* (1994), as an important source of inspiration, I wish to identify Mansfield’s Expressionist art, and the importance of form in her fiction. Mansfield’s fiction shares with Modernist painting a ‘progressive’ form, where the story develops through the artistic and conceptual story-line, which through a number of subtle scenes renders a complex idea. In this thesis I wish to suggest that the meaning of Mansfield’s art is found in the dramatic ‘image’ suggested through character and scene.
Hence, in the chapters of close reading I wish to single out the scenes which I believe are most significant to the story’s conception, and in doing this I will discuss the particular techniques which Mansfield uses in order to bring about her main ideas.

In his study Butler stresses the ‘individual style’ and ‘experimentalism of technique’ as ‘the common feature’ in all the works which he sees as ‘canonical’ for Modernism (Butler, 14). In her mature fiction, Mansfield can be seen to express her theme through form. The selected stories I have selected for analysis in this thesis, can be claimed to be if not the most ‘canonical’ ones in Mansfield’s fiction, then at least, as I see it, as representing the most complex narratives in her oeuvre. They are therefore, I want to argue, the most ‘artful’ examples of her work.

1.1 The Impersonal Narrative and Mansfield’s Suggestive Method

The subjective quality of Expressionist art can be seen to have encouraged the impersonal aesthetic in literature, which in Mansfield’s work, I will argue, is marked by the suggestive method. The impersonal mode of writing is manifested by the unintrusive narrator, and is also often discussed in terms of the ‘detached’ or the ‘objective’ narrative. In this manner, the narrator ‘describes, reports, or “shows” the action in dramatic scenes without introducing his own comments or judgements’ (Abrams, 232). As such Mansfield undertakes ‘to subordinate the voices of […] the characters to the authoritative discourse and controlling purposes of the author’ (Abrams, 63).

The ‘impersonal’ quality of Mansfield’s fiction has been discussed in terms quite different from those outlined above. This can be seen in Andrew Bennett, Dominic Head, and
Angela Smith’s studies, *Katherine Mansfield* (2004), *The Modernist Short Story* (1992) and *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf – A public of two* (1999) respectively, where they can be said to argue about Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narration through an investigation into and interpretation of her personal statements in her journals, letters and scrapbooks, something which has spurred an argument of ‘ambiguity’ and ‘paradox’. Through their approach to Mansfield’s fiction, Head, Smith and Bennett can be seen to point to an unresolved ‘personal’ quality as manifesting itself in the ‘impersonal’, something which I believe undermines their discussion of Mansfield’s ‘art’ and ‘poetics’. Their approach and argument is however in agreement with the widespread biographical slant in Mansfield criticism, where arguments can be seen to be based on a reading of Mansfield’s personal statements rather than being anchored in the fiction in question.

Head, Smith and Bennett’s argument of Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narrative comes close to Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot’s understanding of the concept. These two writers’ theories and poetical practice are discussed in Maud Ellmann’s study *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S Eliot and Ezra Pound* (1987). In her book, Ellmann stresses what she sees as the paradoxical and circular arguments of Pound and Eliot’s ‘impersonal’ aesthetic. Thus, when the above critics argues for ‘ambiguity’ and ‘paradox’ as that which define Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narrative, they can be seen to comply with, according to Ellmann, the resulting fleetingness of Pond and Eliot’s arguments and poetical practice.

An important aspect in my ‘impersonal’ discussion lies in the two poets and critics’ approach to the concept which, in fact, can be seen to originate in a reactionary position against Romanticism. For Pound and Eliot, the understanding of the ‘impersonal’ should be the antithesis to ‘the slither of the Romantic individualism’ (Ellmann, 4) where the only antidote was ‘a fierce renunciation of the self’ (ibid.). In this way, I believe, Pound and Eliot settle on a difficult, if not impossible, task. The fleeting sense of the ‘impersonal’ argument is
clearly brought out at a point where Ellmann rhetorically asks ‘Does it mean decorum, reticence, and self-restraint? Does it imply a concealment or extinction of the self? Or does it mean the poet should transcend his time and place, aspiring to universal vision?’ (ibid.). She contends that ‘These are just a few of the confusing ways that Pound and Eliot manipulate the term’ (ibid.).

Mansfield’s ‘ impersonal’ narration, I will argue, is inextricably linked to her expressionism, and the suggestive mode of writing. Rather than seeing the ‘ impersonal’ narrative as a manifestation of a certain unresolved ‘personal’ quality of the author, I wish to suggest a void of such. Mansfield’s proclaimed philosophy, ‘the defeat of the personal’, has nothing to do with the argued ‘restraint’, ‘limitation’, ‘ambiguity’ or ‘paradox, but on the contrary, as can be inferred from her journal entry on October 1921. Her ‘philosophy’ calls for a serene narratorial state of mind, untouched, in fact, by self-consciousness:

There seems to be some bad old pride in my heart; a root of it that puts out a thick shoot on the slightest provocation...This interferes very much with work. One can’t be calm, clear, good as one must be, while it goes on [...] It’s a kind of excitement within one, which shouldn’t be there. Calm yourself. Clear yourself. And anything that I write in this mood will be no good; it will be full of sediment [...] One must learn, one must practice to forget oneself. I can’t tell the truth about Aunt Anne unless I am free to enter her life without selfconsciousness. Oh God! I am divided still. I am bad. I fail in my personal life. I lapse into impatience, temper, vanity & so I fail as thy priest. (Mansfield, Journal, 269)

As can be inferred from the quotation, the ‘ impersonal’ mode of writing requires the ‘detached’ and ‘objective’ state of mind of the artist, untouched by the ‘personal’ self-consciousness. In its context, ‘thy priest’ must be seen as the metaphorical embodiment of ‘inspiration’, and is in this manner close to the inspirational ‘ Divine’ source of the Romantics.
Mansfield’s impersonal mode of writing is rooted in her ‘objective’ approach to her fictional material. In a letter to John Middleton Murry on 3 November 1920, having just finished ‘The Stranger’, Mansfield describes her method:

> What a queer business writing is. I don’t know. I don’t believe other people are ever as foolishly excited as I am while I’m working. How could they be? […] I’ve been this man been this woman. I’ve stood for hours on the Auckland Wharf. I’ve been out in the stream waiting to be berthed. I’ve been a seagull hovering at the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn’t as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, God knows. But one is the spectacle for the time. (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 97)

Implicated in the statement, I will argue, is a suggestion of Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ method, turning on the suggestive expression, and the artistic re-creation of her fictional matter. In this manner, in addition to her method of composition, the impersonal quality of Mansfield’s fiction is that which suggests the visionary quality of her art.

The suggestive method of Expressionist art demands precision both in language and composition, a quality which in its ideal form should be manifested as ‘the elocutionary disappearance of the poet’ (Stéphane Mallarmé in Arthur Symons, 135). This, I will argue, is a distinct quality of Mansfield’s suggestive method. Through an unequivocal precision, I believe, Mansfield’s impersonal mode defies Head, Smith and Bennett’s readings of the fluid or elusively ‘ambiguous’. In a letter to Richard Murry on 17 January 1921, commenting on her technique in ‘Miss Brill’, Mansfield highlights the tight structure of the story, which can be seen as a next statement of her method of an ‘impersonal’ and suggestive expression:

> In ‘Miss Brill’ I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I chose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on that day at that very moment. After I’d written it I read it aloud – numbers of times – just as one would play over a musical composition – trying to get it nearer to the expression of Miss Brill – until it fitted. (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 165)
In *The Modernist Short Story* (1992), Head argues the case for Mansfield’s impersonal narrative by pointing to the ‘personal’ quality of the writer: ‘Mansfield’s modernism […] stems from an ambivalent attitude to the nature of personality; and this ambivalence is reflected in the structure and language of her stories’ (Head, 109). This ambivalence, Head suggests, is conveyed through ‘a complex and ambiguous method of characterization through complex and ambiguous technical effects’ (Head, 33).

Through a New Historicist approach to the Modernist short story, Head proposes a counter-argument to the traditional short-story criticism which advocates the unity of impression, arguing for the ‘disunifying effects of ellipsis and ambiguity’ (Head, 2), an argument which I believe is unjustified in his treatment of Mansfield. In the following I will discuss his analyses of ‘Bliss’ (1920) and ‘Je ne parle pas français’ (1919), two stories which he employs in his discussion of Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narrative. Even if, as I will claim, the two stories cannot be situated within Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism, in the sense that they do not develop a complex conception of a state of mind, they are nonetheless ‘impersonal’ narratives.

The ‘impersonal’ quality of ‘Bliss’, Head suggests, is brought about by the ambiguous symbolism of the pear tree. On the one hand, and in line with Walter Anderson, Head argues that the pear tree is ‘a symbol of Bertha’s sexuality’ (Head, 24), where ‘its tallness representing her (unrecognized) homosexual aspirations and its rich blossoms expressing a desire to be sexually used’ (ibid.). The problem of linking the character of Bertha Young with the ‘symbolism’ of the pear tree arises when in the final paragraph of the story (and through the perspective of the character’s awareness of having been sexually and intimately betrayed), the pear tree is seen to be ‘as lovely as ever’. This fact Head accounts for by resorting to his argument of an ‘ambiguous symbolism’, suggesting that ‘There is […] a fluidity in the tree’s

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2 In his treatment of Mansfield’s stories, Head consistently argues for ‘ambiguity’.
symbolic purport; in addition to its function as an emblem of Bertha’s sexuality, there is also a sense in which the tree and that which it embodies is distanced from her’ (ibid., 25), concluding that ‘The symbol [of the pear tree] is at once Bertha and yet not-Bertha, a formal contradiction which summarizes Bertha’s personality contradiction and non-identity’ (ibid.).

According to my argument about the impersonal and suggestive method of expression, the ‘pear tree’ in ‘Bliss’ should be read as an object correlative, suggesting the shifting states of mind of the protagonist throughout the story. ‘Bliss’ is the story of Bertha Young, an innocent and sexually frustrated young female depicted in a state of bliss. Towards the end of the story, her state of bliss is violently broken down into a state of emotional and intellectual collapse when she realises that her friend, Pearl Fulton, and her own husband are having an affair. Conveyed against the character’s state of bliss before the dinner party, the pear tree is seen as having ‘not a single bud or faded petal’ (178)\(^3\), a perception which suggests the protagonist’s initial state of bliss. During the dinner party, looking at the pear tree in connection with Pearl Fulton, it suggests, I will argue, the climactic bliss in the story: ‘Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed – almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon’ (182-83). In her emotional breakdown at the end of the story, Bertha Young is seen to run over to the pear tree which ‘was as lovely as ever and as full of flowers and as still’ (185). Juxtaposed to the preceding visions of the tree, the character’s final perception of it suggests a neutral and detached quality. Implicated in the protagonist’s vision is a suggestion of ‘distance’ between the character and the pear tree, and through this the protagonist’s emotional breakdown is suggested.

In his analysis of the story ‘Je ne parle pas français’ (1919), Head argues for a new ‘complex and ambiguous method of characterization’, discussed within the argument of

Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogic form’. According to M. H. Abrams, the ‘dialogic form’ is a form where ‘the characters are liberated to speak a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses’ employed to ‘disrupt the authority of the author’s single voice’ (Abrams, 63). As can be seen in the following quotation, Head’s argument about the ‘dialogic form’ is put forward in terms which in fact undermine the definition of the concept:

Duquette is continually aware of an implied auditor’s response and criticism of his words, and it is this internal dialogue which presents adverse aspects of the characterization as it is established. The most prominent feature of this dialogical style is insistent affirmation which implies self-doubt and consciousness of criticism from ‘an absent interlocutor’. (Head, 115-16)

Implicated in Head’s statement is the fact that it is the narrator’s voice which is in charge, the character’s voice being informed by ‘self-doubt and consciousness of criticism from an absent interlocutor’. In this manner, Head seems in danger of subverting his argument of the ‘dialogic’ form, both in terms of the failure to account for the ‘genuine polyphony’ (Abrams, 63) of the form, as well as through the implied statement of the ‘authority’ of the author. Furthermore, through discussing the ‘impersonal’ mode in terms of a next literary concept, Head demonstrates what is at best a fluid understanding of the method in question.

‘Je ne parle pas français’, I will suggest, is a strident satire on contemporary Anglo-Saxon literary men (and women), embodied in the characters Raoul Duquette and Dick Harmon, where both the sustained dog metaphor employed in connection with Raoul Duquette and the very name of ‘Dick Harm(on)’ are overt satirical elements. Other undeniably satirical elements are the pervading and explicit ridicule of the literariness of the protagonist, whose infancy is suggested to have been dominated by a sexual relationship to the family’s washer woman, and who, under the façade of a literary young man, is suggested

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4 Cf. Dr. Leena Kore Schroeder, in her MA course Modernism in Britain, the University of Nottingham, Spring semester, 2005.
to be both a gigolo and a pimp (an exaggeration which is yet another mark of Mansfield’s satire). The protagonist’s literary achievements are equally satirized as those of ‘False Coins’, ‘Lost Umbrellas’ and ‘Wrong Doors’.5

Through reading the story as satire, Head’s argument about the ‘adverse characterization’ is eliminated. The ‘impersonal’ characterization of the protagonist is mixed with the satirist’s voice, which can be seen to loom in the surface of the narrative. One example of this can be seen in the opening of the story, where Mansfield, in establishing the character, links him to the motif of the ‘Customs official’ (142), and through this, significantly suggests the protagonist’s ‘true nature’:

‘Have you anything to declare? Any wines, spirits, cigars, perfumes, silks?’ And the moment of hesitation as to whether I am going to be fooled…and then the other moment of hesitation just after, as to whether I have been, are perhaps the two most thrilling instants in life. Yes, they are to me. (142)

Through the idea of the Customs official, Mansfield skilfully suggests the gigolo/pimp, evaluating people via their material belongings.

Insisting on the honourable quality of the protagonist, Head, in line with his argument of the impersonal ‘ambiguity’, suggests that ‘Duquette anticipates a lack of empathy in the reception of this self-analysis, and this reaction admits a critical position’ (Head, 116). In my reading of satire, Head’s ambiguous suggestion of character comes across as imposed on the story.

In his recent study Katherine Mansfield (2004), Andrew Bennett can be seen to pick up the critical tradition of reading Mansfield’s fiction with a biographical bias. Bennett’s study, rather than contributing a fresh perspective, can be seen to reach a climax in this critical tradition. Instead of peering ‘lasciviously between the lines for biographical

Bennett can be seen to argue about Mansfield’s impersonal narration on the basis of her private writings, meticulously investigating and interpreting the author’s ideas, statements and confession in her notebooks, journal and letters.

Whereas Head argued for an ambiguous complexity within the structure and form of Mansfield’s stories, Bennett is more concerned with detecting the ‘impersonal’ in Mansfield’s personal statements, suggesting that:

In this book we will examine Mansfield’s major achievement, the evolution – or even revolution – that she effected in the form of short fiction as a development bound up with her sense of personality, of personhood, of impersonality and impersonation – bound up, in the end, with Mansfield’s own mobile, fractured, and multiple sense of personal identity’. (Bennett, 9)

In this manner, Bennett, too, argues about the ‘impersonal’ as that of an unresolved ‘personal’ quality. Like Head, Bennett can be seen to argue his case for the ‘impersonal’ in terms of ‘ambiguity’, ‘fluidity’ and ‘paradox’, and as such Mansfield’s personal statement of a notion of having ‘multiple selves’ is highlighted.

Rather than reading this aspect as a manifestation of ambiguity, I wish to point to a possible creative manifestation. According to W. B. Yeats: ‘A poet […] never speaks directly: he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down at breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete’ (quoted in Ellmann, 3). In a slightly different manner, John Keats suggests that the poet is ‘continually filling some other Body – beyond the confines of his private self’ (ibid.), a view which emphasises the projecting of the self, or selves, in the act of creation.

In the much-quoted journal entry presumably written during May or June 1920, Mansfield expresses a Bergsonian view on subjectivity and personal identity. Spurred by Polonius’ line in *Hamlet*, ‘To thine own self be true’, Mansfield confesses a notion of having

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‘hundreds’ of personal selves (Mansfield, Journal, 205). However, in the same entry, Mansfield goes on to acknowledge a notion of having a genuine and particular self as well, one which, untouched by the ‘complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections’ is in direct touch with both oneself and the world. She concludes that: ‘This is the moment which, after all, we live for, - the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal’, a state of mind which Mansfield metaphorically suggests as ‘the flowering self’ (ibid.). What can be inferred from these quotations is that despite of an acute manifestation of inner division, Mansfield can still trace and identify a core of a permanent ‘self’, where ‘most ourself and least personal’ can be seen to suggest the ‘impersonal’ identity, marked by the ‘continuation’ of personal identity.

Taking an opposite view, Bennett reads a paradox into the statement, suggesting that it ‘emphasizes the contradiction contained within the notion of the unique, personal self’, inferring that ‘this flowering self has nothing to do with personality, with the will, with the person of ourself’ (Bennett, 17). In this manner, Bennett rejects the notion of a constant personality, something which constitutes his argument of Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narration.

Another statement which Bennett uses in his argument about Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ quality, is the journal entry where Mansfield as writer and artist is seen to struggle with the obstacle of self-consciousness (manifested as ‘pride’, ‘vanity’, ‘impatience’ and ‘temper’), quoted and discussed above. However, rather than reading the passage as a statement of the ‘impersonal’ state of mind of the artist, in the sense of the ‘detached’ or ‘objective’, Bennett suggests another paradoxical reading, claiming that: ‘the passage not only argues but also plays out or performs its concern with paradoxical, conflicted ideas of the self […] producing an unstable, paradoxical balancing of the impersonal, the dispassionate, with the personal, the impassioned’ (Bennett, 18). Not only does Bennett link the ‘impersonal’ mode with an interpretation of the quality of Mansfield’s personal writing, but in equating ‘the impersonal’
with the ‘dispassionate’ and ‘the personal’ with the ‘impassioned’, I believe that Bennett ends up drawing too rigidly defined lines of the impersonal quality. In my opinion, the ‘impersonal’ narration cannot automatically be equated with a ‘dispassionate’ quality, and least so in Mansfield’s fiction, which, I will claim, is rather marked by the ‘impassioned’, but manifested in the creation of character. On the other hand, if the ‘impersonal’ fiction has the note of the unmediated ‘personal’ (reading the personal as the self-consciousness of the author), then it is a mark of the ‘personal impassioned’ of the author, and as such, in line with Ellmann, it is difficult to say how impersonal the work is.

Bennett’s study comes across as an ambiguous statement about Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ mode. At the same time as he praises Mansfield’s achievement, he also demonstrates a frustration with Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ mode. At one point he claims that ‘Mansfield’s work is remarkable, not least, for the extent of her restraint, restraint in the first place of authorial commentary on issues of psychological motivation’ (Bennett, 15). However, this impersonal ‘restraint’ can be seen as that which, in fact, poses the major obstacle for his access to Mansfield’s stories, as he argues in line with Raymond Mortimer that Mansfield masks herself too much behind her fictional characters, something which ‘makes it extraordinarily difficult to discover the real colour of the author’s mind’. This, in turn, has prevented Mortimer – and Bennett – in developing an ‘affectionate relationship’ with the author (Bennett, 17-18). According to this notion, Bennett can be seen to theorize about Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ mode of writing as a technique which is ‘constitutively resistant to interpretation to the extent that interpretation depends on the possibility of a stable, identifiable origin, a source of speech or of writing’ (ibid., 24). Arguing in this manner, Bennett seems to base his approach on a Realist point of view, suggesting that the

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7 Bennett’s theory of the critic’s denied access to Mansfield’s fictional world can be seen to be applied in his ‘analysis’ of ‘Bliss’. In his analysis, Bennett suggests in fact an antagonist reading of the protagonist, and the story, claiming that ‘the very diction and syntax, the very rhetorical and figurative dimensions of language, are themselves provoking us towards an oppositional meaning’. Cf. Bennett, 24. In this manner, Bennett is seen to move away from his argument of the impersonal merging of the author and character.
‘impersonal’ mode is ‘resistant’ to interpretation on the grounds of the very quality of the technique, and the ‘unintrusive narrator’. However, if the statement refers to the absence of explicit comments in Mansfield’s personal writings, then the statement comes across as rather unorthodox. Another interpretation can be seen in a reading which detects an overall unstable and unidentifiable form, marked by ‘ambiguity’ and ‘paradox’, something which I want to resist by way of my Expressionist argument.

