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INNER LABYRINTHS: SYMBOLISM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S CHARACTERS

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ABSTRACT

L'obbiettivo della tesi è quello di esplorare l'universo letterario di Katherine Mansfield, una delle scrittrici più innovative e distintive del ventesimo secolo. L'oggetto principale di studio sarà analizzare come la scrittrice riesca, attraverso i suoi racconti brevi, a mettere in luce gli aspetti più svariati della natura umana, catturandone l'essenza delle emozioni e offrendo una forte analisi sulla complessità psicologica dei personaggi. Lo scopo sarà anche quello di evidenziare come la scrittura di Katherine Mansfield sia riuscita a rompere le convenzioni narrative tradizionali, sfidando le aspettative dei lettori e offrendo loro nuove prospettive.

L'analisi si concentra su racconti quali *The Voyage*, *The Garden Party*, *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, *Miss Brill*, *Her First Ball*, *The Doll's House*, *The Fly*, *Marriage à la mode*, *Bliss* e *The Lady's Maid* in cui Katherine Mansfield esplora temi universali come la crescita personale, il lutto, la solitudine e la ricerca di identità. I personaggi, spesso donne, affrontano situazioni di crisi personale che mettono in luce le loro vulnerabilità, desideri e conflitti interiori e, attraverso la tecnica dello stream of consciousness, la scrittrice permette ai lettori di entrare nelle loro menti rivelandone le percezioni e le riflessioni più intime. L'analisi psicologica dei personaggi di Mansfield si basa principalmente sull'esplorazione dei loro pensieri, spesso rivelati attraverso monologhi interiori e descrizioni dettagliate delle loro percezioni sensoriali. In *The Garden Party*, ad esempio, la scrittrice descrive le emozioni contrastanti della giovane Laura mentre organizza una festa in giardino, mettendo in evidenza il conflitto tra il suo desiderio di conformarsi alle aspettative sociali e la sua empatia per un vicino defunto. Allo stesso modo, in *Miss Brill*, la protagonista vive una trasformazione interiore mentre osserva il mondo intorno a lei da una panchina del parco, solo per confrontarsi in seguito con una cruda realtà che infrange le sue illusioni.

Un altro importante oggetto di studio sarà il simbolismo, uno degli strumenti principali utilizzati dalla scrittrice. Ogni simbolo rappresenta una chiave che apre le porte delle emozioni dei personaggi e dei loro conflitti interiori, permettendo ai lettori di esplorare l'intricato labirinto della mente umana. La mosca in *The Fly*, ad esempio, simboleggia la lotta per la sopravvivenza, la crudeltà del destino e l'ineluttabilità della morte; la casa delle bambole in *The Doll's House* diventa un simbolo che rappresenta la gerarchia sociale e l'emarginazione; l'albero di pero in *Bliss* simboleggia la percezione di beatitudine e pienezza della vita che, successivamente, verrà messa in discussione quando la protagonista scopre il tradimento del marito. Paesaggi, colori e oggetti quotidiani diventano dunque strumenti attraverso i quali la scrittrice comunica, in modo impalpabile ma potente, il turbamento emotivo o la calma interiore dei suoi personaggi, illuminando le connessioni tra mente ed esperienza.

La ricerca sarà basata su un'analisi approfondita dei racconti selezionati, esaminando in dettaglio i personaggi, le loro relazioni e le loro dinamiche emotive, con l'obiettivo di esplorare le loro profondità psicologiche per cogliere le sfumature più oscure e nascoste della natura umana. Verranno esplorati i mondi di personaggi come Bertha Young in *Bliss*, Josephine and Constantia in *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, Fenella in *The Voyage* o Leila in *Her First Ball*, sottolineando come queste donne affrontino emozioni e sentimenti complessi.

Il primo capitolo della tesi fornirà una panoramica sulla vita di Katherine Mansfield, approfondendo i dettagli della sua infanzia, il contesto familiare e gli studi. Nello stesso capitolo verranno analizzati il contesto storico in cui la scrittrice ha vissuto, includendo l'impatto della Prima Guerra Mondiale nella sua vita, e il contesto letterario osservando brevemente le opere più significative che contribuiscono a definire il suo stile inconfondibile. Nel secondo capitolo verrà esplorata l'evoluzione del racconto breve

come genere letterario soffermandosi soprattutto sul contesto del modernismo. In quel periodo, il racconto breve subisce una trasformazione, diventando un mezzo per esplorare la complessità psicologica e le tensioni interiori dei personaggi e Katherine Mansfield, mirando a catturare momenti significativi e simbolici, contribuisce significativamente a questa evoluzione. Infine, il nucleo della tesi sarà sviluppato nell'ultimo capitolo che offre un'analisi approfondita di dieci racconti selezionati con un'attenzione all'analisi psicologica dei personaggi e all'utilizzo del simbolismo. Attraverso l'esamina di tali racconti si comprenderà meglio come Katherine Mansfield costruisca i protagonisti delle sue opere, concentrandosi su momenti fugaci di introspezione che rivelano desideri, insicurezze e profondità emotive che altrimenti rimarrebbero nascoste.