In her Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two (1999), published five years before Bennett, Angela Smith argues about another ambiguity in Mansfield’s fiction which, similar to Bennett’s approach, is brought out through a close reading and discussion of Mansfield’s personal writings. This way, Smith argues for Mansfield’s ambiguous form through the concepts of ‘liminality’, ‘boundaries’ and ‘rite de passage’, which constitute an argumentative thread in her book. The concept of ‘liminality’ is argued about as an ‘in-between’ state of mind of the author, and thus comes close to Head and Bennett’s argument about the ‘impersonal’ mode. Smith’s argument can be seen to spur a number of different approaches to Mansfield’s story, which include those of ‘linguistics’, ‘gender’, ‘psychology’, and also a reading of meta-fiction.8

Reading Mansfield as Literary Expressionism, I wish to situate her stories within the artistic framework of ideas, and within Modernist concepts such as ‘intuition’ and ‘expression’, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘inner division’ and ‘harmony’ and ‘rhythm’ (Butler, 16). Through this, it can be argued that Mansfield’s ‘impersonal’ narration draws on the concepts of ‘intuition’ and ‘expression’, through the suggestive method. It is largely within this parameter, I will suggest, that the poetry of Mansfield’s fiction is to be found. The other crucial aspect in Mansfield, I will suggest, is her Expressionist form which can be defined through the concepts of ‘harmony’ and ‘rhythm’. Other poetical devices is the use of symbol,

8 This can for example be seen in Smith’s discussion of ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ and ‘At the Bay’.
the objective correlative (as argued in ‘Bliss’), metaphor, simile, personification (of nature and animals in ‘At the Bay’), and onomatopoeia (in ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’).

1.2. Mansfield and Literary Expressionism

Mansfield’s Expressionist form has received surprisingly little attention from her critics, and, despite of the fact of frequent references to her ‘poetics’, ‘art’, and even ‘expressionism’, I have yet not come over a publication which situates her stories within an Expressionist framework.

Among Anglo-Saxon critics at least, there seems to be a consensus of reading Mansfield within a symbolist framework, where a reading of metaphors eliminates the crucial quality of substance in Mansfield’s fiction, brought about, I will argue, through the intuitive particularity of the suggestive method. The fallacy of the symbolist reading can be detected in the failure to sustain the argument, invariably lapsing into a tracing of similarities (both within and between Mansfield’s various stories), something which at best can be seen to be schematized into some broad categories of meaning (leaving the story rigidly static). At its worst, as seen in Smith, it lapses into a reading which traces a number of disconnectedly scattered parallels, something which, I believe, renders an overall vague reading.

Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr are perhaps the two critics on Mansfield who have most strongly asserted the legacy of the Symbolist practice in Mansfield’s work. However, rather than assert the Symbolist influence on Mansfield’s work, Hanson and Gurr in fact claim that Mansfield is a ‘Symbolist writer’ (Hanson and Gurr, 16). This is argued for on the

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9 In the reading of ‘At the Bay’ for instance, Hanson and Gurr can be seen to embark upon an extensive tracing of similarities with another of Mansfield’s stories, namely ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’, and in this manner, too, can be seen to undermine their argument about Mansfield’s ‘reflexive’ language.

10 Cf. Marvin Magalaner and C. A. Hankin’s analyses of ‘Prelude’. 
grounds that she is ‘interested not in social contexts and realities, but in the imaginative
discovery or recreation of the ideal within the real’ (ibid.), a statement which can be seen to
spur the fatal statement that Mansfield was a writer without ‘a “mission” or purpose’ (ibid.).

By suggesting that the Symbolists – and Mansfield – were not interested in ‘social
contexts and realities’, Hanson and Gurr overlook the innovation and technical breakthrough
of the Symbolist Movement, where the rationalism and materialism of the Realist school is
replaced by the ‘primitive’ subjective, exploring in art the spiritual and psychological
dimensions of reality, conveyed through ‘intuition’ and ‘expression’. Furthermore, when
Hanson and Gurr suggest a ‘recreation of the ideal within the real’, they can be seen to point
to the colloquial sense of the term, as ‘the pursuit of an ideal’ (*The Oxford Companion to
Philosophy*, 386). The ‘idealism’ in question, I will suggest, lies in the philosophical meaning
of the term, denoting a ‘metaphysical theory about the nature of reality’ (ibid.), one which
‘presupposes a distinction between appearance and reality, drawn in other than common-sense
way. It maintains in general that what is real is in some way confined to or at least related to
the contents of our own minds’ (ibid.). The essential idealism of Symbolist art lies in their
‘subjective’ approach to reality, and thus represents a radical break with Realism. In
Symbolist art, the ‘ideal’ *is* the ‘real’, suggested by the visionary, or analytical, consciousness
of the artist.

In a another statement about the Symbolist heritage in Mansfield, Hanson and Gurr
suggest that ‘in literature an abstract state of mind or feeling should be conveyed not through
descriptive analysis but through concrete images or symbols. Such a theme must be evoked,
not described, if it is to be successfully conveyed in art’ (Hanson and Gurr, 22). However,
what can be seen both within their theory and between their theory and practice is a distortion
of the Symbolist ‘image’. Instead of the essential and suggestive quality of image, Hanson
and Gurr argue for a reading of metaphor. This can be detected in their next statement,
suggesting that ‘in a Mansfield story almost every detail has a symbolic as well as a narrative function’ (ibid.). Implied in the statement is a reading of allegory, something which is in agreement with their various analyses of Mansfield. One example of this, is their reading of the sea in ‘At the Bay’, which, according to Hanson and Gurr, symbolises ‘an unstable, subversive element which suggests annihilation and loss of the self’ (ibid., 100). Argued from within an Expressionist framework, the sea in the story rather functions in conjunction with the other natural elements (the rising sun, the evening sky, and the moon/cloud) as the motifs through which the story’s argument of natural cycle is suggested.

At the times when Mansfield does use ‘private’ or ‘personal’ symbols, she can be seen to exploit some widely shared associations, and thus her symbolism is of a far more recognizable kind than what has been suggested in the various symbolist readings. One example of this is the rising and the setting sun in ‘At the Bay’ which, I will argue, can be read in terms of birth, life, or beginning, and death or end respectively. Furthermore, Mansfield’s ‘image’ is in line with the Symbolist practice. It is a suggestive expression. One example of this comes in ‘Miss Brill’, where the character towards the end of the story ‘climbed the stairs’, an image which (in its context) is weighted with the character’s state of sadness.

Having argued about Mansfield’s suggestive method, I wish to trace the link back to the poetics and practice of the French Symbolists, and their suggestive method in creating their fictional objects. The Symbolist symbol or image is the re-creation of the poetic object. According to Arthur Symons, in its smallest determinant, the Symbolist symbol is the word itself which ‘long usage had darkened almost out of recognition’, but which in the Symbolist poetry ‘takes fresh lustre’ (Symons, 138). After having gone all the way back to the genesis of Symbolism and God’s creation of the world by naming it, Symons turns to a definition of the Symbolist symbol, suggesting that it is: ‘a form of expression, at the best but approximate,
essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness’ (ibid., 2-3). The ‘essential’ quality of the Symbolist symbol suggests, in Roger Fry’s terms, the ‘thisness’ of expression, and thus cannot point to a meaning outside of its expression, which is argued in the various symbolist readings. Furthermore, the ‘essentially’ but ‘arbitrary’ quality of the Symbolist symbol defies the rigid claim of the ‘impersonal ambiguous’ discussed in 1.1.

As the Symbolist conception is brought about by the juxtaposition of images, where the local image is evoked through the juxtaposition of single words, or in the cadence,\textsuperscript{11} the conception of Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism is conveyed through the juxtaposition of scenes. Here the scene, I will argue, represents Mansfield’s ‘image’. However, and contrary to the symbolist readings, which can be seen to argue for ‘key-images’, each scene or ‘image’ represents a nuance in the story’s total conception, something which makes for a complex total image. As can be seen in the stories treated in this thesis, the concept is inaugurated already in the initial paragraph of the story, progressing towards a total conception. Four stories, I will argue, develop a concept of state(s) of mind, whereas in one story, ‘At the Bay’, it is the cyclic argument of nature which is developed.

Mansfield’s innovative form, I will argue, is in line with the Cubist experience, a breakdown of the elements of representation, forming new wholes. As Nicholas Cook has pointed out about Arnold Schoenberg: ‘Schoenberg’s work reflects the idea that music’s ultimate significance lies not in the effect that it has on an audience, but in the integrity with which it expresses the composer’s personal vision, as he attempts to make his idea comprehensible to the listener’ (Nicholas Cook in Butler, 72). Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism, I will argue, suggests this integrity of idea, where ‘the elimination of repetition along with its supporting harmonic organization’ (Butler, 74) is suggested in the

\textsuperscript{11} My example is drawn from Stéphane Mallarmé’s poem ‘Un Coup de Dés’ (1897).
number of nuanced images which constitute the story, and where the organizing principle of juxtaposition suggests the progressive – and analytical – language in Mansfield’s fiction. The symbolist argument, on the other hand, argues for the ‘static’ image, suggesting that ‘key-images [are] repeated in order to express a general, rather than a specific truth’ (Hanson and Gurr, 19). This particular suggestion is taken from Hanson and Gurr’s reading of a story included in Mansfield’s first volume, In A German Pension, namely ‘The Child Who was Tired’, but the argument is one which underlies and constitutes all of the symbolist readings referred to in this thesis. Through accounting for the narrative movement, and the progression of Mansfield’s argument, the complexity of the concept can be grasped, something which, I will suggest, marks the bounding outlines of Expressionist form.

Practically all of the Mansfield criticism I have referred to, have disregarded the conceptual story-line of Mansfield’s fiction. A common critical view consists in a reading where the importance of character is disregarded in favour of (a symbolist) ‘design’, and where an emphasis on ‘texture’ and the ‘psychological plot-less’ story can be seen to more or less obliterate a consideration of narrative movement. This view is put forth as a truism in Smith’s introduction to Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories (2002): ‘For both writers [Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf] it is the design of the novel or story which is crucial rather than plot or character’ (Smith, xxv), a view which is in agreement with a symbolist reading of Mansfield’s stories, but which fails to account for my argument of Literary Expressionism. Arguing for an Expressionist reading of Mansfield, I wish to highlight the importance of character and the conceptual story-line, brought about through the narrative movement.

A disconnected and fragmentary reading of Mansfield’s fiction can be seen to be adopted in Julia Van Gunsteren’s Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism (1990). Arguing for an ‘Impressionist’ reading of Mansfield, Van Gunsteren not only systematically
disregards the conceptual point of view, but also places Mansfield outside the Modernist Movement. In line with Peter Sloat Hoff, Van Gunsteren suggests a reading in the following terms: ‘the reader is placed at the same epistemological level as the confused characters, who serve as centres of consciousness. […] The information which reaches the reader of an Impressionistic novel is potentially incorrect, for it often comes through an observer who may be mistaken’ (Van Gunsteren, 211, footnote 34). Accounting only for the suggestion of character for the story’s meaning, I believe, Van Gunsteren has only grasped half of Mansfield’s argument, entirely disowning the conceptual story-line.

Using a linguistic approach in her argument for Impressionism, Van Gunsteren can be seen to discuss Mansfield’s use of free indirect discourse in terms of ‘limitation’ and ‘reduction’: ‘free indirect discourse may stress the limitation of a sensory perception and a reduced reliability of interpretation’ (Van Gunsteren, 107). Instead of arguing by way of the ‘negative’ parameters of ‘limitation’ and ‘reduction’, I wish, through an Expressionist view, to account for the method’s ‘positive’ qualities. Through allowing access to inner feelings and motives, I believe that free indirect discourse suggests, in fact, a ‘reliable’ source of information. However, the access to the ‘truth’ of Mansfield’s stories I believe, can only be grasped if one follows their narrative arguments.

Finally in this section, I wish to comment on Smith’s comparative reading of Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and the ‘Post-Impressionist’ painting. In her book Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, Smith is seen, in her chapter on Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway (1925) and Mansfield’s ‘At the Bay’, to suggest an Expressionist (‘Post-Impressionist’) approach to the two stories, which, in fact, is brought about by way of a symbolist argument. As her point of departure, she includes an epigraph where she cites Roger Fry’s much-quoted statement that ‘They [the Modernists] do not seek to imitate form,

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12 The intention of the chapter is to compare Mansfield’s story with Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, an attempt which, I believe, turns out unfruitful, The two writers differ fundamentally from each other, I believe, both in style and in subject matter.
but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life’ (in Smith, 146).

However, rather than to justify her claim, Smith can be seen to employ the Post-Impressionist painting merely as part of a metaphorical language,\(^{13}\) or, when she occasionally attempts to draw parallels between the two art forms, rather than pointing to their shared formal properties, she can be seen to merely hint at some shared effects. For instance, in line with Fry’s ‘thisness’ of expression, Smith suggests that the quality of the ‘Post-Impressionist’ painting is marked by ‘a heightening of people or objects’ (Smith, 149) or else, a form which ‘[appeals] to the viewer’s imagination with the vividness of lived experience’ (ibid.), without further explanation. In order to illustrate her ‘claim’, Smith refers to a scene in ‘At the Bay’, where, in a highly visual manner, Mansfield suggests the hectic tension of the character of Stanley Burnell, evoked in a rush down to the shore for his early morning swim. However, arguing within a symbolist framework, Smith’s argues that: ‘Stanley’s driven speed is conveyed […] through a series of abrupt monosyllabic verbs, indicating that he does everything as if it is a competition, going through rather than round obstacles’ (Smith, 176).

Smith’s suggestion of the ‘general’ can be seen to suggest a symbolist approach to the scene, and thus disowns what I will argue to be the particularity of the image. Not only does Smith disregard the suggested expression of the scene, but, what is more, arguing about Fry’s ‘equivalent for life’ in the disconnected scene, Smith can be seen to disown the Post-Impressionist integrity of idea, and thus, her comparative reading is undermined.

The formal aesthetics (and underlying ideas) of the Expressionist (‘Post-Impressionist’) painting, I will suggest, finds its counterpart in Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism. The simultaneity of impression marking the Expressionist painting is an

\(^{13}\) Cf. ‘the painterly moment’ (in *Mrs Dalloway*) and ‘the layers of paint [in *Mrs Dalloway*] occlude and occasionally reveal’ (Smith, p. 192). Discussing the aspect of ‘time’ in ‘At the Bay’, Smith can be seen to suggest that the opposition of Mrs. Fairfield and Stanley Burnell’s perception of time is suggested by ‘what seems a verbal version of a painting of Mrs. Fairfield by Van Gogh, and Stanley’s interruption of it’ (ibid., p. 173), upon which she quotes a passage from the story. In the same manner, Linda’s vision of the sunset in Chapter Ten, Smith suggests, ‘[reminds] the reader of a [painter’s sky]’ (ibid.) which she associates with Van Gogh’s ‘menacing Crows over Wheatfield’ (ibid.), a view which she (again) can be seen to ‘justify’ with a quotation from the text (Linda’s sunset).
element shared by all of Mansfield’s stories treated in this thesis, conveying a ‘unity of impression’. Another shared feature with the Expressionist painting is the simplistic line suggesting direct emotion, a technique which finds its counterpart, I will suggest, in Mansfield’s fragmented scene. Equally, the Expressionist emphasis on outline matches Mansfield’s ‘bounding outlines’, a quality which is brought about, I will argue, by way of a very precise language. Furthermore, the Expressionist emphasis on contrast can be found in Mansfield’s various juxtapositions within scenes which serve to effect some local conceptions of opposites.  

‘Prelude’ can be argued to be Cubist in its organising principle. Situated in the Karori property, the story hinges on the Burnell family and household’s experience of the moving of house, using the shifting point of view. Lastly, the Futuristic emphasis on movement and the mechanical dimension in human nature can be found in Mansfield’s expression of the subconscious mechanisms in character, found in ‘Prelude’, ‘The Fly’, ‘Miss Brill’ and ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’.

Having attempted a close reading of Mansfield’s stories for this thesis, it became clear to me that their content is expressed through form. In addition to the shared formal properties of Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism: the fragmentation of form, juxtaposition (of scenes), the intuitive organization of material and the progressive movement, each story has its own particular and individual style as well, conforming to their attempted expressions.

‘Miss Brill’, for instance, is largely coloured by Miss Brill’s state of delusion, something which, in my view, effects a highly abstract impression of the story where the story’s progression of ideas are narrated from the point of view of the character’s particular state of mind. In ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’, on the other hand, Mansfield renders a highly visual concept of oppression, done largely by a flouting of the temporal logic of

14 Examples of this are the bathing scene with Stanley Burnell and Jonathan Trout in ‘At the Bay’ and the kitchen scene with Mrs Fairfield and Beryl in ‘Prelude’.
narrative time by foregrounding the number of (the Daughters’) flashbacks in time of which the story is constituted. The final impression is marked, I will suggest, by the aesthetic ‘flatness’ which for long has dominated as the ‘defining characteristic of authentic Modernist painting’ (Butler, 14).

The meaning of ‘Prelude’ and ‘The Fly’, I will argue, is largely conveyed through their respective narrative movements. ‘Prelude’, being a ‘slice of life’ story, moves towards the revelation of secret selves of the characters Beryl and Linda in the penultimate and last chapter. In ‘The Fly’, on the other hand, there is a radical and ‘downward’ narrative movement in the third part of the story which confirms the suggestion of the protagonist’s radical change of grief, suggested in his action. In ‘At the Bay’, Mansfield again devices a remarkable integrity of content and form where the story’s argument of the natural cycle is manifested in the cyclical form of the story which begins shortly before dawn and terminates during night.

In the following chapters, I will point to the relevance of character, creativity and form, and through this, seek to bring out the Expressionist approach in Mansfield’s fiction.
‘Miss Brill’

‘Miss Brill’ appeared in the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922) and is Mansfield’s perhaps most subtle character-sketch, one in which the narrative hinges on the suggestion of the character’s willed state of self-delusion. Being largely narrated and developed from the point of view of the protagonist, the story can also be approached as one of Mansfield’s most abstract pieces of Expressionism.

‘Miss Brill’ concerns the character Miss Brill, a lonely middle-aged woman who lives in a foreign country where she makes her living by teaching English and by reading the newspaper for an invalid gentleman. The story takes place on a Sunday afternoon in a public garden, *Jardin Publique*, where the solitary Miss Brill is suggested to spend all of her Sunday afternoons throughout the year.

There appears to be relatively few analyses of Mansfield’s ‘Miss Brill’. One of these, however, is found in Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr’s study *Katherine Mansfield* (1981). In Hanson and Gurr’s symbolist reading, they can be seen to stress a reading of parallelisms, pointing to the relevance of some ‘key-images’ found in the concepts of ‘age’ versus ‘youth’, ‘stasis’ versus ‘vitality’, ‘solitude’ versus ‘community’ and ‘illusion’ versus ‘reality’ (Hanson and Gurr, 77), and through this, they settle for a ‘general’ reading of the story.

In their analysis, and in line with their symbolist reading, Hanson and Gurr can be seen to highlight the (single) aspect of ‘age’, arguing that the character’s old and ragged necklace fur is Miss Brill’s ‘mirror-image’ (ibid., 78). The fact that they argue about a
metaphor, Hanson and Gurr fail to account for the suggestion and development of the character’s state of mind, which I believe is the crucial aspect in the story. Drawing on the connections between the ‘fur’ and ‘age’, the critics highlight the park scene approximately in the middle of the story which comprises another old and shabby fur (and ditto figure), namely the ‘ermine toque. The scene, according to the critics ‘anticipates the central moment of the story’ (ibid., 79), which connection however remains unclear. Arguing for the epiphanic story convention, the two critics highlight the story’s epilogue and the suggestion of the character’s shattered illusions, a reading which can be seen to turn on their arguments of ‘isolation’ and the conceptual pair ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ rather than on their motif of ‘age’.

In the last part of their analysis, thus, Hanson and Gurr engage in the reading of the character in the story. Based on their symbolist argumentation, the critics convey some elusive ideas about the character Miss Brill, suggesting beyond the confines of the story in statements such as ‘[Miss Brill] realises the cruelty of the other human beings in the cruelty and indifference of the young couple’ (ibid., 81), ‘she has hoped that if she were to miss a Sunday afternoon (for reasons not admitted to consciousness) she would in her turn be missed’, and, ‘Miss Brill does not think about what she has just realised, though it may make its way back into consciousness by degrees’ (ibid.). Not being anchored in the text, the statements come across as highly impressionist.

A more fruitful approach in reading the character is through an Expressionist approach. In this manner, the reading will be anchored in the tracing of the development of the character, something which I believe is crucial in the story.

Whereas I wish to account for an interpretation of a suggested internal cry of Miss Brill in the final sentences of the story, Hanson and Gurr emphasise the fact that Miss Brill puts away the box with the fur, an action which they suggest ‘[shows] her ability to adjust and construct new appearances’ (ibid.). In this way, the critics emphasise a view of Miss Brill as
‘artist’ and also her ‘power of imagination’. Finally, in line with their concepts of ‘illusion’ versus ‘reality’, Hanson and Gurr can be seen to suggest a reading of the ‘real ideal’ (ibid.), something which can be pointed back to their ‘Symbolist’ argument, discussed in 1.2.