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INTRODUCTION

In the vast panorama of twentieth-century literature, important figures emerge, who go beyond the conventions of narration by shedding light on the complexities of the human soul through the pages of their stories. Katherine Mansfield, one of the most distinctive and innovative voices of this period, embarks on a literary journey within the depths of human experience. Her writing captures the essence of human emotions, offering a strong psychological analysis of her characters. In this thesis, the fascinating world created by Katherine Mansfield will be explored, a world in which the emotions, desires and internal conflicts of the characters are examined with sensitivity and depth. The psychological analysis of her characters will be the main object of the present work, focusing especially on how the author highlights, in her short stories, the most varied aspects of human nature, from heartbreaking joy to relentless sadness. Through a careful analysis of some selected short stories, the complexity of her characters will be explored, revealing their most intimate motivations, their secret, and most repressed desires. Mansfield's work will be examined, analyzing the emotional development of her stories, observing how her ability to represent the psychology of characters affects her understanding of human nature. Her characters are not mere figures of invention: they are real and complex people, each bearer of a unique story and an inner world full of conflict and hope. The purpose of this thesis is not only to analyze their psychological nuances, but also to explore how Katherine Manfield's writing has succeeded in breaking down the traditional narrative conventions, challenging the expectations of readers and offering new perspectives on the psychology of characters. Symbolism will also be explored, as its meticulous use helps to deepen the characters' psychological analysis: the writer manages to penetrate the interior of her characters as each symbol is a key that opens the doors of their emotions and their inner conflicts, allowing the reader to explore the intricate labyrinth of the human mind. Each

object, place or situation becomes a vehicle through which the writer explores the emotional sphere of her characters. Through symbolism, Katherine Mansfield manages to communicate her characters' moods, their psychological tensions, and their relational dynamics in an impalpable but powerful way. The psychological analysis of Mansfield's short stories becomes a journey into the labyrinth of human mind where symbolism acts as a guide, illuminating the connections between mind and experience. The research will be based on an in-depth analysis of the selected short stories, examining in detail the characters, their relationships, and their emotional dynamics, with the aim of exploring their psychological depths to capture the darkest and hidden nuances of human nature. The worlds of characters such as Bertha Young in *Bliss*, Leila in *Her First Ball*, Fenella in *The Voyage* or Laura in *The Garden Party* will be explored, underlining how these women are facing complex emotions and feelings. The ambitions that animate them and the fears that torment them will be explored with an emphasis on the message that Mansfield intends to convey with their experiences: to reveal the universal truths about the human soul through her ability to capture the essence of what makes us human. The first chapter will provide an overview of Katherine Mansfield's life. Subsequently the literary background of the author's work will be analyzed, briefly observing the works that help define her unmistakable style, and lastly, the core of the thesis will be developed in the following chapters, focusing on the psychological analysis of the characters in Mansfield's works. In conclusion, this analysis will summarize the key findings, emphasizing the significant psychological approach of Katherine Mansfield and its implications for interpreting her works in the literary context.

CHAPTER 1. KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS

1.1 Biography

Kathleen[1] Mansfield Beauchamp was born on 14 October 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand into a wealthy and well-respected family at 11 Tinakori Road and she was the third of six children. She had two older sisters, Vera, and Charlotte, two younger sisters, Jeanne, and Gwendoline, who unfortunately died when she was only two months old, and a younger brother, Leslie. The origins of her parents were predominantly British, but both were born in Australia. Her father, Harold Beauchamp, was an ambitious and vigorous man who came to New Zealand at the age of two with his father, who left a failed career in Australia to start a new life in New Zealand. At the age of eighteen, Harold began working as a clerk in Wellington where he made his fortune becoming the Chairman of the Board of the Bank of New Zealand. He played a significant role in Wellington's business community and in 1923 he was knighted for his financial services. Katherine's mother, Annie Beauchamp, formerly Annie Burnell Dyer, belonged to a family of successful entrepreneurs: her father was an insurance clerk, and she was the sister of an employee at the insurance company where young Harold began his ascent to financial success. After her birth in 1864, her family moved to New Zealand, where her father established a branch of an Australian insurance company in Wellington. Annie first met Harold when she was thirteen and after a long courtship, they married in 1884.

She is also described as fastidious and delicate, and what we know of her behavior suggests that she was cool - or possibly cold - and could be formidable. Appearances were very important to her. […] Katherine noted early in her journal how her mother told her father 'What he must do and not do' in a social setting. […] She was good at giving orders to her servants; her pleasures were reading, letter-writing and travel. Whenever she could she accompanied her husband on his journeys, and she was perfectly happy to travel alone, given the chance. […] Beauchamp too was a stickler for correct appearances; it is said that his children were obliged to take a cold bath every day, and he himself, with his prominent blue eyes and ruddy complexion, had the fresh look of a

[1] Originally, the writer's name was Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp. She later decided to use "Katherine Mansfield" as her pen name.

man who, having recently emerged from a cold bath, had anointed himself liberally with Eau de Cologne. […] He might be vulgar, crass, tight-fisted, but he was also strong, reliable and magically rich.[2]

It was a family with a fair amount of good manners and as the daughters of a very successful man and woman, Katherine and her sisters were required to be interested and engaged in what was expected of a Victorian lady - mostly involved in activities dealing with servants, flowers, parties, clothes, music and reading - but she was different, she was a troubled child, difficult, rebellious, loving and oversensitive, intense in her feelings, humiliated by being fat and jealous of others' friendships or success. Katherine's best friend, Marion, wrote that «she was silent as she so often was when her sisters were present». In 1893 the Mansfield family moved to the rural suburb of Kaori, outside the city, to give the children the experience of country life and the pleasant Kaori country house where Katherine Mansfield spent part of her childhood was named Chesney Wold. This is where she spent the happiest years of her childhood, and the memories of these moments would inspire her short story *Prelude*. Here, along with her sisters, Katherine Mansfield attended the Kaori Primary School, where she learned to read and write and began to develop an interest in books, something in which she found not only a refuge, but also a source of inspiration when it came to making observations on the world around her: «her observation was as acute as though she had trained herself to examine and retain everything she saw. She called herself a squirrel, storing up her impressions»[3]. In 1898, she attended Wellington Girls' High School, where she met her best friend, Marion. In the mornings the girls focused on formal work, in the afternoons they engaged in drawing, poetry, swimming and sewing but since Katherine detested sewing, she opted to read aloud whenever it was possible, and she also created the school magazine writing stories