In *The Modernist Short Story*, Dominic Head argues for the ‘impersonal’ characterization of Miss Brill through another reading of ‘epiphany’, and as such, and in line with Hanson and Gurr, he can be seen to highlight the epilogue of the story. Head quite accurately sums up the state of mind of the character, suggesting that: ‘The conclusion comprises a complex ambivalent “epiphany” which emulates the character’s own internal conflict between awareness and self-delusion, and this confusion is the essence of Miss Brill’s condition’ (Head, 111). In his analysis Head points to the aspect of the ‘ambivalence’ of the character, and through this suggests that ‘The story convention of single point or discovery is here modified, made less determinate, as benefits the characterization’ (ibid.). The end of the story is indeed deliberately ambiguous and peculiarly open. It ends with Miss Brill’s ‘internal cry’ suggested in her imagined cry of the fur.

‘Miss Brill’ builds up through the development of Miss Brill’s particular state of self-delusion, which, I will argue, is the main theme of the story. According to my argument of Literary Expressionism, I will suggests that the story has a progressive form, conveyed through a number of composite images of the character’s particular predicament and state of mind. The particularly subtle quality of the story, I will argue, lies in the surface narrative, which conveys the fragile balance between the character’s willed self-delusion and her repressed emotions of sadness and loneliness. The character’s repressed feelings occasionally surface in the narrative, both in the initial paragraph and in the climactic paragraph towards the end, and, as such, can be said to function as a powerful undercurrent of the story.

The working of Miss Brill’s mind, and the surfacing of the frail balance between her subconscious and self-delusion can be detected already in the initial paragraph of the story.
Here an important aspect of her character is established: ‘[Miss Brill] felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came from walking she supposed. And when she breathed, something light and sad – no, not sad, exactly – something gentle seemed to move in her bosom’ (225).\footnote{Katherine Mansfield, \textit{Katherine Mansfield Selected Stories}, ed. Angela Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). All further references are taken from this edition.} Through a remarkably fluent and effective use of punctuation, Mansfield both highlights the character’s powerful feeling of sadness, as well as suggesting the character’s working of mind and her deliberate self-delusion.

Another important aspect which is established of Miss Brill in the story’s opening paragraph is the suggestion of the character’s intimate relationship with her necklace fur:

> She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes. “What has been happening to me?” said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown! […] Little rogue! Yes, she really felt that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. (225)

The suggested intimacy with the fur suggests Miss Brill’s loneliness, something which is affirmed in the last scene of the story. This aspect is elaborated on in the next paragraph of the story, in which Miss Brill’s intimacy with the park orchestra is conveyed:

> [T]he band sounded loader and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen; it didn’t care how they played if there weren’t any strangers present. Wasn’t the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new […] Now there came a little ‘flutey’ bit – very pretty! – a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled. (225)

Through the extraordinarily subtle and possessive rhetoric of the passage, Mansfield elegantly completes this aspect of Miss Brill’s character.
Approximately in the middle of the story, Mansfield devices a change of direction which, triggered by the relatively long and neutral scene with the ‘ermine toque’ in paragraph six, it settles for the story’s climax and resolution. This is initiated by the succeeding scene. Emotionally influenced by her untroubled and joyful state of mind of the preceding scene, it is the suggestion of the character’s desire for integration which is dominant. Here, Miss Brill envisions herself as an actor on a ‘worldly stage’. The suggestion can be traced back to a famous passage in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and Jaques’s monologue which starts ‘All the world’s a stage/And all the men and women merely players’. Towards the end of the monologue, the last stage of Man is suggested, something which, I will argue, may function as a comment upon the story of ‘Miss Brill’ as well: ‘Into the lean and slipped pantaloon,/With spectacle on nose and pouch on side,/His youthful hose well saved – a world too wide/For his shrunk shank – and his big manly voice’ (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2.7.158-161). Read as allusion, the lines can be seen to highlight and comment upon the situation and the character of Miss Brill, the lines turning on the notion of ‘age’ and the ‘unfulfilled’ aspect of character, and thus, functioning as a rather sentimental comment. However, a next meaning can be grasped, where, through Shakespeare’s own probable allusion to the ‘ridiculous old merchant’ from *commedia dell’arte*. Mansfield can be seen to highlight the ‘ridiculous’ aspect of her character as well.

In the next paragraph the suggestion of Miss Brill’s desire for integration is developed, something which, I believe, suggests the climactic scene of the story. In this scene, Miss Brill’s imagines herself as forming part of a choir, in the following manner:

> The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing [...] And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches – they would come in with a kind of

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accompaniment – something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful – moving .... And Miss Brill’s eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. (228)

Through the evocation of the ‘tune’ in the initial line, Mansfield can be seen to convey a parallel reading, suggesting Miss Brill’s ‘transportation’ towards a climax which is completed in ‘the light shone’. This is the climax of the story. In the next scene Miss Brill’s bubble of illusion is shattered by the young couple’s remark, seeing her as a ‘silly old mug’ (128), something which brings the narrative into its conclusion and resolution.

The conclusion is marked off, and can thus be seen to function as the story’s epilogue. Here, I will argue, it is primarily Miss Brill’s image of her true self which is relevant. This is conveyed by a new fluency of language which, as in ‘Bliss’, the emotional breakdown of the protagonist is suggested by way of using a neutral language. In addition to the choice of words, Mansfield as a reinforcing device, employs a juxtaposed scene in which she suggests another and final evocation of the character’s usual state of delusion. Through the suggestion of the ‘almond-cake’ and the ‘quite a dashing way’ of striking the ‘match for the kettle’ (229), the reader is painfully reminded of Miss Brill’s preceding suggestions: her intimate relationship with her necklace fur and the park orchestra, as well as her subtle state of ecstasy in the second part of the story.

In the final paragraph Mansfield thus evokes Miss Brill’s sad and lonely own self, suggested through a series of seemingly neutral verbs, such as ‘[Miss Brill] climbed the stairs’, ‘went into the dark little room’, and ‘sat down on the red eiderdown’ (229). Juxtaposed with the emotional language employed in the suggestion of the character’s self-delusions, Mansfield’s choice of the neutral verbs in the story’s final scene attains the full force of the story’s undertow, namely Miss Brill’s true feelings of sadness and loneliness. In the story’s final line, in the manner of the final part of ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ in
which Josephine imagines the crying of a bird, Mansfield conveys a suggestion of the character’s internal cry of desolation, suggested in the necklace fur.

In order to conclude, I wish once again to point to the progressive language and the development of the protagonist’s particular state of mind. Furthermore, the story’s form and content mirror each other. The form of the story is suggested in Mansfield’s letter to Richard Murry on 17 January 1921 where the essence of the character to a large extent is expressed through the distinct qualities of language: ‘In Miss Brill I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I chose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on that day at that very moment’ (Mansfield, The Collected Letters, 165).

‘The Fly’

‘The Fly’ was written in February 1922, and represents Mansfield’s one and only fictional response to the First World War. The story appeared in the collection The Doves’ Nest and Other Stories, published posthumously in June 1923. ‘The Fly’ is set six years after the First World War and takes place in the protagonist’s, that is, the boss’s, office, where he attends to his visitor, a former, now disabled employee, Mr. Woodifield. The theme of the story, I will propose, is about the boss’s grief over the death of his only son and heir in the War. ‘The Fly’ is in my opinion an excellent study of a man’s plight, in which Mansfield’s analytical skills and disciplined structure guides the reader towards the boss’s crisis and resolution.

The five pages long story has elicited a wealth of criticism from 1945, and most notably, as Hanson and Gurr state, in the ‘Essays of Criticism in 1962, and The Explicator
rather earlier, in the 1940s’ (Hanson and Gurr, 128). Several of the critics have approached the story as a form of autobiography, where the fly is seen as Mansfield herself, battling with incurable tuberculosis, or else, the fly and the boss is seen as an analogy of Mansfield and her father respectively. Other frequent interpretations have been that the story represents a statement of a general or universal truth, such as ‘time overcomes all grief’, ‘the selfishness and cruelty of mankind’ and as a ‘universally compelling message of death and loss’. In my opinion, ‘The Fly’ plays too much on the subconscious, the intuitive and the instinctual forces in order for it to be read autobiographically or allegorically. Another difficulty of reading the story as autobiography is the fact that the character of Mr. Woodifield will be superfluous to the story, something which I find problematic in a story of such meticulous concentration. Mr. Woodifield and the fly I will suggest function as foil and as instrument in the portrayal of the character and his particular grief.

The structure of the ‘The Fly’ can be seen to be divided into a three-step design which moves towards the boss’s crisis and a resolution. In the opening of the story the boss is played against the figure of Mr. Woodifield, something which serves to highlight the protagonist’s state of grief. The character Mr. Woodifield is portrayed as a frail man, a man who has suffered from a stroke, probably as the result of his own grief of losing a son in the war. The story opens in this manner: “‘Y’are very snug in here,” piped old Mr Woodifield, and he peered out of the great, green leather armchair by his friend the boss’s desk as a baby peers out of its pram’ (357). Mansfield pictures a man who in every way has regressed once more to early infancy. This is a reduced man, both in voice and size. Through this Mansfield suggests the character’s admiring attitude vis-à-vis the boss, something I believe is a crucial aspect in the story’s first part.

The boss is juxtaposed against this image of Mr. Woodifield who, significantly, is shown to take a particular pleasure from Mr. Woodifield’s praise: ‘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’ (357). In a smooth manner Mansfield subtly suggests the relationship between the two characters. Through juxtaposition Mansfield evokes the two character’s emotional dependence on each other. The revelling of the boss against the frail Mr. Woodifield, I will propose, suggests the first step towards the boss’s crisis and resolution. This particular relationship is elaborated upon in the course of the first part of the story.

Apart from functioning as foil to the boss Mr. Woodifield also functions as the one who triggers his emotional crisis in the second part. The shot of whisky that the boss had offered ‘warmed [Mr. Woodifield]; it crept into his chill old brain – he remembered’ (358). What Mr. Woodifield remembers is about his own and the boss’s dead sons, and the description of the graveyard where the two are buried.

The middle section is thus concerned with the boss’s reaction to this fresh memory of his dead son. After having seen Mr. Woodifield out Mansfield conveys the boss’s thoughts in the ‘inner monologue’: ‘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 girls staring down at him’ (359). In this section, instead of ‘swooping’ across the floor, the boss is evoked with ‘firm, heavy steps’. Equally, juxtaposed to the former image of ‘rolling’ in his office chair, the character is in this part evoked as ‘the fat body plumped down in the spring chair’ (359). The suggestion is that of a heavy fatigue, something which is coupled with the character’s recall of his son and his former visions of building up the firm in view of the son’s ‘stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off’ (360). From the suggestions of the boss’s state of mind in this
part, Mansfield prepares for the ending. The story’s third part is initiated by a rather ominous image, something which is suggested in the ‘thick wrist’: ‘But 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’ (361). With an extraordinary fluidity and naturalness Mansfield manages to produce a frightening image just by the use of the rather conventional ‘thick wrist’.

A common quality of the stories treated in this thesis is the fact that Mansfield’s achieves her intended effects through a carefully controlled narrative structure. This, I believe, is perhaps even more evident in the story in question in which the ill-omened image of ‘thick wrist’ achieves its effect through an intricate suggestion and development of the boss. The image literally turns the narrative away from the humane portrayal of the boss, as it suggests mere oblivious flesh. From thence, Mansfield suggests the boss’s radically altered nature of his grief, something which is suggested in his action on the fly.

The narrative movement of ‘The Fly’ is crucial to its idea about the altered grief of the boss. The meaning of the story can thus be seen to be embedded in its three-step design and its remarkable ‘downward’ movement. After the death of the fly the boss is seized with ‘such grinding feeling of wretchedness’ (361) and the story ends with the fact that he has forgot about his former thoughts on the dead son, something which suggests the ‘mechanical’ act of his fly-baiting.

The story is tightly and intricately structured, in which Mansfield recurrently anticipates its movement and phases. The final idea of the story is for instance anticipated in the preceding part, conveyed through the passage of inner monologue in which the boss declares the impossibility of his recovery: ‘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’ (359). What could be perceived in the third part of the story is precisely the
suggestion that Time has not been able to conquer the boss’s grief, but has instead, as mentioned, altered the six years of grief into a settled form. The fly-baiting must be conceived as the projection of the boss’s grief, a mechanism which has taken over for his former catalyst, the ‘violent fit of weeping’ (359). So, rather than being a wanton act, as R. A. Copland and other critics of the same period have described it, the boss’s eventual killing of the fly must be perceived as much more significant than such an analysis would imply, suggesting the boss’s instinctual (mental) survival.

In his article, Copland gives a fine definition of the narrative effect of the free indirect discourse encountered in ‘The Fly’, which is ‘to efface the narrator-reader relationship and to lure all awareness into direct sympathy with the characters’. Copland’s definition thus pinpoints an important aesthetic principle shared by the Modernists, namely the elimination of the mediating artist in the work, discussed in the introduction as the impersonal narration. By speaking through her characters in the technique of free indirect discourse and inner monologue Mansfield effaces the previous narrator-reader relationship, and moves this relationship to another level, namely to the story’s conceptual representation.

I have not come over much recent criticism of the story. One of these however is Hanson and Gurr’s analysis. Through their symbolist approach they suggest a theme which turns on the idea of the ‘pastoral’ versus the city and the ‘mechanical’, suggested in the characters of Mr. Woodifield and the boss. This, they argue, is seen in Mansfield’s use of the colour ‘green’ which describes the armchair in which Mr. Woodifield is placed. The reading of the ‘mechanical’ dimension of the story is argued in the picture of the boss’s son and equally in the boss’s memory of his son which ‘has long replaced natural memory or grief in the boss’ (Hanson and Gurr, 129). Truly, the mechanical dimensions of the boss’s grief can be detected in his projection of grief in the last part. However, the critics’ do not elaborate on

their defining ‘contrast’ between the ‘mechanical and the ‘pastoral’ and so appears to be an unfruitful approach. What is more, by connecting a reading about the ‘natural’ and the ‘pastoral’ in connection with Mr. Woodifield they completely disown his ‘illness’ from his stroke. The character I believe represents all other things than a ‘pastoral’ aspect.

Finally, Hanson and Gurr suggest that the story ‘lacks the fullness and richness of implication of her finest work’ (ibid., 130), something which they propose lies in the ‘rigidity of the story’s shaping idea’ (ibid.). They can be seen to conclude with a statement that the story is a ‘flaw’, and that is why the story has ‘provoked so many conflicting interpretations’ (ibid.). On the other hand, as I have mentioned above, the wealth of criticism which the story has elicited can be explained precisely through the fact of the story’s tight structure and Mansfield’s precise and particular portrayal of the boss and his plight.

I wish to end this brief analysis by again citing Copland, who concludes his reading of the story with the following words: ‘As a good story [‘The Fly’] gives off a wide radiation of relevance which the critics have not failed to notice. But simply as a story its high value lies in its power not merely to surprise but to terrify, not merely to expose but to involve; and its dynamic, tragic movement’ (Copland, 214).

‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’

‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ appeared in the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922) and is the third longest story in Mansfield’s oeuvre, running over some twenty pages. As the title suggests, the story concerns the two daughters of the late colonel, Josephine and Constantia, who ‘had given up an independent existence, surrendered any other relationship save the one as “daughters” to a “colonel”, and therefore found themselves at his
death rudderless, leaderless, and drifting’ (Magalaner, 92). In his analysis of the story, Marvin Magalaner suggests that it is this drifting quality which ‘Mansfield seeks in every way to express and to exemplify through the story’ (ibid.). This, he suggests, is brought about through the device of ‘time’ which functions in the story both as ‘motif’ and ‘structural device’ (ibid., 95). This is without doubt one major quality of the story. Magalaner does a thorough account of Mansfield’s narrative technique in this story, a technique which he accurately suggests to be mirroring the daughters’ states of mind. Hence, in this analysis I can only elaborate further on what Magalaner in an excellent manner already has observed.

In the beginning of his analysis Magalaner puts down his argument in which he points to the ‘skill of the author in suggesting facets of personality rather than depending on explicit statement’ as well as the importance of ‘Mansfield’s manipulation of point of view, her artful juggling of the time sequence, and her technique of eliminating the distinction among levels of reality’ (ibid., 91). I will discuss these in the course of this analysis.

In the opening chapter of the story Mansfield establishes her two protagonists and the story’s narrative situation. Here, Mansfield suggests the daughters’ absence of genuine grief, proposed in the question about whether to use their mourning indoors. The other point Mansfield makes in this chapter is a suggestion about the daughters’ childish manner. Throughout the chapter, the reader gets the impression that the two characters are girls. Not until well into Chapter Two is the reader conveyed with the information that the two are elderly women, naming them ‘old tabbies’ (233). Lastly, Mansfield suggests the grey, isolated and domestic lives of her two characters, obliquely conveyed through the question of whom can see them without their mourning clothes within the flat, namely their maid and the postman.

In Chapter One Mansfield also establishes the story’s character of vagueness and indecisiveness. This is also suggested in Magalaner’s analysis who claims that ““The
Daughters of the Late Colonel” is deliberately constructed on a foundation of vagueness and indecisiveness’ (Magalaner, 91). This is done largely through the vague reference to time in the story, something which Mansfield conveys in the initial paragraph of the story: ‘The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives. Even when they went to bed it was only their bodies which lay down and rested; their minds went on, thinking things out, talking things over, wondering, deciding, trying to remember where….’ (230). As Magalaner has pointed out ‘The reader does not know until later what the “after” refers to and never does find out what the “where” signifies’ (ibid., 92-93). What is more, the vague reference to the narrative time (‘The week after’) can be seen to haunt the entire narrative, in which the subsequent references to ‘time’ are literally subverted. The effectiveness of the story’s opening sentence illustrates another example of Mansfield’s technical experimentation. Through a single device Mansfield can be seen to affect the entire story and its vagueness concerning ‘time’.

The story’s character of vagueness and indecisiveness is largely conveyed through Constantia. This quality can be seen to be epitomized in the final scene in Chapter Eight. At Cyril’s question about the time, Constantia is left to grapple with the physical time of the clock: ‘Constantia was still gazing at the clock. She couldn’t make up her mind if it was fast or slow. It was one or the other, she felt almost certain of that. At any rate, it had been’ (242). In a fluent and effective manner Mansfield can in the first sentence be seen to establish her concept about the vagueness of ‘time’. This is reinforced in the next sentence through the fact that ‘she felt almost certain of that’, and completed with yet another strengthening of this in the final line. The final line comes across as to be imposed onto the argument. As such, it resonates with the style of writing found in the satire ‘Je ne parle pas français’ in which Mansfield in equal fashion employs a language of deliberate exaggeration in the portrayal and suggestion of her protagonist Raoul Duquette, discussed in 1.1. As such the quotation comes
across as a highly ironical statement, at the same time as it reinforces the story’s vague reference to ‘time’.

Another reference to the story’s ‘vague’ character is found in an instance of ambiguity. Towards the end of Chapter One Mansfield evokes a self-conscious language:

And Constantia said more loudly than she meant to, ‘Mice.’ Josephine was furious. ‘Oh, what nonsense Con!’ she said. ‘What have mice got to do with it? You’re asleep.’ ‘I don’t think I am,’ said Constantia. She shut her eyes to make sure. She was. (231)

The curious and ambiguously posed final line opens up a number of possible readings and can be read both as the point of view of each of the characters as well as being the narrator’s statement. If it is read as Josephine’s point of view, then it suggests a rushed and anxious quality in the character. On the other hand, if the sentence is viewed as being the point of view of Constantia, the line is almost surrealistic, and can be seen to point to the ‘sleepy’, ‘dreamy’ and ‘fluid’ aspects of the character, and hence can be seen to add to the story’s ‘vague’ quality. If the line however is the narrator’s, then it can be viewed in terms of what Magalaner has suggested: ‘the uncalled-for cuteness of the line is jarring to the basic seriousness of the fiction’, however, rather than to ‘represents a throwback to the Mansfield of the German Pension tales’ (Magalaner, 99), the archness of the sentence must be seen as a deliberate structural device.

If the ‘dreamy’, ‘unfocused’ and ‘unpractical’ qualities of Constantia are connected with the ‘vague’ dimension of the story, Josephine’s practical sense of the two can be seen to convey the subtle aspect of the story. One revealing example of this is found in the scene where the sisters are finding themselves inside the late colonel’s room in Chapter Six. At Constantia’s demonstration of terror and her suggestion of putting it off ‘for another day’, Josephine is portrayed as follows: “‘Why?’ snapped Josephine, feeling, as usual, much better
now that she knew for certain that Constantia was terrified. “It’s got to be done. But I do wish you wouldn’t whisper, Con”” (237). However, against this scene Mansfield conveys a terrified Josephine: ‘Josephine felt herself that she had gone too far. She took a wide swerve over to the chest of drawers, put out a hand, but quickly drew it back again. “Connie!” she gasped, and she wheeled round and leaned with her back against the chest of drawers’ (238). The juxtaposition of scenes suggests the character’s gently intricate state of mind.