[2] Tomalin, Claire. *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*. New York, Penguin Books, 1988, page 10.
[3] Ibidem, page 14.

about children's amusements and Christmas. In June 1900, Harold Beauchamp enrolled his daughters at Miss Swainson's fee-paying school, which focused on etiquette rather than academic abilities. In this school Katherine was not popular and she faced the disapproval from her teachers because her essays were too long, messy, badly spelled, and self-centered. After high school, in 1903, the Beauchamp family sailed to England, where she completed her education at Queen's College London where discipline was more relaxed, uniforms were not required, and girls could concentrate on their favorite subjects. That's why Katherine soon decided to study German, French, English, singing, and cello, a profession she believed she would take up professionally, but her interest in writing soon took over as she began contributing to the college newspaper with such dedication that she eventually became an editor. She was particularly interested in the works of the French Symbolists and Oscar Wilde, and she was appreciated among her peers for her lively and charismatic approach to life and work. Her most significant meeting at Queen's College occurred upon her arrival. After the interview with Miss Croudace, Ida Baker, an English girl with an Anglo-Indian background, was chosen to accompany Katherine to their shared room. From that moment a lifelong friendship began. Katherine considered London as vibrant, artistic, full of opportunities and intriguing people, she tried to remain in Europe, a continent she considered perfect for her future, but, after her studies, her family returned to New Zealand in mid-October 1906. Shortly after her arrival, in January 1907, on New Year's Eve, Katherine experienced the unexpected death of her grandmother, with whom she had had a close connection since her childhood. This was Katherine's first experience of facing the pain of death, which left her unprepared and distressed but, overall, 1907 was a very intense year in which she seriously began writing short stories and publishing several works in the *Native Companion*, her first paid writing work, and it was also the first time she used

her pseudonym, Katherine Mansfield. The real turning point for Mansfield came in the summer of 1908, when she sailed again to London. When she arrived in London, she found a welcoming environment that embraced new artistic ideas and perspectives, in contrast to her family's more conservative upbringing in New Zealand. The London society she entered was adventurous, unconventional and in contrast to the traditional values of previous generations. After a seven-week trip, Katherine settled into a luxury room with a balcony at the Paddington student residence where she appreciated and enjoyed the atmosphere of this house full of musicians where they could practice in their rooms. As she was attracted to writers and artists, it was not surprising that just two weeks after her arrival in London, she embarked on a passionate relationship with Garnet Trowell, a musician she had met in New Zealand and the twin brother of Tom Trowell, a young man Katherine had had feelings for in the past. Garnet's parents disapproved of their relationship, especially his father, and they soon broke up. However, she met and fell in love with George Bowden, a singing teacher eleven years older than her, and without any explanation she decided to marry him. The wedding day was set for March 2nd, 1909, at the Paddington Registry Office and after that Katherine was due to move into Bowden's flat after a brief short honeymoon in a London hotel. At the wedding Katherine wore a black suit and hat, reflecting her somber feelings. Everything was going well until they arrived at their hotel where Katherine left her husband suddenly that evening, under mysterious circumstances, without informing anyone. Her emotions and motives for marrying and then leaving him remained unknown to him although he thought it was a sign of her lesbianism. News of Katherine's marriage and the subsequent breakup quickly reached her parents in Wellington. When Katherine's mother found out about the marriage, she immediately headed from New Zealand to London and she blamed the breakup of the marriage with Bowden on a lesbian relationship between her daughter and

one of her friends and quickly sent Katherine to the spa town of Bad Wörishofen in Bavaria, where Mansfield had a miscarriage. It is not known whether her mother knew about this, but as soon as she returned to New Zealand, she cut Katherine out of her will. This period led to the creation of the short story collection *In a German Pension*, which is clearly influenced by her time in Germany. Katherine continued to have male lovers, but she was also infatuated with women, and she had two romantic relationships with women that are notable for their prominence in her journal entries. Her first homosexual romantic relationship was with Maata Mahupuku, sometimes known as Martha Grace, a young Māori woman. She often referred to Maata as Charlotte and wrote about her in several stories. The second affair was with Edith Kathleen Bendall, and Katherine professed her adoration in her diaries. In December, Katherine moved back to London and in March 1910, suffering from peritonitis, she had to go to a nursing home to have surgery. Her left fallopian tube was infected with gonococci and had to be removed. The painful journey was agonizing for Katherine as she documented in her journal: «I remember that when I thought of the pain of being stretched out, I use to cry. Every time, I felt it again, and winced, and it was unbearable». She also experienced terrible pains she attributed to rheumatic fever, unaware it was actually gonorrhea.

> Evidently this is exactly what happened: soon afterwards, she began to suffer from gonorrhoeal arthritis, which affected her hip joints, feet, hands and back at various time. Then, one after another, she suffered the symptoms of systemic gonorrhoea: her periods were markedly irregular, allowing her to believe herself pregnant more than once; she became infertile; after peritonitis, she began to suffer from heart trouble and then later repeated attacks of pleurisy. These attacks have been described as warning signs of impending tuberculosis of the lung, which no doubt they were, but they were also very possibly one of the effects of the gonorrhoea.[4]

After her surgery, Katherine's recovery was gradual. When she had sufficiently recovered, her friend Ida Baker took her to the seaside for further recuperation and she rented rooms above a shop in Rottingdean, a coastal town in Sussex situated midway between Brighton

[4] Tomalin, Claire, *cit.*, page 77.