Another example of the same is found in the scene where Kate, the sisters’ maid, bursts into the room with the obscure question ‘fried or boiled?’ At the maid’s ‘loud sniff’ for an explanation, Josephine replies as follows:

‘Well, why didn’t you say so immediately?’ Josephine reproached her gently. ‘How could you expect us to understand, Kate? There are a great many things in this world, you know, which are fried or boiled.’ And after such a display of courage she said quite brightly to Constantia, ‘Which do you prefer, Con?’ (244)

In the passage Mansfield clearly shows an analytical approach in her portrayal of the character. Josephine’s subtlety of mind adds this quality to the story. In a letter to John Middleton Murry on 15 November 1920, Mansfield’s can be seen to emphasis a concern with the ‘intricate’ dimensions in literature, a statement which I believe is particularly apt in the suggestion of Josephine. ‘Fine shades – fine shades – I’m all for them. Life is made up of nuances. One must be sensitive to the very last nerve – or I must’ (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 113).

The drifting quality of the story is produced, as Magalaner has observed, through Mansfield’s manipulation with chronology, something which mirrors the ‘hazy and directionless’ world of the two characters where ‘time has no meaning and no boundaries’ (Magalaner, 92). This drifting quality of the story is exemplified through the character
Josephine. Using the stream of consciousness, Mansfield evokes Josephine’s mind in the opening passage of Chapter Eight. Magalaner has put it this way:

[Josephine] projects forward in time and imagines a future visit by Cyril during which she will comment on the fact that he is wearing his grandfather’s watch. This train leads her to remember the recent past when Cyril had apologized by mail for his inability to attend the funeral. From this thought, she switches to the future, when the boy had promised to stop by for tea; and to memories of times in the past when he has come to tea. (ibid., 93)

Yet, if Mansfield conveys a distinct delineation of her two characters, she can also be seen to ‘unify’ these, and with it, the composition as a whole. This is produced through the fact of the nuanced contrast suggested in the two characters and also, as can be seen for instance in the story’s opening paragraph, quoted above, in the ‘common’ point of view of the two sisters, narrated through the omniscient narrator. In one of her letters to the Scottish painter Dorothy Brett, commenting upon a painting done of her three small nieces, Mansfield can be seen to elaborate upon her own aesthetic in the story in question:

Three heads – a group like that – are – is – hard to manage. One wants to roll them round softly, until they combine. They want to flow into each other a bit, especially if they are children. You want a kind of soft nudging if one of the children is your little girl. This doesn’t upset their ‘differences’ but it does make one feel the artist has seen them as a THREE not as 1, 2, and, 3. (Mansfield, The Collected Letters, 277-78)

In one passage in the story this ‘unifying’ quality can however be seen to take on a surrealist dimension, where Mansfield actually can be seen to flout the physical identities of the two characters. At the vicar Mr. Farolles’ proposal about the funeral arrangements, Josephine and Constantia are expressed as one character:
'I should like it to be quite simple,' said Josephine firmly, ‘and not too expensive. At the same time I should like—’ ‘A good one that will last,’ thought dreamy Constantia, as if Josephine were buying a nightgown. But of course Josephine didn’t say that. ‘One suitable to our father’s position’. She was very nervous. (235)

Mansfield can be seen to completely blur the integrity of the two characters, going in and out of the two characters as if they were one. The fantastic structure of the passage draws attention to itself can thus perhaps be seen to highlight not only a ‘unified’ impression of the two, but the passage also spurs another impression of ‘vagueness’, in this case manifested in the daughters’ ‘identities’, or, literally, a lack of such.

Through the technique of ‘eliminating the distinction among levels of reality’, Mansfield directs all the retrospective scenes in the surface of the narrative. This produces an impression of ‘flatness’ characteristic of contemporary painting. This way, Mansfield can be seen to further enhance and highlight her concern about ‘form’ and ‘expression’ in this story. Unlike the other stories treated in this thesis, Mansfield in ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ devices a narrative progression through an elaborate manipulation of the time sequence, something which upsets a narrative ‘progression’ in time. By placing these in the foreground narrative Mansfield mirrors, as Magalaner has suggested, the vague, stagnant and directionless world of the two characters.

As a reinforcement of this structural visualization of the story Mansfield can also be seen to sustain and elaborate on various visual devices locally in the story. A number of these can be found in Chapter Six where the two sisters are finding themselves within the room of the late colonel in order to ‘settle about’ his things. One important aspect of the chapter is the suggested relationship between the authority of the colonel and the keen oppression and inaction of the two daughters. The cruel authority of the colonel is suggested through the point of view of Constantia, in the perception of his very furniture: ‘And her pale stare flew from the locked writing-table – so safe – to the huge glittering wardrobe, and she began to
breath in a queer, panting way (238). The suggestion of state of mind through the concrete object is a typical Modernist (Expressionist) feature, something which I believe highlights the underlying metaphysical ‘Idealism’ of Expressionist art, and the ‘subjective’ approach to reality discussed in 1.2. 19 In his book, Christopher Butler emphasises Expressionist art’s deliberate distortion of reality, a quality which projects from and manifests deep emotional conflicts.

Another suggestion of the same is found in the same chapter, in the sisters’ perception of the blind cord: ‘They only gave the blind a touch, but it flew up and the cord flew after, rolling round the blind-stick, and the little tassel tapped as if trying to get free (237). Implied in the statement is a suggestion of the two characters’ feeling of ‘entrapment’ within the late colonel’s room.

The sisters’ feeling of entrapment within their father’s room is established already in the opening paragraph of the scene where, through the point of view of the daughters, the room is evoked in terms of a dream symbol, something which obliquely suggests and establishes the powerful notion of the subconscious dimension of the scene:

It couldn’t be helped. That girl was… Then the door was shut behind them, but – but they weren’t in father’s room at all. They might have suddenly walked through the wall by mistake into a different flat all together. Was the door right behind them? They were too frightened to look. Josephine knew that if it was it was holding itself tight shut; Constantia felt that, like the doors in dreams, it hadn’t any handle at all. (237)

Through the evocation of a dream narrative, Mansfield suggests the idea of the daughters’ emotionally charged states of mind, something which also serves to anticipate the quality of the scene in the chapter.

19 This manner of describing states of mind is characteristic of another work, namely Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), which is situated in the juncture between the Symbolist and the Modernist school.
Another visual reinforcement to the story is the use of ‘colour’. In Chapter Six, for example, the colour ‘white’ is used in order to suggest the coldness of the room: ‘It was the coldness which made it so awful. Or the whiteness – which?’ (237). In the course of the scene, Mansfield can be seen to elaborate on the descriptions and suggestions of ‘white’ and ‘cold’ and hence strengthen the keen oppression of the daughters. Another literary device which is employed for the same purpose is the use of onomatopoeia: ‘Then a cab klopflopped over the cobbles below, and the quiet seemed to shake into little pieces’ (237). The evocation of ‘sound’ effectively conveys the suggestion of the equally charged quietness within the room.

In Chapter One Mansfield employs colour as a device with which to strengthen the suggestion of character. In line with the more passionate Josephine, who in the chapter is evoked as ‘snapped Josephine’, ‘demanded Josephine’ and ‘Josephine was furious’, Mansfield uses the colour ‘dark red’ to describe her night-gown and slippers. This is contrasted with Constantia’s ‘indefinite green’ (231), something which matches her ‘vague’ and ‘indecisive’ identity, in the chapter suggested in terms of ‘said […] slowly’, ‘said […] mildly’.

A next reference to colour is found in the dining-room scene in Chapter Seven, depicting the aftermath of the sisters’ venturesome experiences within the colonel’s room: ‘Their cold lips quivered at the greenish brims. Josephine curved her small red hands round the cup; Constantia sat up and blew on the wavy steam, making it flutter from one side to the other’ (239). The colour can be seen to reinforce the visualizing of the two sisters’ states of mind and their shattered experience of the foregoing scene. Another colour, for instance red or pink, would have upset the expression. On the other hand, the colour of the cups might have been omitted altogether without any severe harm to the story, but the fact that it is conveyed serves to strengthen the visual quality of the story.
Yet another reference to colour is conveyed indirectly in Chapter Five through simile: ‘And Constantia, pale as a lemon in all that blackness, said in a frightened whisper, “Done what, Jug?”’ (236). The simile – which is contrasted with yet another colour, subtly conveyed in the expression ‘all that blackness’ – conveys a highly visual effect and is illustrative of Constantia’s state of mind on their way home from the funeral. The final conveyance of colour is found in Chapter Three, suggesting the colonel at his death bed: ‘He lay there, purple, a dark, angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in’ (234). The colour visualizes the idea of the angry and authoritative colonel, a suggestion which is sustained throughout the narrative both in the scene with Cyril in Chapter Eight when he is still alive, and obliquely through the device of his furniture, most conspicuously conveyed in Chapter Six (another instance of this is suggested in Chapter Four), and in the daughters’ memory of his ‘thumping’ stick in the final chapter of the story.

In the last chapter of the story, Chapter Twelve, Mansfield disrupts the style of the foregoing narrative, and the foregrounding of retrospective scenes. Instead of conjuring up scenes from the past, Mansfield can be seen to prepare for the ending of the story. This is done by hinting at the possibility of the daughters’ ‘liberation’ from the grips of the late colonel’s tyranny.

Initially, this is conveyed through a ‘common’ point of view. In free indirect discourse this is conveyed in the rhythm of the organ-grinder’s music: ‘A week since father died, A week since father died’ (247), and the relief of the fact that his stick never will thump in, ‘It never will thump again, It never will thump again’ (246).

In line with the delineation of her characters, Mansfield uses the image of the sun to hint at Josephine’s ‘epiphany’ and the Buddha figure equally hints at Constantia’s one. The hint at Constantia’s ‘epiphany’ is illustrated in the Buddha figure on the mantelpiece who ‘seemed to-day to be more than smiling. He knew something; he had a secret’ (247). Standing
before the Buddha figure, Mansfield also hints at a new attitude in Constantia: ‘Until the barrel-organ stopped playing Constantia stayed before the Buddha, wondering, but not as usual, not vaguely. This time her wonder was like longing’ (248). However hinting at the two sisters’ ‘liberation’ in this chapter, Mansfield takes great care to show them as merely ‘hints’. This is obliquely announced in statements such as ‘“The sun’s out,” said Josephine’ (247), and equally in the smile of the Buddha which cannot be grasped by Constantia: ‘Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she had always felt there was…something’ (ibid.). The vagueness of Constantia is thus largely a constant feature, and the fact of the suggested disappearance of Josephine’s sun, both anticipate the story’s final scene where in Mansfield’s words: ‘All was meant […] to lead up to that last paragraph. Two flowerless turned timidly to the sun […] and after that […] they died as truly as Father was dead’ (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 249). In the story’s final scene Mansfield’s tentative hints at the two daughters’ epiphanies in the course of the chapter effectively crumbles and ‘[t]he flickering possibility of change evaporates’ (Smith, 222). Through the portrayal of the final confusion of the two daughters, which closes with the image of Josephine’s staring ‘at a big cloud where the sun had been’ (249), Magalaner precisely suggests that Mansfield ‘discloses the inevitability of lives that have drifted too long for salvage’ (Magalaner, 92).

‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ is a modern domestic tragedy, and its tragic quality is in part structurally achieved by its lack of balance. Unlike the dark-veined ‘Prelude’ where Mansfield balances her theme by way of a number of ‘safe’ characters, ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ concerns but the two protagonists and their shared predicament. The only hint of ‘balance’ found in the story is in Constantia’s memory of emerging from a life lived in ‘a kind of tunnel’ (248), in the presence of the natural elements of the moon and the sea. However, unlike the retrospective scenes of the story, the character’s memory in the story’s
In her analysis of ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’, Angela Smith points to the story’s ‘textual illogicalities’, something which reflect the ‘wavering illogicality of the sisters’ minds’ (Smith, 216). This is the main argument in Smith’s analysis, something which can be detected in the title of her chapter on the story (’Vertigo in “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” and Jacob’s Room’). What can be seen, however, is that three out of the four examples are what I would call misreadings. The first example Smith refers to, is the fact of the illogicality of the first sentence of Part Two: ‘Another thing which complicated matters was they had Nurse Andrews staying on with them that week’ (232). Truly, the sentence cannot be logically referred back to Chapter One and thus can be seen to render the initial chapter as a prologue to the story. The next two examples Smith gives, seem like clear misreadings, in her argument about similar illogicalities in the opening sentences of Chapter Three and Chapter Five. These sentences clearly refer to the preceding chapters and hence, rather than producing a textual ‘illogicality’, neatly connect the chapters. Lastly, Smith’s fourth example, rather than being a misreading, seems to have been stretched in order to make it fit her interpretation. In the last paragraph of Chapter Six, it is ‘that last time’ which appears problematic to Smith: “‘Come, Jug,” said Constantia, still with that awful callous smile, and Josephine followed just as she had that last time, when Constantia had pushed Benny into the Round Pond’ (239). Smith argues that the reference to time proves problematic ‘as there is no overt link between locking a wardrobe and pushing a brother into a pond, but we infer that the sisters keep a private and unspoken record of their acts of revenge on the male despots in their family’ (Smith, 220). In my view, the quotation’s reference to time illustrates yet another example on the story’s vagueness as concerns narrative ‘time’. However, I believe, the sentence is not only logical, but furthermore captures the very essence of the modernist short
story, being economical in words, and at the same time, due to its very construction, it gives a lot of information. From the sentence, the reader can infer that Constantia is the one of the two who is the most capable of such ‘brave’, concrete actions. At these times, the sisters’ roles have been reversed, where it is Constantia who is the character of action, whereas Josephine becomes the one of inaction, mutely following the younger sister. However, this has only happened about two times in their lives: in Chapter Six when Constantia locks the late colonel’s wardrobe door, and once during childhood when she had pushed her brother into a pond. The statement thus furthermore adds to one of the motifs of the story, namely the isolated, grey and domestic lives of the two sisters.

Having identified her textual ‘illogicalities’ however, Smith draws attention to the daughters’ social position and argues for a ‘genteel euphemism’ and the ‘conservatism’ of the two characters. In the introduction to the Oxford edition of Katherine Mansfield’s *Selected Stories*, she puts forth this interpretation. Here, Smith interprets the fact of the daughters’ imagined horror in Chapter Four spurred by Mr Farolles’ offer to have a Communion in the drawing-room, as a manifestation of their conservatism, rather than as the oblique expression of the daughters’ lack of genuine grief. This argument can be seen to be elaborated on through an argument of ‘meta-fiction’, where Smith claims that:

‘Like “Pictures” and *Jacob’s Room*, the story concerns middle-aged women who are required to act parts described for them by a male-dominated society. […] Their bewilderment at being placed centre stage because of their father’s death, instead of lurking in the wings, comments obliquely on the way in which drama and fiction usually privilege the young and the beautiful; the sisters’ do not know what to say or how to dress for their parts. (Smith, 216)

By claiming this, I believe, Smith pulls away from her suggestion of the form which mirrors the daughters’ states of mind, and can instead be seen to impose Virginia Woolf’s political and feminist themes onto Mansfield’s fiction, which I have argued must rather be seen within

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an artistic and Expressionist framework. Furthermore, by explaining the daughters’ ‘bewilderment’ through such an argument, Smith can be seen to lose out on the essence of the story, in which I have argued it is the daughters’ ingrained oppression which is expressed throughout the story. Smith’s argument is furthermore undermined through the rather odd statement that ‘fiction usually privilege the young and the beautiful’. The fact that the sisters do not know ‘how to dress for their parts’ must be seen to point to the suggestion in Chapter One, in the sisters’ discussion of whether they should wear ‘black’ indoors, discussed above. This I have argued, obliquely suggests, as C. A. Hankin also has noted, the lack of genuine grief. Another suggestion of the same is found in Chapter Four, in the daughters’ horror at the vicar’s offering of a private Communion. The suggestion of the lack of grief, I believe, is obliquely proposed in the juxtaposed scene in Chapter Three, and the evocation of the colonel at his death-bed.

Finally, drawing on her thematic argument of ‘liminality’, Smith can be seen to argue about the sisters’ identities in terms of their social status. This according to Smith is ‘entirely dependent on [the colonel’s] status in society’ (ibid., 216-217). The other point which Smith makes is the daughters’ ‘genteel euphemism’ (ibid., 216), something which she claims would be better illustrated in the story’s ‘original’ title, ‘The Non-Compounders’ (ibid.), which was a term supposedly used at Queen’s Collage, where Mansfield took a three year long education. This title, Smith states is ‘more accessible to a general public’ as it would suggest ‘a liminal state when it is applied to the story: people who do and at the same time do not belong’ (ibid.). On the other hand, Smith contends, ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’ casts the characters as ‘perpetual dependants, and as permanent girls rather than women’ (ibid., 217). This way, Smith can be seen to suggest a possible flaw in the integrity of the story’s title and its content. As argued above, the fact of the characters’ ‘dependency’ is suggested in the story’s title. This is also suggested in Chapter One, in the portrayal of the daughters’
girlishness, which is an important point in the chapter and which resonates throughout the narrative.

C. A. Hankin acknowledges Mansfield’s ‘thematic and technical handling of time’ in the story (Hankin, 200), but contrary to Magalaner’s argument she suggests that this ‘is not at the emotional heart of the story’ (ibid.). On the contrary, Hankin can be seen to suggest that ‘time’ is a ‘formal device woven into the very fabric of the narrative’ (Hankin, 204), something which ‘serves to deflect attention from the anxiety-laden emotional themes’ (ibid.). As such she can be seen to largely disregard the structure’s relevance to the story’s theme.

In her analysis, Hankin wishes to point to the ‘ambivalent feelings of the two middle-aged daughters about the death of their father’ (ibid.), and through this, she settles for a psychoanalytic approach to the story. Hankin proposes a view which mainly reads the two characters’ oppression as ‘guilt’ about a secret wish of having the colonel dead. This is also read into the image of Constantia’s ‘crucifixion’ in the story’s final chapter, stating that: ‘The image of crucifixion, with its implication of punishment for a crime, is peculiarly appropriate in a story where guilt over wishing father dead is so central to the theme’ (203). In this manner, Hankin wishes to put the stress on the daughters ‘secret selves’ in the story, something which I believe is absent from this text. The inflicted tyranny of the colonel on the two daughters’ minds, I have argued, is mirrored in the ‘drifting’, ‘vague’ and ‘subtle’ quality of the story. Having argued about the story’s clear-cut conveyance of characters, I have instead wished to see the image of Constantia in the story’s last chapter as a final suggestion of the character’s identity. In Magalaner’s words: ‘Constantia’s need for identification with moon and tide, with the ebb and flow of regular forces in the cosmos, with the patterned harmony of the universe, is indicated here’ (Magalaner, 96).

In conclusion, it can be said that both through the quality of suggestion and through the story’s structural device of ‘time’, Mansfield effectively renders the concept about the two
daughters’ particular oppression under which they suffer. The story is constituted of a number of retrospective scenes which develop through the physical progression of the narrative. However, Mansfield’s manipulation with the story’s chronology mirrors, as Magalaner suggests, the vague and directionless world of the two sisters. The concept of the story is highly visualized, created through Mansfield’s technique of flouting the distinction among levels of reality. Projecting all of the story’s scenes in the surface narrative, Mansfield conveys a highly visual piece of work.
CHAPTER 2

‘Prelude’

‘Prelude’ (1918) announced a breakthrough in Mansfield’s literary career, one in which the change in subject matter seems to have coincided with and perhaps inspired a development of her literary technique. From the much weaker conceptions which had constituted her first collection of short stories, *In a German Pension* (1911), ‘Prelude’ conveys a much more integrated idea, something which paves the way for Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism and places her firmly within the Modernist school.

As is well known, ‘Prelude’ is the result of Mansfield’s revision, assisted by Virginia Woolf, of the much longer story *The Aloe*. The latter she began to write while staying in the south of France (Bandol) shortly after the death of her brother in 1915. The story spans over approximately three days and evokes the Burnell family and household in their new house in the inland of New Zealand. The story as such turns on the various characters’ experience of moving house from the suburbs and into the countryside.

‘Prelude’ is a focalized third-person narrative, and on the threshold of the technique of free indirect discourse which subsequently would become something of a trademark for Mansfield. The technique of multiple views can be seen as Mansfield’s innovatory (Cubist) response to the relativist ideas of the period of Modernism, and due to the story’s great cast of characters, the technique produces the rich impression of the story. As in the other stories treated in this thesis, the concept of the story is created through a fragmented form, based, through the narrative perspective, on suggestion and selection. ‘Prelude’ is mainly conveyed
in a linear form, depicting characters and incidents from hour to hour. However, in the middle of the story – Chapter Six – an illusion of a cinematographic effect is produced, when through a fluent technical device, Mansfield creates the illusion of simultaneity of events where Kezia’s exploration and experience of the garden is made to occur in parallel with the preceding incidents of the characters of Linda and Beryl in Chapter Five and Six. As such, the narrative overlaps, producing a rich narrative texture.