and Newhaven. One of the most significant events in Mansfield's life was marked by her encounter with John Middleton Murry, whom she met in 1911 during a dinner arranged by Willy George, a poet and novelist. J. M. Murry was an Oxford undergraduate who was working as an editor for the *Rhythm* magazine and after their first meeting, where he believed that Katherine was everything he had expected and more, he immediately wrote to her, suggesting she should write reviews for *Rhythm* and asking for more of her work. They soon developed romantic feelings for each other, and their mutual love for literature and writing led them to a romantic relationship in which they discussed books in the evenings, and they exchanged thoughts about authors and philosophers. Katherine described their love as very childish; «they were happy and busy, with brilliant hopes for their future»[5], but once again, Katherine found herself facing the disapproval of the parents of the man she loved. Murry's effort to introduce Katherine to his family ended predictably badly. After her one visit to Nicosia Road in Wandsworth, his mother and aunt showed up at Clovelly Mansions to try to physically separate him from the risky married woman but in response Murry pushed them out and did not see them again until 1914. Things seemed to be going well for Katherine, and she began to think about getting a divorce from Bowden. They discussed the possibility of an American divorce, but they concluded that it would not be recognized in England, and she was unwilling to divorce as the guilty party, a process that would inevitably put her name in the newspapers. Although nothing had been resolved and no decisions had been made, Katherine and Murry had a brief "honeymoon" in Paris in May. After returning to London, the couple grew tired of city life and began dreaming of a country home. They quickly discovered a charming house in the village of Runcton, complete with a walled garden and trees. 'The two tigers', as they were called by friends, were deeply connected to each other.

[5] Tomalin, Claire, *cit.*, page 104.

Mansfield's writings experienced significant development over the next two years, with publications focusing on New Zealand subjects. However, there were financial concerns and frequent address changes. Together the couple edited *Rhythm* and its successor, the *Blue Review*, but were unable to prevent Murry's bankruptcy, which followed their stay in Paris in late 1913. In 1914, Mansfield and Murry spent several months living in the English countryside where they became close friends with D. H. and Frieda Lawrence, who played a significant role in their lives and were best man and maid of honor at their wedding. They were neighbors and they shared a lot of time together exchanging friends, organizing magazines, establishing club rooms and communal living spaces, conversing, arguing, and complaining. She slowly developed a friendship with Virginia Woolf, who initially found Katherine Mansfield «cheap and hard in her manner, unpleasant but forcible and utterly unscrupulous»[6] but then, in late July 1917, she invited her to dinner and after listening to her stories and adventures, she was impressed. They spent a weekend together in Asheham, and afterward Katherine Mansfield wrote a thank you letter praising Woolf's writing and mentioning that they had very similar goals as writers. Leonard, Virginia's husband, also approved of their friendship. Virginia Woolf wrote that «I was jealous of her writing. The only writing I have ever been jealous of». By the middle of December 1917, at the age of 29, Katherine was very ill and was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis.

> Her bones aching till she felt a 'crawling thing without the power of doing anything except cursing my fate', her temperature soaring, Ida irritating her with cups of hot milk, the doctor on the way. 'Dry pleurisy', said the doctor […]. He bound up her chest and told her she must stay in bed. […] The next day she wrote to Murry at Garsington, where he was staying for Christmas again, that she had a 'SPOT' in her right lung; that she must go to the south of France; that she could not work; and that she wished they could be married before she went.[7]

[6] Tomalin, Claire, *cit.*, page 161.
[7] Ibidem, page 163.

It remains uncertain, however, when the illness really began, Tomalin believes the beginning related to D.H. Lawrence. Katherine was often in close proximity to the Lawrences during the war, sharing meals and occasionally staying overnight at their cottage. Lawrence suffered from tuberculosis, and while his wife Frieda and Murry were able to fight the disease due to their strong immune systems, Katherine, who was not strong enough and susceptible to illness, was not so lucky. Unsure about the best treatment, she searched for different doctors and accommodations moving from one place to another and writing became a way for her to escape the reality of death. Despite her shortness of breath and the rapid shift from enthusiasm to depression and exhaustion, her writing revealed an incredible strength and energy. On May 2, 1918, the much-anticipated divorce was finalized, allowing Katherine and Murry to get married the next day at Kensington Register Office on Marloes Road. After the wedding, during a few months in the Spring and Summer of 1918, she joined her friend Anne Estelle Rice, an American painter, in Looe, Cornwall, hoping to recover. Virginia sent her letters and flowers. Murry went to Cornwall for a week's holiday, where Katherine booked him a separate room. This could be to avoid exposing him to her tuberculosis or to protect him from witnessing her pain. From mid-July to August, she lived in a hot and modest neighborhood in Chelsea and experienced periods of fever and difficulty in walking. A doctor also gave her electrotherapy for her joint pain. Over the course of the Fall, she saw at least four doctors, the first of whom told her she needed to go to a sanatorium, and he told her that if she didn't follow that advice, she only had four years to live. Rejecting the idea of staying in a sanatorium for the fact that this would cut her out from writing, she moved abroad to avoid the English winter. On Virginia's recommendation, she consulted a doctor who confirmed that both lungs were tuberculous and recommended spending a year in Switzerland. In May 1921, accompanied by her friend Ida, she travelled to Switzerland

to investigate the tuberculosis treatment of the Swiss bacteriologist Henri Spahlinge. It was a highly productive period of Mansfield's writing, for she felt she did not have much time left. In February 1922, she went to Paris to have a controversial X-ray treatment from the Russian physician Ivan Manoukhin. The treatment was expensive and caused unpleasant side effects without improving her condition. In October she moved to Fontainebleau, France, where she lived at G. I. Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, where she was put under the care of Olgivanna Lazovitch Hinzenburg. As a guest rather than a pupil of Gurdjieff, Mansfield was not required to take part in the rigorous routine of the institute, but she spent much of her time there with her mentor Alfred Richard Orage. Mansfield suffered a fatal pulmonary hemorrhage on 9th January 1923, after running up the stairs. After walking upstairs to her room, her cough got worse and there was nobody who could help her. She died within the hour.

> In the evening he and Katherine sat in the saloon; at about ten she said she would go to bed. Her room was on the first floor. As she went up the stairs, she began to cough. Murry took her arm to help her. In her room, her cough became worse and 'suddenly a great gush of blood poured from her mouth. It seemed to be suffocating her. She gasped out "I believe… I'm going to die." Murry put her on the bed and rushed for a doctor. The two who came immediately pushed him out of the room, although, as he always remembered, 'her eyes were imploring me'. A few minutes later, and she was dead. [8]

Murry telegraphed Ida and she arrived the next day. The funeral took place at the Protestant church in Fontainebleau, attended by Murry, Ida, Orage and Katherine's sisters Charlotte and Jeanne. She was buried at Cimetière d'Avon, near Fontainebleau. Because Murry forgot to pay for her funeral expenses, she initially was buried in a pauper's grave; when matters were rectified, her casket was moved to its current resting place. The grave was covered by a large stone slab bearing as epitaph a quote from Shakespeare's Harry Hotspur, which Katherine loved, in a font designed by Richard Murry. «But I tell you, my

[8] Tomalin, Claire, *cit.*, page 237.

lord fool: out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety». The inscription reads: "Katherine Mansfield, wife of John Middleton Murry, 1888-1923."

1.2 Historical Context

Although Katherine Mansfield was born in the 19th century, her life and literary career took place mainly in the 20th century, but she did not live beyond 1923 because of her untimely death. The 20th century in England was a period of extraordinary transformations, shaped by epochal events that deeply affected the history and culture of the country. The 20th century marked an era of profound change in Britain, encompassing a turbulent process of political, social, economic, and cultural change. During this century Britain faced unprecedented challenges and opportunities that reshaped the country and left an indelible mark on its history. The century began with Britain at the height of its imperial power, as British imperial dominion seemed indisputable; however, the First World War would soon radically change this panorama. «It was the most traumatic event the British had ever experienced. It closed the door on the secure nineteenth century and opened the way to the uncertainties of the twentieth»[9]. At midnight on August 4, 1914, Britain entered the First World War and Katherine Mansfield, like many others, experienced the hardships of the conflict over the next four years. Through the loss of friends and loved ones, she witnessed firsthand the devastation caused by the conflict which had a profound and lasting impact on her life and writing. The war shattered the illusion of stability and revealed the fragility of human existence, leading Mansfield to explore themes of mortality and disillusionment. During the war she traveled through France several times, including in 1915, when she crossed the French war zone. She

[9] Bisson Douglas, Roberts Clayton, Roberts F. David. *A History of England, Volume 2 (1688 to the Present)*, London, Routledge, 2016, page 428.

witnessed the gradual decline of the places she knew and the effects of the gassings. In March 1918, while traveling from southern France, where she had spent the winter, she was caught in the bombing of Paris as she testified in one of her letters:

> I came out of the restaurant last night into *plein noir* – all the cafés shut, all the houses. Couldn't understand it. Looked up and saw a very lovely aeroplane with blue lights ("couleur d'espoir", said an old man, pointing to it) and at the door of the hotel was met by the manager and made to descend to the *caves*. There had been an *alerte*. About 50 people came, and there we stayed more than long enough. It was a cold place, and I was tired. At eight this morning as I lay in bed – bang! whizz! – off they went again. I washed and dressed and just had time to get downstairs before the cannons started. Well, that *alerte n'est pas encore finie*. It's now 3.45! Most of the shops are shut – all the post offices – the shops that are not quite have a hole in the shutters, and you put your arms over your head and *dive* through. (*Letters* 117-118)[10]

In Mansfield's letter, the tension between the haste and sense of urgency created by the alert and the complete cessation of daily life is evident, suggesting that time and space are becoming saturated with the ongoing conflict. The atmosphere resulting from this situation changed Katherine Mansfield's life and literary work. As Alice Borrego confirms in her essay "*The time has come for a new word": Katherine Mansfield's Literary Ethics*, Katherine Mansfield felt that it was her duty as an artist to reflect the changes caused by war in her works so that people would remember the upheavals of the time. Her critical writings illuminate her moral reaction to the war and to the creation of literature. That her stories should somehow reflect the war is clear from her reviews of other people's books. From April 1919 to December 1920, she was a book reviewer for the *Athenaeum*, whose editor was Middleton Murry. In these reviews, Katherine often commented on the influence that the war had, or should have had, on literature. In October 1920, she wrote to her husband:

> You know there are moments when I want to make an appeal to all our generation who do believe that the war has changed everything to come forward and let's start a crusade. But I know, darling, I am not a crusader and it's my job to dwell apart and write my best for those that come after. (*Letters* 282)[11]

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[10] Borrego, Alice. *"The time has come for a new word": Katherine Mansfield's Literary Ethics*, *e-Rea* [Online], 2020 http://journals.openedition.org/erea/9596

[11] Ibidem.

In October 1915, her younger brother, Leslie Beauchamp, was killed, at only 21, during a grenade training exercise while serving with the British Expeditionary Force at Ypres Salient, Belgium. He was teaching his men how to use a grenade when it exploded in his hand, killing not only Leslie but also his sergeant. After this tragic event, the writer, in some of her works, began to take refuge in nostalgic reminiscences of their childhood in New Zealand. In a poem directly dedicated to her brother, in which she describes a dream she had shortly after his death[12], she wrote:

By the remembered stream my brother stands
Waiting for me with berries in his hands...
"These are my body. Sister, take and eat."[13]

Her loss was followed by the loss of several of her friends, as John Middleton Murry explained: «None of Katherine's friends who had gone to war came back from the war alive». (Journal 107).