As in other critical work on Mansfield, there is also in the treatment of ‘Prelude’ a critical consensus of reading the meaning of the story within a symbolist framework, arguing for a symbolist patterning and structure. This view is shared by some prominent Mansfield scholars, such as C. A. Hankin, Kate Fullbrook, Angela Smith, Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, as well as the somewhat older, Marvin Magalaner. This will be brought out in the following analysis. Such a view implies, broadly speaking, a move away from character towards an emphasis on imagery and symbols in the construction of meaning. As already mentioned in the introduction, Angela Smith, in her introduction to Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories (2002), confirms this view, when claiming that ‘For both writers [Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf] it is the design of the novel or story which is crucial rather than plot or character’ (Smith, Selected Stories, p. xxv). The most obvious effect of reading the meaning of the story through symbols, is the fact of a de-emphasis on character, something which I believe has grave effects for our understanding of the story of ‘Prelude’. In the various symbolist interpretations, the characters are left as nothing more than marionettes for certain ideas about the story, and in this manner, ‘Prelude’, in my opinion, is left both vague, superficial and static. What is more, this argument can be seen to produce both a lack of narrative movement and a radical reduction of the story’s visual qualities, two aspects which I believe are crucial to the story. A more fruitful approach is to read meaning through
character and theme, something which gives the story, in my opinion, its rightful substance, integrity and, not least, its narrative movement.

As briefly noted, ‘Prelude’ evokes the community of the Burnell family and household, and is situated in the New Zealand inland where Mansfield lived during much of her childhood. It is a story about the Burnell family’s interrelations, and, more precisely, in line with a recurrent theme of another modernist, Joseph Conrad, the unsafeness of these relations, conventionally thought of as safe and protective. The theme of the story is that of female oppression, which can be said to inform the various relationships encountered in the narrative.

The rich quality of ‘Prelude’ is also manifest in the story’s theme, which has a tripartite constitution, represented through the characters of Linda, Beryl and Kezia. The three characters can be seen to represent three different generations, each embodying three different degrees of oppression. The story’s theme forms the backbone of the story, running through the entire composition, from the very first scene of the story to the very last, inaugurated by Linda in the first scene and ending with Kezia.

One important motif in ‘Prelude’ is the encoding of the patriarchal system, which can be claimed to be the situation on which the narrative rests. This is suggested already in the first scene of the story, where Kezia and Lottie are seen to be left by their mother in favour of some ‘urgent necessities’ which include, among other things, the patriarch’s – represented in the character of Stanley – very slippers. The children’s grim experience of their mother’s priorities is first captured in the sentence: ‘Hand in hand, they stared with round solemn eyes first at the absolute necessities and then at their mother’ (79). A few paragraphs further ahead, the two children are physically left behind:

At the last moment Kezia let go Lottie’s hand and darted towards the buggy. “I want to kiss my granma good-bye again.” But she was too late […] The buggy twinkled away in the
sunlight and fine golden dust up the hill and over. Kezia bit her
lip, but Lottie, carefully finding her handkerchief first, set up a
wail.21

Through a distinct syntax, the narrator effectively evokes the disappearing movement of the
buggy, and with it renders a strong feeling of abandonment seen from the point of view of the
children, an incident which reveals the patriarchal dimensions of the situation as well as its
ramifications of female oppression.

Linda’s alienation from her children constitutes one aspect of the story’s theme. This
aspect of the character is conveyed already in the first scene, where she secretly compares her
two children with the rest of the furniture left for the final journey to the new house:

How absurd [the furniture] looked! Either they ought to be the
other way up, or Lottie and Kezia ought to stand on their heads,
too. And she longed to say: “Stand on your heads, children, and
wait for the storman.” It seemed to her that would be so
exquisitely funny that she could not attend to Mrs Samuel
Josephs. (79)

This aspect of the Linda character is pursued in Chapter Three, where at the arrival of her two
youngest children, they are portrayed in an equally unflattering manner: “Are those the
children?” But Linda did not really care; she did not even open the eyes to see’ (86).

The story moves towards the revelation of Linda and Beryl’s secret selves, conveyed
in the penultimate and last chapter of the story. Up until these points, each of their stories has
been distinctly delineated, something which I will discuss in some detail later.

1.1 The Function of the Aloe

In line with the critical agreement regarding ‘Prelude’ as a symbolist story, great attention and
meaning have been allotted to the aloe plant. Virtually all critics have argued that the aloe is

further references will be to this edition.
the principal or central symbol in the story. In my view, only the interpretation of Marvin Magalaner can sustain and justify such a claim, when, in *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, he argues for its symbolic function in relation to the, somewhat enigmatic, title of the story. After some preliminary reflections on its reference in connection with the Burnell characters, Magalaner turns to his main argument in claiming that the aloe represents and reflects the various ‘swelling’ motifs of the story, concluding his analysis with the statement that ‘Although not in the story, the whole narrative is but a prelude to the swelling act of his [Mansfield’s brother] coming’ (Magalaner, 31). In this manner, he is seen to argue in line with Mansfield’s own reflections prior to writing the story, namely her desire to write an elegy to her beloved brother who died in a training session in preparation for the war. In her journal on 22 January 1916, Mansfield reflects upon her aims:

> Then I want to write poetry. The almond tree, the birds, the little wood where you are, the flowers you do not see, the open window out of which I lean and dream that you are against my shoulder, and the times that your photograph ‘look sad’. But especially I want to write a kind of long elegy to you...perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose. Almost certainly in a kind of *special prose*. (Mansfield, *Journal*, 94)

By arguing that the story is a ‘swelling’ prelude of birth, I believe that Magalaner highlights only one minor aspect of it, disowning altogether the narrative situation of female oppression which in my opinion constitutes the story. As such, in order to connect the story’s title to its theme, I will suggest that ‘Prelude’ may point to the prelude to female liberation, suggested in the generational representation of the story.

In the remaining analysis, Magalaner argues for some structural dualisms, contingent on the ‘larger motif of illusion and reality in life which permeates “Prelude”’ (Magalaner, 34), a view which is also picked up on and developed in Hankin, pointing to the ‘disturbing pattern of contraries’ of order and disorder, of the safe versus the unsafe (Hankin, 117). In such reading of parallelisms, the narrative movement is eliminated and the readings resort to a
narrative coherence read through the linking device of ‘repeated appearance of objects or activities which have symbolic meaning’ (ibid.). In this way, the narrative is rendered both static and vague.

Hanson and Gurr can also be seen to draw on and develop Magalaner’s argument of the aloe as the dominant symbol in the text. However, instead of linking its symbolism to the story’s title, they simply suggest that the aloe represents ‘a view of life’, a suggestion which, through its indefinite reference, subverts their symbolist claim:

Through the controlling symbol of the aloe Katherine Mansfield […] expresses in ‘Prelude’ a view of life which underlies all her major stories. The aloe is, like life itself, often unlovely and cruel, offering for long periods nothing but years of darkness, yet it also holds within itself the possibility of that rare flowering which justifies existence […] The other images of the story blend into and support this central symbol. (Hanson and Gurr, 52)

Through the wide definition of the symbol, their symbolist argument is undermined. What is more, by endowing the flowering of the aloe with positive implications, they are seen, in my opinion, to completely disregard the storyline of ‘Prelude’. If one links the budding aloe with the suggestion of Linda’s pregnancy, which in my opinion is the most plausible connection, this will for the Linda character represent all other things than that which ‘justifies existence’. In fact, I will argue that Linda’s pregnancy in ‘Prelude’ represents the most fundamental expression of its theme, something to which I will return. Furthermore, instead of supporting Magalaner and Hankin’s argument of a structural dualism, Hanson and Gurr wish to regard the whole story from the point of view of the aloe and its suggested ‘symbolism’, something which implies a highly static notion of the story.

In line with Hanson and Gurr, Hankin seems to propose an almost detached ‘symbolism’ of the aloe when suggesting its function in the story as that of a rather general ‘catalytic symbol’: ‘With dramatic inevitability “Prelude” progresses towards an exposure of
what is psychologically hidden, towards the crystallisation, by means of a catalytic symbol, of
the characters’ only partly understood anxieties’ (Hankin, 125). By suggesting this Hankin
can be seen to employ the aloe as a ‘general’ symbol as that which eventually will disclose a
theme of the ‘psychologically hidden’ for all the characters. According to its theme, as
mentioned, only the secrete selves of Linda and Beryl are disclosed in the story.

Emphasising character as the main source of meaning in ‘Prelude’, rather than seeing
the plant as representing a thematic symbol as such, or functioning as a detached
superimposed element, I wish to argue its significance in connection with the Linda character.
The aloe, I believe, has three different – and important – functions in the story. Seen by day, it
serves as the first step towards Linda’s self-revelation. When the aloe plant is introduced in
Chapter Six, it functions as a source of identification for the character:

Linda looked up at the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves
and fleshy stem. High above them, as though becalmed in the
air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it might
have had claws instead of roots. The curving leaves seemed to
be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind
could ever shake it. (98)

Linda’s identification with the plant is made known through her very vision of it, described as
it is, with awe. This notion is reinforced by the contrast conveyed through Kezia’s perception
of it. In the preceding paragraph, she has focused on its old and withered state. Furthermore,
‘[t]he curving leaves’ which ‘seemed to be hiding something’ can be viewed as announcing
the revelation of Lindas’s secret self towards the end of the story. Another aspect of
identification, which will be revealed in Chapter Eleven, lies in the way in which the aloe,
through Linda’s point of view, is perceived to keep on living, despite its obvious need to keep
apart and to it self (‘[B]ecalmed in the air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it
might have had claws instead of roots’). The perception finds its resonance during Linda’s
revelation of a secret self, where she asks herself: ‘And why the mania of hers to keep alive at
all?’ […] ‘What am I guarding myself for so preciously?’ (116). Although cruel and withered (like the aloe plant), Linda is also suggested as clinging to life by the help of an innate life force.

The next purpose of the aloe is found in Chapter Eleven, where it functions as the (Romantic) stimulus which triggers the narrative moment of Linda’s revelation of a secret self. In the dark of the night and in the moonlit garden, other perspectives of the aloe come into sight. Now, instead of seeing in the plant her own unarticulated self, the character is seen to assimilate a desirable quality, because at the sight of the ‘long sharp thorns that edged the aloe leaves’, Linda’s ‘heart grew hard’(115). From thence the narrative discloses Linda’s secret self and unravels the subconscious aspect of the character. The motif and image of ‘rushing animals’ previously referred to in the narrative, here assume the human shape of Stanley, being described in the metaphor of an eager ‘Newfoundland dog’ (117). Furthermore, the violent strength associated with the image of ‘rushing animals’ is in this scene epitomized in Stanley’s sexual drive. The scene can be viewed as the point in the story where the patriarchal structures take on their most fundamental expression, where the dominating lust of the male is suggested at the cost of the female’s mental and physical health:

There were times when he was frightening – really frightening. When she just had not screamed at the top of her voice: ‘You are killing me.’ And at those times she had longed to say the most coarse, hateful things… ‘You know I’m very delicate. You know as well as I do that my heart is affected, and the doctor has told you I might die any moment. I have had three great lumps of children already…’. (115)

This passage highlights both the character’s alienation towards her children, as well as suggesting her state of oppression in ‘Prelude’, where the fact of her unwanted pregnancies not only has caused a mental, but a physical oppression as well. In this quotation, the narrator thus exploits the theme to its limit, making Linda’s plight the complete manifestation of the story’s evocation of female oppression.
The last function of the aloe is again manifested at night when its image takes on the shape of Linda’s imagined rescue. The scene can be viewed as a somewhat ironic prelude to the crystallization of Linda’s subconscious, when, towards the end of her insight, there seems to be a deadlock, as manifested in the character’s final resignation, suggesting a situational status quo. Linda’s predicament can thus be seen to be both marked and sustained by the encoding of the patriarchal system, and only in her fantasy of leaving the family behind can she assume some kind of identity: “Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: “Faster! Faster!” to those who were rowing” (114). This quotation is the one point in the story where the character is seen to take control of her own life, where the usual state of resignation is transformed into an active state of mind. However, the irony of the passage, as noted above, is perceived towards the end of the character’s epiphany, when after having sorted out her ambivalent feelings towards her husband, she lapses into her usual state of mind, a state which furthermore ends the character’s story in ‘Prelude’: ‘She hugged her folded arms and began to laugh silently. How absurd life was – it was laughable, simply laughable. […] I shall go on having children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them to choose from’ (116). The suggestion is that however many aloes she will have to choose from in the future – in the sense of acquiring self-knowledge – Linda will not escape her prescribed status within patriarchy. As such, Linda’s final regression must be read in terms of the socio-political system informing the story, the quotation suggesting, through Linda’s point of view, a near totalitarian system where, in Fullbrook’s terms, the woman is ‘culturally defined as Other, in the light of male subjectivity’ (Fullbrook, 6). The character’s final act thus completes a circle, going from a state of unarticulated oppression towards revelation, and then again lapsing into resignation, suggesting the character’s situational impasse, and with it, her unfulfilled womanhood.
1.2 The Question of Identity

Another aspect of the theme of female oppression is the question of identity. If Beryl’s identity is shattered, Linda’s is barely recognizable. In fact, Linda’s story is nothing but the story of oppression. The aspects which are disclosed in Linda’s revelation of a secret self in Chapter Eleven have close affinities with the suggestion of the character’s subconscious in Chapter Five. In the fragment of Linda’s nightmare, there is a clear symbolism of losing control over pregnancies and births, mixed with a strong feeling of betrayal:

[the bird] was quite tame. But a funny thing happened. As she stroked it began to swell, it ruffled and pouched, it grew bigger and bigger and its round eyes seemed to smile knowingly at her. Now her arms were hardly wide enough to hold it and she dropped it into her apron. It had become a baby with a big naked head and a gaping bird-mouth, opening and shutting. Her father broke into a loud clattering laugh. (90)

Linda’s nightmare conveys the essence of the character’s predicament, in that its symbolism conveys powerful emotions of being out of control and of being at the mercy of treacherous agents.

In the same chapter, a highly developed sensibility is evoked, something which may be connected with the revelation of her weakened health, revealed in Chapter Eleven, quoted above. This is manifested through Linda’s notion of the poppy on the wall-paper which literally ‘comes alive’ under her tracing finger, in the ‘coming alive’ of shapes and patterns of inanimate objects, where for instance the fringes of quilts and cushions ‘change into a funny procession of dancers with priest attending’ (92), and also in the ‘washstand jug’ that ‘had a way of sitting in the basin like a fat bird in a round nest (92-93).

Towards the end of the scene is perhaps the point in the story where Linda has her most critical moments regarding her own identity. In the following quotation, a climax is reached where contraries and tensions are suggested to completely dominate the character:
How lightly she breathed; she scarcely had to breathe at all. Yes, everything had come alive down to the minutest, tiniest particle, and she did not feel her bed, she floated, held up in the air. Only she seemed to be listening with her wide open watchful eyes, waiting for someone to come who just did not come, watching for something to happen that just did not happen. (93)

The quotation marks a complete void of identity where, in a mystical fashion, the character is evoked in an unsubstantial and weightless state in the middle of this tension.

Prior to Linda’s weightless state of tension, an overwhelming fear is evoked, represented in the character’s imagination of a great ‘THEY’. The quality of the emotion is suggested in terms of a vulgar and corrupted power: ‘They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important content, and when they were full she felt they smiled. But it was not for her, only, their sly secret smile; they were members of a secret society and they smiled among themselves’ (ibid.). Through establishing the sense of a dominating power, the quotation gives associations to the oppressive system of patriarchy, where ‘they’ are suggested to act together, securing their mutual interest vis-à-vis the objectified and powerless woman.

In the story’s theme, degrees of oppression are distinctly conveyed, something which is conveyed through the interlocked method of suggestion and compositional form. It can be argued that Linda constitutes the first representation of female oppression, Beryl, the second, and Kezia the third. Formally, this is conveyed by cutting short Kezia and Beryl’s evocations of oppression by the intervention of other members of the family, whereas Linda’s is not. The climactic scene suggesting Linda’s weightlessness is suggestive not only of the nature of her oppression, but also by the fact that the scene terminates the chapter, thus conveys its degree as well, suggesting an integrated and sustained kind, leaving the character to dwell indeterminately in her isolated oppression. Furthermore, the aspect of the character’s isolation is reinforced in her identification with the aloe plant, which, like Linda, is depicted as residing in isolation, standing on an ‘island of green’.
1.3 The Integrity of Theme: Linda and Kezia

The integrity of the story’s theme is conveyed through the linking and creation of distinctions by means of a few mutual narrative devices. The link between mother and daughter is created through mutual manifestations of oppression, the first of which is a feeling of an overwhelming fear, represented in their respective imaginations of ‘THEY’ and ‘IT’. The second bond is conveyed through their mutual nightmares, where a symbolism of ‘swelling’ is shared, and, lastly, the motif of ‘rushing’ animals is connected with both characters in the course of the story. However much linked, the narrator takes great care to distinguish between Linda and Kezia’s natures and degrees of emotional tensions, something which is best illustrated in their mutual feelings of fear.

1.3.1 Kezia’s Story

Kezia’s story of oppression is of a far more short-lived and scattered nature than both Linda and Beryl’s, but is nonetheless a developed aspect of the character. The first instance of Kezia’s oppression is manifested in her fear of the dark, evoked in the initial scene of Chapter Two, when she finds herself inside their empty and abandoned house. Something of the nature and quality of her fear is suggested in the fourth paragraph, where the narrative suddenly leaps into the depiction of Kezia’s fear:

Kezia liked to stand before the window. She liked the feeling of the cold shining glass against her hot palms, and she liked to watch the funny white tops that came on her fingers when she pressed them hard against the pane. As she stood there, the day flickered out and night came. With the dark crept the wind snuffling and howling. The windows of the empty house shook, a creaking came from the walls and floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. (82)
The sudden shift in the narrative situation is brought about in one sentence (‘As she stood there, the day flickered out and night came’). In the next sentence it is the dark which has taken over the narrative situation, metaphorically evoked through the image of the beast. What is more, through the evocation of the empty house, a suggestion of isolation is also conveyed, establishing another link to the character of Linda.

In the subsequent narrative, Kezia’s fear is evoked, imagined through the child’s point of view as ‘IT’. Like Linda’s ‘THEY’, Kezia’s ‘IT’ represents an overpowering angst, projected as roaming in every part of the dark house. However, ‘THEY’ are evoked as a far more integrated and substantial fear than ‘IT’, suggested both in the applications of the terms as well as in their distinctly conveyed suggestions of their formal properties. Kezia’s fear, on the other hand, ends as abruptly as it had started when Lottie suddenly is at the door, telling Kezia that they are leaving: ‘But IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back door. But Lottie was at the back door, too. “Kezia!” she called cheerfully. “The storeman’s here” (ibid.). Although short-lived, Kezia’s oppression is nonetheless evoked as intense and overwhelming.

Such feelings of fear are also suggested in the story’s last scene, where Kezia’s reaction to the possibility of having destroyed her Aunt Beryl’s cold cream lid, is brought out in the following manner: ‘[The lid] did not break. But for Kezia it had broken the moment it flew through the air, and she picked it up, hot all over, and put it back on the dressing table. Then she tip-toed away, far too quickly and airily ….’ (120).

This story has spurred several symbolist interpretations of the last scene. In order to argue for a view of the story’s ‘triumph’ over contemporary cultural codes, Fullbrook invests the scene with a wealth of symbolism which, in my view, is overdetermined, bringing out meanings in both the cold cream lid and in Kezia’s dirty Calico cat, where the lid presumably
The girl at the end of the story is a sign of the author, challenging the permanency of the world she has described. The lid does not break, but Kezia has seen the cat in the mirror that her mother cannot even bear to look into; there is a possibility that the girl will not lose her vision, that someday the lid will break. (Fullbrook, 84)

By arguing in this manner, Fullbrook, I believe, stretches Mansfield’s symbolist practice towards the unrecognizable. As I have argued in the introduction, Mansfield’s uses of symbolism exploit some widely shared associations, something which can be seen for instance in her symbolic use of the sun in ‘At the Bay’ and ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’. In the symbolism of the aloe, Mansfield can be seen to take great care to identify and connect the suggestions of the plant with the Linda character.

Hankin offers a more plausible interpretation of the story’s final scene, arguing for yet another symbolist view. Instead of focusing on some ‘signifying’ objects, she argues, through pin-pointing Beryl’s void of identity, for a merging of the two characters of Beryl and Kezia, as represented in Kezia in the final scene: ‘Her (Kezia’s) tip-toing from the room […] is symbolic of the inner confusion which will continue to torture Beryl and which bodes ill for Kezia as well’ (Hankin, 134). However, by suggesting a merging of the two, Hankin not only subverts the integrity of Mansfield’s characters, but also contradicts the established patterns of the story’s plural quality, manifested both in its theme and in its total impression.