1.3 Literary Context

Katherine Mansfield emerged during a period of great literary upheaval in the early 20th century. The literary context to which she belongs is deeply rooted in the modernist movement that swept through literature in the early twentieth century. Modernism was a reaction to the social, political and technological changes that determined the pre-First World War period and the industrial and communication rapid advances. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of artistic and literary avant-gardes spread all over Europe, and their common objective was the general renewal of forms. The need for modernity had already emerged in previous decades, but this need now becomes a deliberate program of groups and movements, is transformed into manifestos

[12] In this dream Katherine and her brother were in Berlin without passports, having lunch in the waiting room of a railway station with several German soldiers just back from the front.
[13] Katherine Mansfield, *To L.H.B*

proclaiming projects and soliciting adhesions. Modernity becomes modernism, a desire for renewal. Before delving into the characteristics of this literary period, we should understand what is meant by "modernism". As Laura Winkiel writes in the book *Modernism - The basics*, «modernism has meant, and continues to mean, many different things to many different people, depending on the criteria they use and the objects they select»[14]. She claims that the term "modernism" was originally used to describe experimental French visual art circles associated with the bohemian subcultures of the 1850s and 1860s. However, its use soon spread to French avant-garde poets and prose writers like Arthur Rimbaud who declared, in 1873, that one must be "absolutely modern!". The term traveled across the English Channel, most notably in 1908, when the poet and critic T. E. Hulme declared in his *Lecture on Modern Poetry* that he had 'no reverence for tradition' and he referred to Imagist poetry and techniques as 'extreme modernist'. Moreover, as Maurice Beebe explains in his journal article *Introduction: What Modernism Was,* the term modernism presents particular difficulties. Many people continue to view literary history in terms of classical, medieval, and modern periods. They assume that "modernism" covers the last five or six centuries and may not appreciate that we use the term to refer to a period that is only a small part of that time span. Actually, as Bernard Bergonzi states in the *History of Literature in the English Language. The twentieth century,* «the word 'modern' is increasingly used to refer to a particular period – that is to say, the years between 1900 and 1930 – and the kind of writing that flourished at that time»[15]. By the mid-1930s the term was used to describe different tendencies, attitudes, beliefs, and works of art of varying quality and significance, yet united in spirit and sometimes in concept. «Modernism can be understood, then, as an early twentieth-

[14] Winkiel, A. Laura. Modernism - The basics, London, Routledge, 2017, page 8.
[15] Bergonzi, Bernard. *History of Literature in the English Language. The Twentieth Century*. Vol 7, London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1970, page 17.

century cultural movement that strove to achieve a new consciousness about the experiences of modernity through new forms of artistic expression»[16]

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies it as the term for 'any of various movements in art, architecture, literature, etc., generally characterized by a deliberate break with classical and traditional forms or methods of expression'. The OED provides examples of the term "modernism" since 1879, but as we have already mentioned, the decisive year is 1908. The periodization of Modernism is an interesting topic because various dates have been proposed by scholars; 1890 is proposed as a reasonable beginning date and is the most frequently accepted date in the canon of literary history. The modernists themselves put forward further theories about the beginning of modernism as they recognized that their work was significantly different from earlier works and that they could see with remarkable clarity the change in mood and attitude at the turn of the century. Among these authors, the most famous is Virginia Woolf, who stated in 1924 that «on or about December 1910 human character changed»[17]. Traditionally, modernist scholars consider the period from 1890 to 1910 as the prehistory of modernism, when few artists and writers experimented with new forms, especially in France. The period from 1910 to 1930 is known as "high" modernism and refers to the time when some of the most famous modernist works such as *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* were produced. The development also lasted until the 1950s, the "late" modernism, which presupposed the gradual disappearance of modernism in favor of postmodernism. Two periods can be distinguished in English modernism: the pre-war period, which began in 1907 with Hulme's Image School and continued until the most prominent phase in 1914-1915, and

[16] Walz, Robin. *Modernism*, London, Routledge, 2013, page 4.
[17] Woolf, Virginia, Character in Fiction, Essays of Virginia Woolf, in Andrew McNeillie (ed.), *Essays of Virginia Woolf*, to be six vols., quoted in Whitworth, page 23.

the postwar period, culminating in its annus mirabilis in 1922 and continued into the thirties.

> The basic story about modernism goes like this: something extraordinary happened in the arts around the beginning of the twentieth century. This new art was chaotic and fragmented in its form, and allusive and indirect in what it meant. It was often difficult to understand because it was so fragmented, allusive and indirect in what it meant. Though only a small group of artists and writers practiced this groundbreaking art, it gradually became central to the study of the literature and painting during this time period. It came to be called "modernism" – meaning "the new and the now.[18]

According to Anna Anselmo, the art of that era was animated by the fundamental struggle to renew it. This meant that in poetry one could break metrical conventions by using free verse; in prose, modernists' attempts at radical renewal were expressed in the need to represent human subjectivity in all its intangible complexities, as well as the human mind and soul. «All in all, modernist writing is rich in irreverence and known for its experimentation, its complexity, its formalism, and for its attempt to create a tradition of the new»[19]. Michael Whitworth, a professor at Oxford University, identifies some important features that characterize modernist writing. First, modernist writing is complex: it uses a wide range of cultural, literary, and linguistic references, is verbally ambiguous and paradoxical, and sometimes aims to disorient the reader by removing conventional literary devices, complicating the process of understanding the text. Modernist writings are known for their fearless experimentation with the category of time. Time is no longer managed linearly as in realist writings, and the most obvious consequence is that greater attention and active participation from the reader, who must strive for reconstruction and chronological understanding, is needed. Modernist literature is primarily concerned with the mind rather than the body and is concerned with the representation of inner thoughts and their effects on the physical self. It illustrates the