In my view, Hankin and Fullbrook’s suggestions are symptomatic of a more or less complete disregard of the story’s form. This is conspicuously clear in Fullbrook’s analysis. In the conclusion of her analysis, she actually suggests an Expressionist view, claiming that ‘Prelude’ represents a possible ‘triumph’ over contemporary established cultural codes ‘conveyed in the narration which sees and knows and represents what the characters
themselves cannot confront’ (Fullbrook, 84). She resorts to some rather awkward suggestions in order to justify such a view.

‘Prelude’ is a ‘slice of life’ story, where, as argued above, the last scene must be seen as merely a final evocation of Kezia’s fear. By ending the story thus (Kezia’s oppression is previously only evoked in Chapter Two and Nine), Mansfield can be seen to accomplish two goals, namely the suggestion of Kezia’s perpetual state of oppression and with it, an implication of the continuity of the story’s theme, something which confirms the story’s composition as a ‘slice of life’. In this manner, and in line with Fullbook, ‘Prelude’ can be seen to convey a ‘possible triumph over established cultural codes’, suggested in its very form. This is suggested in the organization of material in the penultimate and final chapter of the story. As can be seen, there is a gradual ‘diminishing’ of the story’s theme where Linda’s secret self is revealed in Chapter Eleven, Beryl’s in Chapter Twelve, ending with Kezia in the closing scene.

In this manner, too, Mansfield can be seen to stick to her own visual, meteorological metaphors of ‘Prelude’. In a letter to Dorothy Brett, she claims that ‘And just as on those mornings white milky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it. I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again’ (in Vincent O’Sullivan, 15). Through the final evocation of Kezia, Mansfield can be seen to ‘cover’ the psychological depths of Linda and Beryl, where her reference to ‘beauty’ in the literary world must be understood as the character’s true nature, as seen in the disclosing of Linda and Beryl’s secret selves.
1.3.2 Beryl’s Story

The last of the threesome constituting the story’s theme is the character of Beryl, who, as argued above, marks a ‘middle’ position, situated somewhere between the characters of Linda and Kezia. Beryl’s plight occupies a more integral part of the theme than Kezia, and like Linda her story moves inexorably towards the revelation of a secret self in the final chapter. However, just as with Kezia, Beryl’s oppression is suggested as being of a more short-lived nature, and the character is seen to occupy a more active role within the community of the Burnell household than is the case with Linda.

One similar trait between the characters of Linda and Beryl is found in their mutual visions of the ‘sly’ man, something which reinforces the notion of the story’s encoding of patriarchal structures vis-à-vis the repressed woman. Linda’s vision of ‘THEY’ in Chapter Five finds its resonance in Beryl during the night scene in Chapter Four, where a sly and mocking male figure is summoned up in Beryl’s imagination as well. However, unlike Linda’s overpowering notion of deception, Beryl’s vision of the oppressor takes the shape of a ‘young man’, something which may suggest ‘distance’ and is thus a reinforcing device in conveying the two characters’ degrees of oppression:

The window was wide open; it was warm, and somewhere out there in the garden a young man, dark and slender, with mocking eyes, tip-toed among the bushes, and gathered the flowers into a big bouquet, and slipped under her window and held it up to her. She saw herself bending forward. He thrust his head among the bright waxy flowers, sly and laughing. (88)

Compared to Linda’s ‘THEY’, Beryl’s detached vision of the male figure suggests a less integrated state of oppression. This suggestion is pursued in the following paragraph, when juxtaposed to her vision, Beryl is seen (however subconsciously) to connect her mocking and sly male figure with the ‘frightfully unreasonable’ Stanley, a consciousness which must be
seen in connection with the previous scene in Chapter Three, where a tension had been aroused from an understated gender dispute between the two.  

Another such mutual device which Mansfield employs in the delineating of her characters is the use of the mirror. The mirror is in fact employed in connection with all of the three characters who are so central to the story’s theme, and through its different functions in connection with these, the narrator suggests and strengthens the tripartite representation of the theme. Whilst the mirror is employed in an innocent and practical manner in connection with Kezia in the last scene of the story, it is used to express and to contrast the nature of emotional conflicts in Beryl and Linda.

The mirror plays an important role in suggesting Beryl’s vanity. This quality, I believe, must be understood as a facet of Beryl’s predicament of the double self (which I will discuss in detail later) and not as ‘fundamentally narcissistic’, as Hankin and others have suggested (Hankin, 132), a term which disowns the nature and quality of Beryl’s plight in ‘Prelude’. Before I look at this aspect, I wish to consider how the mirror is used to convey another contrast between the two characters of Linda and Beryl.

For Beryl, the mirror serves as the character’s escape from her troubled emotions, whereas for Linda, it poses a threat of revealing some of her raw fears: ‘Then she could not hurry, she could not hum a tune; if she tried to say ever so carelessly – “Bother that old timble” – THEY were not deceived. THEY knew how frightened she was; THEY saw how she turned her head away as she passed the mirror’ (93). The mirror is used suggested, through Linda’s point of view, as posing a threat of revealing and as reflecting her deepest fears, something which implies the integrated nature of her oppression. For Beryl’s

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22 Yet another device which can be seen to be employed for the purpose of contrasting and grading the threesome, is conveyed in the motif of ‘surprise’, where Linda’s imagined surprise to her husband would be a ‘packet’ of hateful thoughts, whereas Beryl’s surprise to Nan Pym would be to reveal her true self, both of which constitute the characters’ secret selves. Kezia’s surprise for her grandmother, on the other hand, will be the childish surprise of a flower-decoration inside of a match-box.
predicament of the ‘double self’ on the other hand, the mirror serves as a means of escape, and thus highlights her suggestion on of the double self.

Beryl’s story in ‘Prelude’ is the story of the ‘double self’. The nature of Beryl’s predicament is of a more evasive kind than that of Linda and Kezia, and as such cannot be easily detected. However, through the revelation of a secret self, the narrator sheds light on Beryl’s plight, where the character’s expression in the story can be seen to be summed up in Chapter Twelve in the phrase ‘I know that I’m silly and spiteful and vain’ (119).

Only at one point in the narrative is Beryl’s predicament of the divided self truly manifested. This is evoked in Chapter Six, where a sharp disparity between the character’s public appearance and private self is suggested:

[Beryl] ran away singing: How many thousand birds I see That sing aloud from every tree… ‘…birds I see That sing aloud from every tree. …’ But when she reached the dining-room she stopped singing, her face changed; it became gloomy and sullen. ‘One may as well rot here as everywhere else,’ she muttered savagely, digging the stiff brass safety-pins into the red serge curtains. (96)

The change in mood is remarkable, from a singing figure in the presence of her mother and sister in the previous scene, to that of a savagely gloomy one once she is alone with herself.

Beryl’s vanity is seen to work coterminously with the character’s flight from her troubled emotions, where the mirror is seen to have a counterbalancing function. The character’s reflection in the mirror automatically eliminates her deeper emotions from her consciousness. This mechanism is initially conveyed in Chapter Seven, where after some hints of her troubled emotions, Beryl, in the last scene of the chapter, returns to the mirror. It is suggested that this act helps her recover her balance. By constructing this recovery in the chapter’s last scene, Mansfield again, like the final scene with Linda in Chapter Five, suggests the character’s escape from her emotions as a sustained mechanism of survival, reaching beyond the boundaries of the chapter.
In the story’s last chapter, Beryl’s particular use of the mirror reaches a climax, culminating in an extraordinarily long and tedious mirror scene, where the character is seen to scrutinize her looks, feature for feature, running over five paragraphs. As in Chapter Seven, Beryl is seen to take refuge in the mirror when deeper emotions manifest themselves in the character’s consciousness. In Chapter Twelve, the mirror scene is spurred by the character’s initial awareness of her false self, manifested in the content of the letter she writes to her friend, whereupon she moves over to the mirror: ‘Beryl slammed the letter-case to. She jumped up and half unconsciously, half consciously she drifted over to the looking-glass’ (118). The meticulous scrutinizing of her looks which follows must be seen to suggest the character’s secret mechanisms of counterbalancing her awareness of her false self. However, unlike in Chapter Seven, the mirror cannot rescue her from herself in the story’s last chapter. Instead, it becomes the site which eventually reflects the character’s double self, something which acts as a prelude to the climactic revelation of a secret self. In a visual manner, Beryl’s double self is epitomized in her reflection in the mirror, where both her true self and her false self are foregrounded at the instance of crossing each other:

But even as she looked the smile faded from her lips and eyes. Oh, God, there she was, back again, playing the same old game. False – false as ever. False as when she’d written to Nan Pym. False even when she was alone with herself, now. What had that creature in the glass to do with her, and why was she staring? (119)

The passage conveys the suggestion of the alienation between Beryl’s two selves, something which highlights the aspect of the character’s predicament in ‘Prelude’. In the subsequent narrative, there is a suggestion of the character’s developed superego, where in a critical manner, her true self is evaluating (through memory) instances of her false self.

In line with the character’s middle position in the construction of the story’s theme, Beryl’s predicament is of a more short-lived kind than Linda’s, and her revelation of secret
self is interrupted when Kezia comes in to announce that ‘lunch is ready’, something which serves to pull the character into the life of the community again. Seamlessly, Beryl’s character fades out of the story and the character of Kezia takes over the narrative situation:

‘Very well, Kezia.’ She went over to the dressing table and powdered the nose. Kezia crossed too, and unscrewed a little pot of cream and sniffed it. Under her arm she carried a very dirty calico cat. When Aunt Beryl ran out of the room she sat the cat up on the dressing table and stuck the top of the cream jar over its ear. (120)

The narrative shift of focus from Beryl to Kezia is elegantly performed, leaving the character of Kezia, and Kezia’s story, to end the narrative.

1.4 Narratorial Perspectives

Far from simply being a nostalgic re-creation of Mansfield’s childhood experience, as several critics have argued, the narrator can be seen in a critical manner to comment on the story, both directly, and indirectly through imagery and suggestion. In Chapter Three, for instance, there is a poignant commentary on Linda’s lack of motherhood: “Are those the children?” But Linda did not really care; she did not even open her eyes to see’ (86). In Chapter Seven and Chapter Eleven, there are, in my opinion, some less successfully conveyed commentaries directed towards the character of Stanley in his communication with Linda: “Hand me those two parcels.” And he said to Linda, “I’ve brought you back a bottle of oysters and a pineapple,” as though he had brought her back all the harvest of the earth’ (101), and equally in an answer brought about through Linda’s memory of requesting to light a candle after intercourse: ‘And she heard his joyful voice answer: “Of course I will, my darling,” and he leapt out of bed as though he were going to leap at the moon for her’ (115). The employment
of the typical Modernist simile (‘as though’) in the two examples, is, I believe, intended to underline the lack of communication between the two characters. However, through the rather overstated quality of the similes, the images lose their power, and as such, in my opinion, the suggestions would have been more effective if omitted altogether.

At the end of Chapter Four, a narrative perspective can be perceived through the associations drawn from nature, where the particular sounds of the New Zealand birds come across as a harsh narrative comment on the two previous chapters (where the tension within the Burnell family has been suggested), as well as an announcement of the psychological tension which is to follow: ‘In the garden some tiny owls, perched on the branches of a lacebark tree, called: “More pork; more pork”. And far away in the bush there sounded a harsh rapid chatter: “Ha-ha-ha…Ha-ha-ha”’ (89).

In Chapter Three, a new narrative perspective is suggested in the violent imagery describing the new house and the road leading up to it, in another unsentimental narratorial gesture: ‘When she [Kezia] opened them [the eyes] again they were clanking through a drive that cut through the garden like a whip lash’ (84). The house is also described as lying ‘stretched upon the green garden like a sleeping beast’ (85). Although the images are connected with the character of Kezia, they must be regarded as pertaining to the narratorial perspective, rather than as being Kezia’s thoughts. In this paragraph, the narrative perspective can be seen to shift between Kezia’s point of view and that of the narrator, something which is marked by radical shifts of tone. From the violent images, the point of view in the next sentence is conveyed through Kezia’s innocent and expectant state of mind: ‘And now one and now another of the windows leaped into light. Someone was walking through the empty rooms carrying a lamp. From a window downstairs the light of a fire flickered. A strange beautiful excitement seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples’ (85). Almost as if by magic, the narrator conveys the new house through the point of view of the character’s
serene, excited and expectant state of mind. The paragraph highlights an important aspect of ‘Prelude’ (and the rest of the stories treated in this thesis), namely the narrative’s dual levels of meaning, where Kezia’s point of view pertains to the fluctuating impression of character, whereas the narratorial perspective – through suggestion and selection – conveys the story’s idea.

In a mystical fashion, Mansfield can in ‘Prelude’ be seen to comment on the states of mind of her characters. These representations can be seen as manifested in the dualism of Kezia’s garden in Chapter Six. The garden stands out as a symbol, pertaining to the ancient theory of correspondences, the doctrine ‘that there exist inherent and systematic analogies between the human mind and the outer world, and also between the natural and spiritual worlds’ (Abrams, 314), where the flowering garden can be seen to represent life as it is evoked through the reassuring and productive characters of the story, whereas the other side gives associations to states of oppression. Kezia, functioning as the third representation of the story’s theme, can be seen to be situated in the juncture of the story’s dual representations of states of mind, something which can be apprehended, among other things, through her perception of the garden:

[T]he paths had box edges and all of them led into a deeper and deeper tangle of flowers […] pink monthly roses with a dark ring of fallen petals round the bushes, cabbage roses on thick stalks, moss roses, always in bud, pink smooth beauties opening curl on curl, red ones so dark they seemed to turn black as they fell, and a certain exquisite cream kind with a slender red stem and bright scarlet leaves’. (97)

23 What can be added in this respect is that also in her private writings, Mansfield is seen to employ this kind of symbolism in describing states of mind. In a journal entry of December 1920, she writes that: ‘Such a cultivated mind doesn’t really attract me. I admire it, I appreciate all “les soins and les peines” that have gone to produce it – but it leaves me cold […] No, no, the mind I love must still have wild places, a tangled orchard where dark damsons drop in the heavy grass, an overgrown little wood, the chance of a snake or two (real snakes), a pool that nobody’s fathomed the depth of – and paths threaded with those little flowers planted by the wind. It must also have real hiding places, not artificial ones – not gazebos and mazes. And I have never yet met a cultivated mind that has not had its shrubbery. I loathe and detest shrubberies’, pp. 234-35.
The language induces an erotic overtone, conveyed by a heavy rhythm of alliteration, and can thus be seen to represent the rich and productive state of mind in line with the story’s ‘safe’ characters. However, seeing the garden in the light of the theme of female oppression, the description of the flowering garden gives associations to the character of Beryl, when at the end of the revelation of her secret self she reflects in a similar manner that: ‘And for what tiny moments she was really she. Beryl could almost remember every one of them. At those times she had felt: “Life is mysterious and good, and I am rich and mysterious and good, too”’ (119-20).

Juxtaposed to the blooming garden is the ‘frightening side’ which Kezia thought was ‘no garden at all’ (97). This side is described as that of many little paths which ‘all led into a tangle of tall dark trees and strange bushes with flat velvet leaves and feathery cream flowers that buzzed with flies when you shook them […] The little paths here were wet and clayey with tree roots spanned across them like the marks of big fowls’ feet’ (ibid.). The dark, empty and unfruitful associations produced from this description, give resonances to the imagery employed in connection with the Linda character, that of ‘cave’ and ‘deep well’.

Lastly, one more narrative dimension can be seen to be manifest in the scene with the fried duck in Chapter Eleven. At the same time as Mansfield suggests the character of the servant girl (by comparing the two), the fact that the scene dwells on the image of the bird’s ‘resignation’ opens up for the possibility of reading the image as an oblique comment. In the view of the story’s images of rushing animals (and also the suggested strength and vitality of Stanley), the image of the fried duck can be seen to sympathise with Linda’s understated desire of emasculation:

The white duck did not look as if it had ever had a head when Alice placed it in front of Stanley Burnell that night. It lay, in beautifully basted resignation, on a blue dish – its legs tied together with a piece of string and wreath of little balls of stuffing round it. (112)
In the same manner, and from a feminist point of view, the image of the ‘hanged man’ (depicted in connection with Pat’s character) in Chapter Four can be interpreted as another narratorial comment. However, the violent image does not really fit with the overall impression of the character and as such, its associations seem out of place, and it remains a puzzle. In my view, the image can perhaps at best be seen as a remnant of *The Aloe*, which is a less sophisticated story than ‘Prelude’. Hanson and Gurr offer an interpretation which, I believe, does not help to unravel the mystery, but on the contrary, blatantly invest the image with its opposite connotation, namely the ‘executioner’, suggesting that it foreshadows ‘Pat’s executioner’s role’ in Chapter Nine (Hanson and Gurr, 53). Hence, in this manner the critics, in line with Dominic Head, imply that there is a complex and fluctuating symbolism in the story, a view which I have dismissed. Furthermore, Hanson and Gurr’s interpretation of Pat is in conflict with my emphasis on character for meaning. Pat, I wish to argue, function in the story as one of the ‘safe’ characters which serve to balance the story’s theme.

1.5 Pat’s Function within the Story

According to the various symbolist interpretations of ‘Prelude’, the scene in Chapter Nine, where Pat, the Burnells’ handyman, is decapitating the duck, has spurred, in my opinion, some extravagant interpretations. For instance, both Hanson and Gurr and Fullbrook, in each of their analyses, offer a view where they regard the scene, in Hanson and Gurr’s term, as being ‘wholly negative in its implications’ (Hanson and Gurr, 54). In their analysis, Hanson and Gurr suggest that the character of Pat represents the ‘destructive and aggressive impulses of the adult characters’ (ibid.), a view which can be seen to be picked up in Fullbrook’s
analysis where she sees him as ‘the representative of all the adults, blind to the possibilities of
meaning in his action’ (Fullbrook, 74). In this way, the suggested symbolism in the scene
can be seen to cover for all of the adult characters in the story, and thus, a next reading of
parallelism can be detected where the adult characters of the story are juxtaposed to the
children characters. Reading the story as Literary Expressionism, I have pointed to this
conflict between adults and children in Linda’s lack of motherhood, and in her alienation
towards her children.

In light of my overall approach, I have tried to show character (and form) as the
principal constituent in conveying meaning in ‘Prelude’, something which is highlighted both
through the story’s suggestive method as well as in the shifting point of view. What is more,
the story is a well-balanced and nuanced evocation of the community of the Burnell family
and household, where the practical characters function as the reassuring streak in the story’s
total atmosphere, balancing the theme of female oppression. As such, all of its fourteen
characters (seeing the Samuel Joseph children as one) are crucial to the story’s rich quality
and must be seen as integral elements, each of which forms a sustained pattern of meaning.
Mansfield can be seen to establish five of the story’s characters already in the first scene:
‘Isabel bursting with pride, her nose turned up at all the world, Linda Burnell prostrated, and
the grandmother rummaging among the very curious oddments she had put in her black
reticule at the last moment, for something to give her daughter’ (80). These initial
characterizations are some of those which will bring forth the final impression of the story,
where Linda’s oppressed womanhood is counterpoised with the practical grandmother, and
Isabel, however marginal to the story, is the one who is evoked as having the closest affinities
to the mother, as well as having a boasting attitude vis-à-vis her two younger sisters.

24 What should be noted in view of Fullbrook’s analysis of the scene, is the fact that her interpretation seems to
contradict a statement made in the initial part of her analysis, suggesting that the story is ‘a narration that exactly
mirrors the consciousnesses of her characters, and which keeps this connection unbroken even in passages of
description’, p. 65. By reading Pat and the duck scene in symbolist terms, her initial statement is undermined.
Furthermore, Chapter One, as discussed earlier in this analysis, conveys the relationship between Linda and her two youngest children and also the intimate relationship between Kezia and her grandmother, who is the one she wants to ‘kiss goodbye’. Hence, as in the rest of the stories treated in this thesis, character does not change in any radical way during the course of the story. On the contrary, the concept of character is already established in the very first paragraph, something which perhaps is most conspicuous in the two character sketches I have discussed. This method is, however, employed in ‘Prelude’ as well, but due to its larger number of characters, their manifestations occur at different points in the story.

I find it hard to accept that the character of Pat should represent some embodiment of all the adult characters of the story, or that his action should represent an abstracted meaning of aggression and destruction, something which, as mentioned, undermines the importance of character. Instead, I wish to suggest that the notorious duck scene suggests the safe and practical character of Pat and conveys a narrative relief from female oppression (as it is represented through the characters of Linda and Beryl).