[18] Winkiel, A. Laura, *cit.*, page 6.
[19] Anselmo, Anna. *Modernism*, Milano, EDUCatt Università Cattolica, 2009, page 4.

difference between personal consciousness and social behavior. This awareness is reflected stylistically in techniques such as indirect or direct free speech and the use of inner monologues and streams of consciousness. Katherine Mansfield can be placed in this literary context. One of her notable contributions to the modernist canon is her use of the stream of consciousness: in stories such as *The Garden Party* and *Miss Brill*, Mansfield uses this technique to deepen the complexities of her characters' mind, capturing the subtle nuances of human consciousness and emotion. In addition, she also uses the theme of alienation, a common topic in modernist literature. The sense of separation and disillusionment that pervaded society at that time is expressed in Mansfield's work. In stories such as *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* and *Prelude*, she explores the insulating effects that social norms and customs have on individuals, particularly women, and she describes the tension between individual desires and social expectations. Mansfield's exploration of the theme of identity and fluidity is another aspect that places her in the modernist movement. The characters in her stories often explore themes such as self-discovery, identity, and instability in a rapidly changing world. This is particularly evident in works such as *Bliss* and *The Doll's House*, in which the characters deal with the reality of their perceptions and the changing nature of their identities. Mansfield's acute observations of human behavior, her ability to capture the complexities of everyday life, her innovative narrative methods and her exploration of psychological depth reflect the greatest concerns of modernity.

1.4 Main works

Despite her tragically short life, Mansfield's contribution to literature continues to be celebrated for its enduring relevance and influence; she produced a substantial body of work that has left an indelible mark on the literary world. Her work is based on a collection of seemingly simple short stories, experimenting with new literary techniques that have exerted an important influence on the evolution of the short story in English. In her writing Mansfield breaks away from the conventions of nineteenth-century fiction by eliminating the narrator's independent voice and reducing plot to a minimum. Her focus is on the inner world rather than on external action, and much of the narration is within the minds of her characters. Although she spent most of her adult life in England and France after leaving New Zealand in 1908 at the age of nineteen, Mansfield's New Zealand ancestry was a major creative influence and the source of many of her best stories. Her poems such as *The Sea Child*, *A Little Boy's Dream* and *Sea Song* as well as her short stories such as *At the Bay* and *Prelude* clearly show the influence of New Zealand. The way it is portrayed significantly influences the readers' overall mood and perception of the characters and narrators. It continued to be more than just the place of her birth; she preserved it through literature, drawing on its inherent beauty and atmosphere. Furthermore, Mansfield's memories and thoughts are influenced not only by nature, but also by her family, especially her grandmother and brother. Shortly after her arrival in London she soon began to publish short stories in A. R. Orage's *New Age,* «a journal whose political project at the time was to endorse a form of non- progressivist anti-capitalist and anti-democratic socialism known as distributionism»[20]. Some of Mansfield's *New Age* stories were published in 1911 in a book form under the title *In a German Pension*. It is her first collection of short stories largely inspired by her

[20] During, Simon. "Katherine Mansfield's World." *Journal of New Zealand Literature (JNZL)*, no. 33, 2015, pp. 33–66. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43303617

experiences in Bavaria, Germany, where she lived for a time. Among the short stories collected in this book we can mention *Germans at Meat* and *The Luft Bad*, in which Mansfield caustically parodies German attitudes toward food and digestive systems, or *The Baron* in which she criticizes snobbery. As her biography shows, in 1913 Katherine spent parts of her life in Paris and during this time she wrote only a story titled *Something Childish but Very Natural*, a short story that explores the transition between innocent childhood and becoming an adolescent, which acknowledges the physical aspects of human relationships. It describes a young couple, Henry, and Edna, who discover their ideal cottage in the English countryside and embodies Mansfield's own desire for a stable domestic life. A huge change in her writing took place in October 1915 after her brother's death. Since that moment she felt that she should write about her native country because there is where she spent her happiest childhood days with her brother. During this period, Mansfield's writing was most notable for the first part of her story, *The Aloe*, which she later revised and turned into one of her most famous works, entitled *Prelude*. It is her longest composition, and it is a semi-autobiographical story that explores the early years of her life in New Zealand, and it represents a significant turning point in the development of her creative process. «In April 1917, for *Hogarth Press* publication, Virginia Woolf asked Mansfield for a story and was offered *The Aloe*. Mansfield spent the summer re-writing the long short story, which came out entitled *Prelude* in July 1918».[21] As Patrick D. Morrow writes in *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*, Katherine Mansfield's *Prelude* was a long-term project that accompanied her throughout her life, generating numerous controversies after her death. Mansfield began writing the story around the age of sixteen, and although she submitted a copy to Leonard and Virginia Woolf, she continued to work

[21] Séllei, Nóra. "'The detached existence of art': Mansfield's 'The Aloe' versus 'Prelude' and Wollf's theory of fiction.", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS), vol. 1, no. 2, 1995, pp. 75–84. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41273898, page 75.

on it until the end of her days. This early version was longer and more detailed, encompassing a wide range of situations. Mansfield originally conceived *The Aloe* as a kind of short novel full of details and digressions. However, she felt that the manuscript failed to convey the emotions and inner dynamics of her characters with the necessary intensity and precision, so she undertook a revision to transform the original manuscript into a more concise and focused narrative. This process of reduction and concentration allowed Mansfield to eliminate the superfluous, intensifying the emotional and thematic impact of the narrative and reducing the length of the text to sharpen the psychological portrait of the main characters. The fragmentary episodic structure of *Prelude* is a direct result of these revisions. The story is divided into twelve parts, each focusing on a specific event or character's point of view. These passages do not follow a strict chronological order, but are linked thematically and emotionally, forming a story that moves back and forth in time and space. This approach allows the author to capture the complexity of family dynamics and the character's individual experiences. The main characters through whom the story is told include Linda Burnell, her mother Mrs. Fairfield, her sister Beryl, and her daughters Isabel, Lottie, and Kezia. Each section explores their inner perceptions and reflections, offering a multifaceted look at their lives and interactions. The internal focus on female characters allows Mansfield to explore themes such as domestic dissatisfaction, emotional isolation, and the desire for autonomy. The narrative explores the dynamics and personal challenges of Burnell family members following their move from the city of Wellington to the countryside[22], an event that marks the beginning of a series of changes in the family's life.