Pat is described entirely in good terms in ‘Prelude’. The first evocation of the character is conveyed through Stanley’s point of view in Chapter Seven: “I believe this man is a first-rate chap,” thought Stanley. He liked the look of him sitting up there in his neat brown coat and brown bowler. He liked the way Pat had tucked him in, and he liked his eyes. There was nothing servile about him’ (99). Pat’s safe and comforting nature is developed in Chapter Nine, where his genuine care and love for the children is conveyed as another dominant aspect of the character. This is suggested in the first scene of the chapter:

Pat came swinging along; in his hand he held a little tomahawk that winked in the sun. ‘Come with me,’ he said to the children, ‘and I’ll show you how the kings of Ireland chop the head off a duck.’ [...] ‘Come on now,’ he coaxed, smiling and holding out his hand to Kezia. ‘Is it a real duck’s head? One from the paddock?’ ‘It is,’ said Pat. She put her hand in his hard dry one,
and he stuck the little tomahawk in his belt and held out the other to Rags. He loved little children. (107)

In this quotation, the suggestion of the character’s safe qualities is reinforced in the narrative statement of the last sentence. At the end of the chapter, the idea of Pat’s love for children is developed, when he is seen to comfort Kezia during her anguish provoked by the decapitated duck (something which must be seen as the second instance of Kezia’s manifestation of oppression). Finally, in the last paragraph of the chapter, Kezia is seen to be positively distracted away from her fear by Pat’s very being, who she notices wears ‘little round gold ear-rings’ (109). This notion of the character, I believe, is not broken when he decapitates the duck, an act which, in my opinion, conveys his reassuringly practical capabilities, and thus has little to do with aggression and destruction as such.

1.6 Mrs. Fairfield’s Function within the Story

The other unthreatening character in ‘Prelude’ is the character of Mrs. Fairfield, whose balancing effect is intimately conveyed when twice in the story she is juxtaposed with each of her two daughters at critical moments.

The first juxtaposition is found in the scene of Chapter Six, where Beryl is looking for a suitable place to hang Stanley’s Chinese paintings. The scene evokes a critical moment for the Beryl character, who is described in terms of ‘rushed in’, ‘very flushed’, ‘dragging with her two big pictures’, ‘spitefully’, ‘angry glance’, ‘banged away’ (94-95). The character’s anxious state of mind is juxtaposed to that of Mrs Fairfield’s safe and relaxed one, something which balances the scene:

‘There! That is enough! Hand me the picture, mother.’ ‘One moment, child.’ Her mother was wiping over the carved ebony
frame. ‘Oh, mother, really you need not dust them. It would take years to dust all those little holes.’ And she frowned at the top of her mother’s head and bit her lip with impatience. Mother’s deliberate way of doing things was simply maddening. It was old age, she supposed, loftily. (95)

Through the juxtaposition of two opposite states of mind Mansfield creates a well balanced scene.

The other juxtaposition is to be found in the scene of Chapter Eleven, where Linda and Mrs Fairfield find themselves in the moonlit garden. In this scene, Mrs Fairfield’s practical and productive thoughts, including harvesting from the orchard and the preservation of jam, are counterpoised with Linda’s hateful thoughts towards her husband, running over almost a page. What can be seen is the fact that Mrs. Fairfield’s productive thoughts are those which end the chapter, and thus serve to counterbalance Linda’s revelation of her secret self, and with it, the most fundamental expression of the story’s theme.

1.7 Conclusion

As I have tried to show in this analysis, ‘Prelude’ is a well-balanced and many-faceted story, something which not least is brought out in its exploration of gender. Even if Mansfield sets out to disclose female oppression and its ramifications, she does not categorize the oppressed and the oppressor only along gender lines (something which is suggested in the analyses of both Fullbrook and Hanson and Gurr), but skilfully utilises changes in the point of view. This way, she is seen to sympathise with all of her characters. Nevertheless portraying female oppression within the confines of the socio-political structures of patriarchy, ‘Prelude’ can be claimed to be a representative example of Mansfield’s feminism.
In this analysis I have tried to argue for Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism through a reading based on Mansfield’s suggestion of character, and where the concept of the story is brought about through a careful selection and ordering of scenes, and also, the division into chapters which in this story is remarkable for their suggestive capacities, most prominently perhaps in Chapter Five and Chapter Seven, where the closing scenes are made to resound beyond the closing of the chapter. Each of these conveys an important aspect of the story’s theme, which are the suggestions of the profound emotional conflicts of Linda and Beryl.

As mentioned ‘Prelude’ is a well-balanced story which perhaps best can be detected in the juxtapositions of the character of Mrs Fairfield and her two daughters, and particularly so in Chapter Eleven, where the character’s productive thoughts are counterpoised to Linda’s hateful ones, and where these can be seen to end the chapter.

Being the longest story of Mansfield’s oeuvre with its forty-one pages, and through its great cast of characters, its theme can be seen to unwind from the story’s initial scene to the final one, and in this manner, produces the dark vein in this remarkably rich story.

‘At the Bay’

‘At the Bay’ (1921) is the first story of The Garden Party and Other Stories, published in February 1922. The story was first intended to give the collection its title, but after writing another story, ‘The Garden Party’ (finished 14 October 1921), Mansfield wrote to the publisher J. B. Pinker in order to include the latter story in the collection and to change the name accordingly, arguing that ‘the book needs one more substantial story and a title that is solid. At the Bay now seems to me flimsy and vague. One forgets it – it doesn’t carry and the
other is a more “compelling” (horrid word) title on a bookstall’ (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 293).

‘At the Bay’ is a continuation of ‘Prelude’ where the cast of the Burnell characters from the earlier story is followed during one day at their summer colony at Crescent Bay, New Zealand.25 ‘At the Bay’ can in some respects be judged to be a more ‘plain’ story than its forerunner. Whereas ‘Prelude’ has an overall suggestive quality, ‘At the Bay’, I will argue, is constructed as an open and philosophical discourse. Instead of developing concepts of states of mind, Mansfield in ‘At the Bay’ can be seen in her individual and unique style, to convey a vegetation myth, drawing on the idea of life, death, and rebirth.

The story has a remarkable integrity of form and content, where its cyclical argument is mirrored in its form which starts right before dawn and terminates during night. In this way, form and content completes a whole, or an absolute.

In ‘At the Bay’ it is nature, and the cycle of one day which pulls the story forward, and the characters, I will argue, are – disconnectedly – played up against the various stages of this natural cycle, forming thematic parallels. Other motifs of the story turn upon the concepts of the ‘natural’ versus the ‘unnatural’ and of ‘harmony’ versus ‘disharmony’.

The story is written during a time when Mansfield was struggling to come to grips with her own impending death. In her journal dated 24 November 1921 she wrote ‘Why am I troubled every single day of my life by the nearness of death and its inevitability?’ (Mansfield, *Journal*, 201). According to C. A. Hankin, Mansfield wanted through the story to ‘celebrate life’, where ‘the death which she faced alone had to be seen in the wider, universal perspective of death – and renewal – of all natural forms’ (Hankin, 223).

Practically all of the critics included in this thesis have argued that ‘At the Bay’ has a thematic parallel with ‘Prelude’. In line with Frank O’Connor, for instance, Hankin suggests

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that “‘At the Bay” and “Prelude” are Katherine Mansfield’s masterpieces and in their own way comparable with Proust’s breakthrough into the subconscious world’ (in Hankin, 222). Hanson and Gurr suggest that the story ‘is constructed like “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” and Prelude as a sequence of twelve linked episodes, in each of which indirect free form is used to explore the consciousness of one or more of the central characters’ (Hanson and Gurr, 99). Marvin Magalaner in slightly different terms suggests that the story is ‘Katherine Mansfield’s sequel to “Prelude”’ and that ‘In almost every respect it is a faithful attempt to follow the Burnell family through another series of episodes of daily life […] whose principal activity is the trip to the bay […] for the daily bathe’ (Magalaner, 38).

Tracing a thematic parallel to ‘Prelude’, Magalaner stresses a theme of ‘freedom and escape’ (ibid., 40-41), which is an aspect seen in the Linda character in the former story.

Disowning the Expressionist form of ‘At the Bay’, Magalaner can be seen to suggest a missing coherence, first discussed as a ‘deliberate’ form, on the grounds that ‘When this ostensible lack of pointed relevance manifests itself, the chances are that the vagueness is deliberate’ (ibid., 39), and then to suggest a possible flaw, where, in connection with the story ‘Miss Brill’, he suggests that ‘Maybe [Mansfield] understands Miss Brill better than she can grasp the forces that animate the Burnells and their circle, so that the writing of the latter she treads more gingerly and leaves the patterns less clearly defined, mistier in the New Zealand haze’ (ibid., 40).

Picking up on Magalaner’s metaphor of the ‘mist’, Angela Smith can be seen in her analysis to read a symbolism of the subconscious into the story’s evocation of the mist and the ‘rock-pools’, thus, I believe, settling for an intricate reading of symbolism and the subconscious. Smith will be discussed in greater depth in the course of this analysis.
In ‘At the Bay’, Mansfield’s foregrounds nature. The evocation of nature is suggested through a sustained use of personification, and hence, has a powerful presence in the story. ‘At the Bay’ opens with the evocation of Nature, in which dawn, and the rising of the sun, are suggested to emerge from a ‘smothering mist’, and the subsequent evocations of water and wetness, something which, according to my argument about the story’s cyclical character, can be seen as a suggestion of ‘eternal’ renewal.

The first suggestion of this theme is found in the second paragraph of the first chapter, suggesting one of the motifs in the story, namely the mysterious dimensions of Nature:

Ah-Aah! Sounded the sleepy sea. And from the bush there came the sound of little streams flowing, quickly, lightly, slipping between the smooth stones, gushing into ferny basins and out again; and there was the splashing of big drops on large leaves, and something else – what was it? – a faint stirring and shaking, the snapping of a twig and then such silence that it seemed some one was listening.’ (281)

A next personification of nature occurs in Chapter Two and the bathing scene with Stanley Burnell and Jonathan Trout. In the context of Jonathan Trout’s state of ‘spending’ himself (284), Mansfield suggests the image of the early morning as ‘happiness’: ‘To live – to live! And the perfect morning, so fresh and fair, basking in the light, as though laughing at its own beauty, seemed to whisper, “Why not?”’ (284-85). The precise language can be seen to reinforce the image of early morning with its additional suggestion, something which can be seen to effect ripples of meanings, and, according to the story’s argument, the beginning of the natural cycle.

The next suggestion of nature is found in Chapter Ten, where in the evening and through the point of view of Linda, a suggestion of ‘balance’ and ‘harmony’ is conveyed: ‘[T]o-night it seemed to Linda there was something infinitely joyful and loving in those silver
beams. And now no sound came from the sea. It breathed softly as if it would draw that tender, joyful beauty into its own bosom’ (309). The suggestion, I believe, has a taint of the nostalgia which is found in the chapter, something which, like the suggestion above, conforms with the stage of day.

Finally, in the story’s last chapter, Chapter Thirteen, containing one paragraph, the suggestion of nature can be seen to be drawn further, where, I will suggest, Mansfield lets the entirety of the scene mirror the preceding misadventure between Beryl and Mr Harry Kember, in Chapter Twelve. Juxtaposed with a suggestion of Beryl’s troubled soul, and the ensuing ‘stillness’ after she has ‘wrenched free’ from the grips of the character Mr Harry Kember, the story’s last chapter evokes a final suggestion of nature: ‘A cloud, small, serene, flouted across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. The cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still. (314). Read as a mirror, Mansfield can be seen to convey a final suggestion of the mystery of nature.

Reading the story within a Symbolist framework, Smith can be seen to invest certain natural elements of the story with a reading of characters and state of mind. The ‘mists’ at the bay, Smith suggests ‘symbolize the processes of the human minds at work in the story’ (Smith, 167). One such process, according to Smith, suggests a reading of isolation: ‘Moments of finding each other occur as when Linda talks with Jonathan’ (ibid.) but ‘in the marriage between Linda and Stanley […] the secret self of each remains unrevealed to the other’ (ibid.). In this manner, Smith too can be seen to draw on the theme of ‘Prelude’. What is more, Smith, through reading symbolism into the mist, can be seen to embark upon an

26 The separation of the last paragraph into a final chapter was done in the American edition of the volume, and was also chosen for Anthony Alper’s edition of Mansfield’s stories as well as The Oxford World Classic edition. The separation of the last paragraph, I believe, highlights the frame of the story, and thus marks a sharper contrast between the two structures of macrocosm and microcosm.
extremely oblique reading, as the mist only is suggested in the initial paragraphs of the thirty four pages and thirteen chapters of the story.

Some of the difficulties of Smith’s reading is found in the development of her argument, where the landscape, according to Smith, seems to suggest a number of things, such as ‘character’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘experience’: ‘Features of the landscape, like the psychic experiences that have shaped the consciousnesses of the characters, are known to be there but cannot be seen’ (Smith, 167). Through a reading of metaphor, Smith disowns Mansfield’s suggestion of nature, which through an Expressionist approach must be read as the essence and quality of its evocation, and hence Smith renders a reading of the story which is both ‘hazy’ and vague.

2.2 Harmony versus Disharmony

Having argued for the structural device of the sun/time in ‘At the Bay’ and a meaning ‘which is primarily philosophical’ (Hankin, 225), Hankin can also be seen to move towards a focus on character, but a reading which fails to account for the story’s cyclical and philosophical argument.

The sun and the sea in the story, Hankin suggests, function as ‘pervasive motifs’ (ibid., 224). Hankin can be seen to invest the sun with a symbolism akin to the qualities brought out by Stanley Burnell, those of ‘power’, ‘potential destructiveness’ and ‘masculinity’ (Hankin, 225). In this way, Hankin suggests that Stanley dominates the narrative, claiming that ‘just as the presence of the sun is felt in virtually every episode of the story, so does the figure of Stanley Burnell, whether present or absent, command more attention than any other character’ (ibid.). By suggesting this, Hankin devices an obscure reading of the story where
her initial argument of ‘sun’ and ‘time’ (ibid.) is replaced by a reading of the ‘sun’ as that which suggests the character of Stanley

   Equally, the sea, according to Hankin, ‘carries the […] mythic resonance of birth’ (Hankin, 226-27) as well as taking on the associative meanings of ‘mother’, ‘wife’ and the ‘feminine’ (ibid., 227). The sea is said to be ‘the presiding mother-deity and unifying force around which the characters gather’ (ibid., 227). Hankin’s symbolist reading of the sea does not really add to the story, and the suggestion is superfluous. Reading the story as Literary Expressionism, I wish to read the function of the sea as part of the structure through which the story’s argument is manifested and played out.

   In other places, Hankin’s suggestion of symbolism can be seen to distort rather than to enlighten the story. One example of this, can be seen in her argument of the sea as symbolising ‘birth’ and ‘the feminine’: ‘Possessive of the water, Stanley in his resentment of Jonathan’s presence there first acts as if the sea were feminine: part wife, part mother. To be immersed in its depths is to partake of its life-giving qualities – to be reborn and revitalised’ (ibid., 227). The suggestion disowns the fact that Stanley feels ‘cheated’ in his morning swim, and as such, the symbolism comes across as being imposed on the story.

   Another supposedly symbolist trait is that whilst the sun is associated with the Stanley Burnell, the sea, according to Hankin, is linked to the Linda character: ‘[T]he sea (or water) acquires […] the negative attributes of Linda in her rejecting, emotionally destructive moods’ (ibid.). In this manner, Hankin’s suggestion of symbolism can be seen to be drawn entirely from a reading of the qualities of the Linda character, and as such, the symbolism of the sea is redundant. What is more, in line with Dominic Head Hankin can be seen to suggest a ‘fluid’ symbolism, which is argued both in terms of ‘birth’ and ‘mother-deity’ as well as in inhabiting the ‘negative attributes’ of the Linda character. Having established a reading of symbolism, Hankin suggests that ‘an inherent hostility of female towards male’ is seen to be
emotionally relevant to the separate episodes’ (ibid., 228). In this manner, Hankin suggests a thematic parallel to the earlier ‘Prelude’.

The characters in ‘At the Bay’ can indeed be seen to draw on their qualities of the former story. But I will suggest that these are linked to a different theme, namely the natural cycle. Suggesting the theme of female oppression in ‘Prelude’, Linda, in ‘At the Bay’, again has an important function in connection to the story’s theme. This can be seen in Chapter Six, where, in addition to suggesting the character’s settled acknowledgement of her role as wife and mother (which is stated explicitly), she can be seen as a central character in the conveyance of the story’s argument about a natural cycle.

In Chapter Six, Linda can be seen to be placed in connection with the cycle of the Manuka tree, which must be seen as a reinforcing device to the story’s argument:

> But as soon as they flowered, they fell and were scattered. You brushed them off your frock as you talked; the horrid little things got caught in one’s hair. Why, then, flower at all? Who takes the trouble – or the joy – to make all these things that are wasted, wasted… It was uncanny’. (294)

The flowers which fall make Linda consider the temporality of life; the statement is mixed with a sense of hopelessness, while yet hinting at the mystery of nature.

The motif of love and renewal is suggested through the Linda character, and as such there is a development of the character from the former story. Through Linda’s point of view, the baby boy is seen in this manner: ‘The baby had turned over. He lay facing her, and he was no longer asleep. His dark-blue eyes were open; he looked as though he was peeping at his mother. And suddenly his face dimpled; it broke into a wide, toothless smile, a perfect beem, no less’ (296). The idea can be seen as a celebration of life and love, and the image suggests rebirth.

The quality of the tense business man which Mansfield draws of the character Stanley Burnell in ‘Prelude’ is retained in the latter story. In ‘At the Bay’, the character functions in
the story’s motif of ‘harmony’ and ‘disharmony’, and, contrary to Hankin’s suggestion, the character is significantly disconnected with the sun and the story’s tracking of cyclical time.

At the opening of Chapter Two, the fundamental idyll of Chapter One is cut short when Stanley Burnell is introduced as the first of the Burnell characters:

A few moments later the back door of one of the bungalows opened, and a figure in a broad-striped bathing suit flung down the paddock, cleared the stile, rushed through the tussock grass into the hollow, staggered up the sandy hillock, and raised for dear life over the big porous stones, over the cold, wet pebbles, on to the hard sand that gleamed with oil. Splish-Splosh! Splish-Splosh’. (283)

The abrupt and violent break with the foregoing chapter is suggested through the listing of verbs separated by commas, thus mirroring the character’s hectic tension, a state of mind which is reinforced through the use of onomatopoeia in the last sentence.

The tension which accompanies Stanley Burnell is elaborated upon in Chapter Two, as well as in Chapter Three. In the following quotation, Stanley’s character is juxtaposed with that of his precise opposite, the character Jonathan Trout, and the character is suggested as being in disharmony with nature:

‘Glorious morning!’ sang the voice.
‘Yes, very fine!’ said Stanley briefly. Why the dickens didn’t the fellow stick to his part of the sea? Why should he come barging over to this exact spot? Stanley gave a kick, a lunge and struck out, swimming overarm. But Jonathan was a match for him. Up he came, his black hair sleek on his forehead, his short beard sleek.
‘I had an extraordinary dream last night!’ he shouted. What was the matter with the man? This mania for conversation irritated Stanley beyond words. And it was always the same – always some piffle about a dream he’d had, or some cranky idea he’d got hold of, or some rot he’d been reading. Stanley turned over on his back and kicked with his legs till he was a living watersprout. But even then…. ‘I dreamed I was hanging over a terrifically high cliff’. (283-84)

In the form of a neatly constructed free indirect discourse, Mansfield devices perhaps one of her finest examples of the suggestive method. Stanley is suggested to be in a complete
disharmony with nature, with the sea, something which is elaborated upon in Chapter Three, which will be discussed shortly.

The quotation suggests the tense ‘disharmony’ of Stanley Burnell. However, at this point there is only an illusion of Jonathan Trout’s state of mind as one in complete harmony with nature. This illusion is hinted at in the last paragraph of the chapter, where a different aspect of the character is revealed: ‘But now he was out of the water Jonathan turned blue with cold. He ached all over, it was as though some one was wringing the blood out of him. And stalking up the beach, shivering, all his muscles tight, he too felt his bath was spoilt. He’d stayed in too long’ (285). As an antithesis to Stanley Burnell, Jonathan Trout yields excessively to Life and to Nature. Through these two opposite suggestions of ‘disharmony’, Mansfield can be seen to point towards a suggestion of ‘harmony’ and ‘balance’, which is another motif in the story.

In Chapter Three, Stanley’s tension is pursued, as suggested through the presence of the clock, ‘time’ is measured in minutes and half-minutes. When Stanley leaves for work, the narrative tension spurred by ‘mechanical’ time disappears, something which releases the story into a natural rhythm. From this point on, time is referred to by the sun’s position in the sky.

2.3 Macrocosm versus Microcosm

Reading the story as Literary Expressionism, I wish to account for the developing idea of the cycle of one day and the paralleling moods of the characters, conveying thematic parallels.

The opening chapter of ‘At the Bay’ suggests a complete harmony between Nature and Man, where it is the shepherd character which is played against the evocation of dawn.
This chapter can be seen to unearth, as Hankin and Hanson and Gurr have also pointed to, some mythical references to a historical dawn as well, and to early Christianity. Harmony reigns between Nature and Man in the opening chapter of the story. Against the rising sun and ‘the leaping, glittering sea’ which ‘was so bright it made one’s eyes ache to look at’ (282), the suggestion of the shepherd is drawn:

The shepherd drew a pipe, the bowl as small as an acorn, out of his breast pocket, fumbled for a chunk of speckled tobacco, pared off a few shavings and stuffed the bowl. He was a grave fine-looking old man. As he lit up and the blue smoke wreathed his head, the dog, watching, looked proud of him. (282)

The detailed analysis of the action can be seen to suggest an idea of balance and harmony.

The next reference to the sun is found in Chapter Three where Mrs. Fairfield is suggested against the morning sun. In its poetical association, the morning sun can be portrayed as ‘life’ and ‘hope’, qualities which can be associated with this character:

Through the wide-open window streamed the sun on to the yellow varnished walls and bare floor. Everything on the table flashed and glittered. In the middle there was an old salad bowl filled with yellow and red nasturtiums. [Mrs Fairfield] smiled, and a deep content shone in her eyes. (286)

The association of the character and the morning sun is suggested where, through the immediate association with the sun, its shining quality is applied in the characterisation of Mrs. Fairfield (‘a deep content shone in her eyes’). This is something which, akin to the morning sun, suggests the character’s reassuring safety and life-giving powers. In the story, Mrs. Fairfield is suggested to be the anchor in Kezia’s life as well as the one who takes care of both the baby and the family’s nutrition.

In the two first paragraphs of Chapter Seven it is the ‘baking’ quality of the mid-day sun which is suggested to dominate the outdoor scene, deserted by the characters. Paralleled to the mid-day heat, the theme of death is openly raised. This occurs in the hour of siesta, inside the Burnell’s bungalow. Spurred by the grandmother’s memory of Kezia’s uncle
William who had died from a sunstroke working in one of Australia’s mines, Kezia raises questions about her own death as well as the death of her grandmother:

[Kezia] didn’t want to die. It meant she would have to leave here, leave everywhere for ever, leave – leave her grandma. She rolled over quickly. ‘Grandma,’ she said in a startled voice. ‘What my pet!’ ‘You’re not to die.’ Kezia was very decided. ‘Ah, Kezia’ – her grandma looked up and smiled and shook her head – ‘don’t let’s talk about it.’ ‘But you’re not to. You couldn’t leave me. You couldn’t not be there.’ This was awful. ‘Promise me you won’t ever do it, grandma,’ pleaded Kezia. The old woman went on knitting. ‘Promise me! Say never!’ But still her grandma was silent. Kezia rolled off the bed; she couldn’t bear it any longer, and lightly she leapt on to her grandma’s knees, clasped her hands round the old woman’s throat and began kissing her. (299)

The passage illustrates Mansfield’s remarkable gift for conveying a child’s mind and manner. By juxtaposing Kezia’s fear of death with the practical and reassuring grandmother, some of the poignancy of the scene is reduced, something which serves to balance the scene.

The last reference to the sun’s position in the sky is found in the scene between Jonathan and Linda in Chapter Ten. In this chapter, the sinking sun is played against the suggestion of the ageing of man, something which suggests the move towards the completion of the cycle. This is also brought out through the character Jonathan Trout, whose cry ‘The shortness of life! The shortness of life!’ (308) is evoked in connection with the character’s marks of ageing: ‘[H]e passed his hand over his head. “Look!” His black hair was speckled all over with silver, like the breast plumage of a black fowl’ (309).

Added to the suggestion of a cyclic finality, is a hint of nostalgia. This notion is – again – suggested through the parallel of the evening sky and Jonathan Trout. Juxtaposed with Jonathan’s musings over his unfulfilled life as a clerk and a final reckoning of a status quo, the evening sky is described thus: ‘The sun had set. In the western sky there were great
masses of crushed-up rose-coloured clouds. Broad beams of light shone through the clouds and beyond them as if they would cover the whole sky’ (309).

If the various stages of the sun’s position in the sky are paralleled to suggestions of moods, so do the night scenes suggest some parallel moods. The evocation of dark in the washhouse scene in Chapter Nine is associated with a mood of betrayal. Having established the suggestion of the dark and the frightened children, Mansfield can be seen to reinforce a notion of a physical and mental isolation of the children, through the physical act of ‘The blinds were being pulled down; the kitchen fire leapt in the tins on the mantelpiece’ (306). The idea of betrayal is openly suggested in ‘Oh, those grown-ups, laughing and snug, sitting in the lamp-light, drinking out of cups! They’d forgotten about them. No, not really forgotten. That was what their smile meant. They had decided to leave them there all by themselves’ (ibid.). Played against the dark, the stark feeling of isolation spurs a notion of poignancy, seen from the point of view of the children.

2.4 Beryl’s story and Suggestion of the Unnatural

As a contrast to the story’s argument about nature stands the suggestion of the unnatural which dominates Beryl’s story. Like the character Stanley Burnell, Beryl is not set against the cyclic argument of the story, and so functions as an unnatural element within the argument. Played against the highly unconventional foils of Mrs and Mr Harry Kember in Chapter Five and Chapter Twelve, Beryl’s character in ‘At the Bay’ is dominated by a narrative opacity, where the character’s emotional conflicts are only hinted at.

In Chapter Five, in the bathing scene between Beryl and Mrs Harry Kember, Mansfield suggests some of the character’s personal conflict: ‘Beryl felt that she was being
poisoned by this cold woman, but she longed to hear. But oh, how strange, how horrible!’ (294). The character’s attitude, I will argue, suggests ‘an internal psychical division between attraction and repulsion’ (Butler, 108-109), something which can be seen to suggest a deep fear.  

The unnatural aspect of the Harry Kember couple is suggested in terms of their inhuman qualities, and thus goes beyond the story’s motif of harmony and disharmony. In Chapter Five, Mrs Harry Kember is set against the image of the sun in the following manner:

> When [Mrs Harry Kember] was not playing bridge […] she spent her time lying in the full glare of the sun. She could stand any amount of it; she never had enough. All the same it didn’t seem to warm her. Parched, withered, cold, she lay stretched on the stones like a piece of tossed-up driftwood. (292)

The suggestion sends associations to that of a corpse (an image which is also referred to in another context in the chapter), and through this, I will argue, Mrs Harry Kember is shown up as a character who lacks in some essential human qualities. However, the motifs of Beryl’s actions are only hinted at throughout the narrative, and hence the character remains in the mystery.

If Mrs Harry Kember’s inhumaness is suggested in her unnatural relation to the sun, her husband’s inhumane quality is suggested in what can be seen as the character’s fundamental lack of empathy.

The night scene between Mr Harry Kember and Beryl in Chapter Twelve can, in line with the washhouse scene in Chapter Nine, be seen to trigger a theme which suggests a death-in-life. The mental ‘darkness’ of the Beryl character is for one thing brought out through the character’s bad judgement of people, which is one of the points made in the chapter. This leads the character into the misadventure with Mr Harry Kember.

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27 The statement is a comment on Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907).
Beryl’s state of mind once she finds herself in the garden with Mr Harry Kember is described in metaphors which evoke powerful associations of an imprisoned soul: ‘[N]ow she was here she was terrified, and it seemed to her everything was different. The moonlight stared and glittered; the shadows were like bars of iron’ (313). The quotation suggests an imprisoned and exposed character. Through eliminating the suggestion of the subconscious as well as the personal motif, Mansfield suggests, I believe, a deep personal conflict in the Beryl character in ‘At the Bay’. Only expression remains.

Whereas Mrs Harry Kember is portrayed as a constant character, somewhat excessively bold and identified with the more ‘stout’ animals ‘horse’ and ‘rat’, Mr Harry Kember is her perfect opposite: an inconstant character whose swiftness in the course of the scene is compared to that of a cat’s. This is suggested in the form and progression of the scene, which through the character of Mr Harry Kember can be seen to have an extraordinary degree of development. The character is introduced in the chapter as ‘calm’ and ‘peaceful’: ‘It couldn’t be a burglar, certainly not a burglar, for he was smoking and he strolled lightly’ (313), for then to change into a fervidly excited one: ‘’That’s right”, breathed the voice, and it teased, “Your not frightened, are you? You’re not frightened?’ (ibid.), and ending as a fundamentally insecure figure: ‘Then why in God’s name did you come?’ stammered Harry Kember’ (314).

As a reinforcing device, the character’s humanity is in the scene recurrently reduced in terms of ‘the voice’ or ‘breathed the voice’, something which strengthens the notion of the unnatural.

Played against the Harry Kember couple’s inhumaness and unnaturalness, Beryl’s character in ‘At the Bay’ is shrouded in mystery. In this manner, the idea can be seen to be the personal mystery, juxtaposed with the story’s evocation of the natural mystery.
The significance of the story’s last chapter, I have argued, is that it mirrors the preceding incident between Beryl and Mr Harry Kember, and as such Beryl’s story can in an oblique manner be seen to be assimilated in nature, something which, I believe, suggests another motif of the mystery of nature, and a fundamentally emphatic nature as well.

2.5 Narrative Technique

’At the Bay’ has a remarkable narrative technique, where Mansfield can be seen to literally zoom in and out on her objects. This, I will argue, is in harmony with the story’s cyclic argument, and is, I believe, another of Mansfield’s fictional innovations.

One effect of this can be seen in Chapter Four, where the Burnell girls are pictured on their way to the beach. The narrative perspective changes between point of view and narrative distance. The point of view is in line with the story’s co-emphasis on character. Lottie is conveyed in this manner, attempting to cross a stile:

By this time Lottie was very red in the face and breathing heavily.
’Here, put your other foot over,’ said Kezia.
’Where?’
Lottie looked down at Kezia as if from a mountain height.
’Here where my hand is.’ Kezia patted the place. (288)

From one point of view, Mansfield in the next scene can be seen to zoom out on her Burnell girls, something which, again, highlights the story’s motif of the relationship between micro- and macrocosm:

The pink and the blue sunbonnet followed Isabel’s bright red sunbonnet in that sliding, slipping hill. At the top they paused to decide where to go and have a good stare at who was there already. Seen from behind, standing against the skyline,
gesticulating largely with their spades, they looked like minute puzzled explorers. (288-89)

Through the use of metonymy, Mansfield establishes the narrative distance. Juxtaposed with other perspectival devices, such as ‘against the skyline’, ‘minute explorers’, and ‘gesticulating largely’, Mansfield manages to zoom in and out on her characters.

In Chapter Ten, Mansfield, through the use of metaphor, suggests a cyclical point of view, narrated as the personal crisis of the character Jonathan Trout, who, in his feelings about having an unfulfilled life, compares it to that of an insect: ‘The shortness of life! The shortness of life!’ ‘I’ve only one night or one day, and there’s this vast dangerous garden, waiting out there, undiscovered, unexplored’ (308). Through the use of the insect metaphor, Mansfield can be seen to trigger a cosmic point of view, drawing on the proportions between the micro- and macrocosm, in ‘space’ as well as in ‘time’.

A cosmic point of view is also achieved in the opening chapter of the story, where towards the end Mansfield can be seen to anticipate and approach her early characters through a steady narrative focus on the space of the Burnell’s summer colony: “Baa! Baaa!” The sheep spread out into a fan. They were just clear of the summer colony before the first sleeper turned over and lifted a drowsy head’ (282). The previous evocation of dawn and the unit of the shepherd, sheep, and sheep-dog is elegantly shifted to a focus on the anticipations of the story’s characters.

A next example of Mansfield’s ‘zooming’ technique is found in Chapter Seven, where, after the two initial paragraphs which suggest the baking quality of the midday sun, Mansfield, in the third paragraph, zooms in on the Burnell characters’ bungalow, and its immediate surroundings. This, I believe, again has proleptic effect in connection with what happens to her characters in Chapter Seven, and in connection with the theme of death. The suggestion of contrast between the outdoor and indoor scene can be seen to reinforce the quality of the midday sun. In the first statement of the third paragraph, ‘The green blinds were
drawn in the bungalows of the summer colony’ (297) is contrasted with the abrupt opening of the indoor scene in the fourth paragraph: “What are you looking at, my grandma?” (298). Through such sharp contrasts, Mansfield is seen to balance the outdoor and indoor scene and their various connotations.

The last thing I wish to point out is the remarkable opening and closing sentence of the story. In their respective chapters, I will argue, each suggests an opening and a closing of the story which literally completes a circle. The neat concision and neutral quality of the opening sentence: ‘Very early morning’ (281) can be seen to function as the pillar of the story on which the chapter’s gradual awakening of dawn is built.

In a similar manner, the story’s final sentence, the equally neutral and concise: ‘All was still’ (314) elegantly closes in on the preceding evocation of nature. As such it suggests a complete and serene stillness.

Taking a different position, Bennett comments on the closing line as that of an ‘apocalyptic or deathly stillness’ (Bennett, 68), which is implied, according to Bennett, in the word ‘all’. In this manner, Bennett comes close, I believe, to Smith’s argument of ‘liminality’, suggesting a final and ‘unsettled’ reading of Mansfield’s ‘At the Bay’. What is more, instead of reading the final sentence as juxtaposed with the preceding suggestion, Bennett is seen to apply this to the closing sentence, something which spurs an argument, I believe, against the closing line of the story: ‘But the paragraph resists the closure that stillness suggests, hinting, instead, at an apocalyptic or deathly stillness […]. It is a troubling stillness, then, like the deep of the sea and its vague murmur’ (ibid.). This way, Bennett suggests a final fluid and unsettled quality of the story.

In this analysis, I have argued for the story’s argument of the cycle of nature manifested in the narrative time of one day, against which the characters of the story are played, effecting thematic parallels. Beryl’s story, I have argued, functions as an Unnatural
vein in the story’s Natural argument, and constitutes the only plot in the story, reaching a climax in Chapter Twelve, and the misadventure with Mr Harry Kember. Through the suggested ‘assimilation’ of nature in the story’s final scene, Mansfield can be seen to point to a fundamentally emphatic Nature, and, furthermore, the suggestion of the micro- and macrocosm as an organic whole. The concision and neutral quality of the opening and closing line of the story effects the notion of a circular quality, and hence, I will suggest, the ‘bounding outline’ of the story.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued the case for Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism. Mansfield’s view of art, I have argued, is most significantly manifested in the dramatic scene in which the suggestion of character is made. It is largely within Mansfield’s suggestive method that the poetry of her art is to be found. Through her particular precision with language, Mansfield achieves a peculiar clarity of expression. However, it is through the story’s progressive form that the full meaning of her stories can be grasped. In line with the Expressionist concepts of ‘harmony’ and ‘rhythm’, Mansfield’s stories develop through a number of composite images towards a complex idea, and thus conveying a total image.

In the chapters of close reading, I have tried to show the relevance of the relationship between character, meaning and form, and through this I have wished to point to the artistic and innovative qualities of Mansfield’s fiction. In each story, Mansfield demonstrates a highly individual style which exactly mirrors its idea. Hence, it is evident that Mansfield was highly involved in an experimentation and innovation with literary technique. This fact is also clearly documented in her letters. In a letter to Dorothy Brett on 25 July 1921, Mansfield highlights the coterminous of form and content in her fiction: ‘Oh, Heavens – how difficult Art is. It’s the perpetual work at technique which is so hard. It’s not enough to know what you want to say – but to be able to say it – to be equipped to say it! That is a life’s work’ (Mansfield, *The Collected Letters*, 255).

At the same time as I have wanted to identify Mansfield’s Expressionist form, I have wished to untie some myths about her fiction, and the view that her persona and fiction are one. This critical myth, I believe, has spurred the widespread biographical bias in Mansfield criticism. In the examples included in this thesis, there is a common critical practice in which
arguments about her fiction are rooted in the interpretations of Mansfield’s personal statements rather than in the texts in question. The perhaps most harmful example of this is the widespread critical consensus about Mansfield’s own internal divisions, brought out in Andrew Bennett’s statement about her ‘mobile, fractured, and multiple sense of personal identity’ (Bennett, 9). This personal quality is that which to a large extent is claimed to be manifested in her fictional form, in which the ‘paradoxical’, the ‘ambiguous’, ‘limitation’ and ‘reduction’ are the trademarks of both the symbolist, ‘impersonal’, and Julia Van Gunsteren’s Impressionist approaches in Mansfield criticism.

Having made my case for the importance of recognising Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism, I have wished to argue for the ‘bounding outline’ of Mansfield’s stories which is achieved through the suggestive method and through the progressive form. It is, furthermore, in the narrative development of the story that the artistic, and conceptual, point of view is put into effect.

The myth about Mansfield and her art can be seen to have been launched already in the Modernist era itself. In 1923 Conrad Aiken suggests that ‘Far more identifiably than most modern writers’, Mansfield ‘used the medium for undisguised confession’ (in Hankin, ix). Aiken’s view is picked up and made into the the main argument in C. A. Hankin’s study, and it is the same view which is implied in the arguments for ambiguity in Head, Smith and Bennett, as well as in the symbolist readings. In this manner, the biographical slant in Mansfield criticism becomes, I will suggest, based on traditional notions of women and writing.

A next myth about Mansfield’s fiction is again brought forth in Hankin’s introduction, and it is the suggestion that Mansfield devices ‘a special quality’ in her fiction, and yet ‘there is a sense in which the nature of her achievement has resisted definition’ (Hankin, ix). This is an argument which is echoed in Bennett’s study, claiming that ‘Mansfield’s technique is
constitutively resistant to interpretation’ (Bennett, 24). In this context, Bennett suggests that Mansfield’s fiction is marked by ‘an indirection that involves both a lack of direction and a certain misdirection’ (ibid.). This view can also be seen to have motivated the various symbolist readings of Mansfield’s work, which all can be seen to render a ‘static’ notion of her stories.

In my opinion, Literary Expressionism is the mode and perspective which most clearly illustrates Mansfield’s ambition and the direction of her Modernist short story. What can be added to this, is the fact that Mansfield’s unfinished stories are all lacking in the strong lyrical quality of her Expressionist stories, something which might indicate that she was running out of productive ideas. In various places in her journal, Mansfield stresses points which, in my opinion, testifies to her Expressionist aim, as can be seen in her comment on ‘An Ideal Family’ on July 1921: ‘Finished “An Ideal Family” yesterday. It seems to me better than [Mr. and Mrs. Dove], but still it’s not good enough. I worked at it hard enough, God knows, and yet I didn’t get the deepest truth out of the idea, even once’ (Mansfield, Journal, 257). In Mansfield’s Literary Expressionism the ‘deep truth’, I believe, is that which is conveyed in the total concept of her story, as the story is being developed in a number of suggested and complex aspects.

In a letter on 3 February 1921 to the painter Richard Murry, Mansfield can also be seen to touch on her Expressionist aims. After having commented upon Murry’s – and with it, her own – ‘desire for technical knowledge’ as being ‘a kind of profound symbol’ (ibid., 173), Mansfield confesses that: ‘You see I too have a passion for technique. I have a passion for making the thing into a whole if you know what I mean. Out of technique is born real style, I believe. There are no short cuts’ (ibid.). The ‘profound symbol’ and the making of the fiction into a ‘whole’ can be seen in Mansfield’s Expressionist stories, marked as they are by the disciplined integrity of an idea.
In her stories, Mansfield conveys some distinct, idiosyncratic suggestions of character and predicament which turns on the expression of the subconscious and psychological dimensions of character. In discussing the rendering of the characters’ various states of mind, I have wished to draw attention to Mansfield’s analytical approach in her stories. This I have linked to Mansfield’s personal, and artistic, demands of the ‘impersonality’ of the author in the act of creation, as discussed in the introduction. In this way, Mansfield achieves the crucial ‘distance’ or ‘detachment’ from her literary material, something which makes her conception viable. Hence, if Mansfield conveys ‘ambiguity’, instances of ‘illogicality’ or other emotional conflicts in her stories, they are strictly poetical expressions, conveyed in the creation of character and idea.

According to Christopher Butler, the Modernists’ focus on technique and form functions ‘not as the provider for aesthetic absolutes, but as the focus for stylistic metamorphoses, which are mediated by a new idea, a shift in an artist’s conceptual scheme, that may be revolutionary’ (Butler, 15). The artist, Butler goes on to suggest, ‘is sustained in making formal discoveries by the expectation that they may be significant in relation to a particular content’ (ibid.). As I have suggested in the introduction and hoped to show in the chapters of close reading, it is largely in the precision of her language that Mansfield’s poetry lies. The meaning and content of her stories are expressed through their idiosyncratic form, where technique and innovation are employed in a fluent and efficient manner. Mansfield’s Expressionist art, I have argued in this thesis, is largely conveyed through the narrative movement and the juxtaposition of dramatic images. In this way, her art also expresses a highly visual approach to the world.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