Although the experiences of the characters are centered around the move from Wellington to the country, Mansfield's focus is not on the move itself but how each character reacts to it. The children perceive the move as an adventure, yet Linda Burnell seems listless and indifferent. Her

[22] Autobiographical reference. In 1893 Mansfield's family moved from Wellington to the rural suburb of Kaori to give children the experience of country life.

sister, Beryl Fairfield, on the other hand, sees it as an end of her chances for freedom through marriage and subsequent financial independence from her brother-in-law. Stanley Burnell, despite the inconvenient distance from town, is proud of his acquisition, and his mother-in-law is looking forward to the bounty of the country home's gardens.[23]

Each character responds in a way that reflects their personality, desires, and inner conflicts. The first edition of *Prelude* did not receive the critical attention it deserved until 1920, when it was included in Mansfield's second short story collection, *Bliss* whose title is also the title of one of the stories of the collection. It is a short story that explores the feelings of the Bertha Young, who discovers during an elegant, London dinner party that her husband has been unfaithful to her. On Sunday, January 11, 1920, Katherine wrote *The Man Without a Temperament* which she finished that same evening. In 1921 it was described in Desmond MacCarthy's *New Statesman* as the finest story in *Bliss*, along with *Prelude*. During her literary career, Katherine Mansfield «reveals her determination to write with greater honesty and integrity by ruthlessly exposing the weaknesses of the central, female figure, whose faults are very similar to her own»[24]. Short stories such as *The Young Girl*, *The Singing Lesson*, *The Stranger*, *Miss Brill*, *Poison*, *The Lady's Maid*, *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, and *Life of Ma Parker.* trace this phase of her literal activity.

Each one is a study of an aspect of female experience. In 'The Young Girl', Mansfield explores the expectancy and optimism of youth; in 'Miss Brill', 'The Lady's Maid', and 'Life of Ma Parker' she portrays female poverty and loneliness; in 'The Singing Lesson' she examines a broken engagement; and in 'The Stranger' she describes the estrangement of a married couple after many months of separation. The most celebrated story of this group, however, is 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', which is the tale of two sisters whose lives have been overshadowed by their domineering father. The model for the most timid of the sisters, Constantia, is Ida, whose own father was an irascible Indian Army doctor. The story is built up from a series of scenes in which the sisters' world is revealed through their relationships with different people. The narration alternates between flashbacks to the past and scenes in the present.[25]

[23] Morrow, Patrick, D., *cit.*, page 50.
[24] Woods, Joanne. *Katherine Mansfield, 1888-1923*, 2007, page 84. https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/kotare/article/download/776/585/680
[25] Ibidem, page 84.

Katherine Mansfield was undoubtedly pleased by the public recognition of her abilities, but, despite the success of *Bliss*, she had financial concerns due to her medical bills, and for this reason she accepted a commission from the editor of the *Sphere*. These stories were written under pressure and among them we can mention *An Ideal Family*, *Marriage à la Mode'*, *Her First Ball* which describes the emotions of a young girl who encounters a cynical, older man at her first ball and *The Voyage,* a story that follows a young girl, Fenella, as she embarks on a journey with her grandmother, exploring themes of innocence and loss. After writing for nine hours on September 10, 1921, Katherine finished a continuation of *Prelude* that she named *At the Bay,* a story in twelve episodes, each of which revolves around a different character and their daily life in a coastal community set in New Zealand. During one of Mansfield's most productive periods, from September 1921 to January 1922, she wrote eight more stories, four of which remained unfinished. It was around this time that she wrote two of her best-known New Zealand stories: *The Garden Party*, which became the title of her third collection, and *The Doll's House. The Garden Party* explores the themes of class distinctions and social conventions through the lens of a garden party hosted by the Sheridan family; *The Doll's House* is a critical examination of the social hierarchy and childhood innocence, following the Burnell sisters as they receive a doll's house as a gift. Mansfield describes the cruelty of class discrimination inflicted on these two girls to highlight the inequalities of the society in which she grew up. In early February 1922 she wrote *The Fly*, a commentary on divine indifference and the tragedy of war. It is the story of a man, known as 'the boss', who drowns a fly in a pool of ink. She uses the fly's struggles as a metaphor for human helplessness and compares the fly's image to that of her deceased brother. *The Garden Party*, Mansfield's third collection, was published on February 22, 1922. It

contained fifteen short stories, including five of those written for the *Sphere*, and *At the Bay*. It was reprinted in March, April and May after becoming an instant success.

Reviews appeared in many of Britain's major newspapers and periodicals, where Mansfield's expanding literary range received favourable comment. In her review for the *New Statesman* of 18 March 1922, Rebecca West remarked on the poetic qualities of 'At the Bay' and described Mansfield's writing as being 'the conquest of prose by the logic of poetry'. She also commented on Mansfield's sharpened technique, noting that 'her choice of the incident that will completely and economically prove her point is astonishing'. The first American edition was published in May 1922 and was in its seventh reprint by the end of 1923.[26]

Public interest in Mansfield was further stimulated in 1927 with the publication of *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, carefully edited by Murry. 1928 saw the publication of *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* in two volumes. Mansfield gained a growing number of admirers as her writings became more widely published. Translations of her stories were published in several countries, most notably France, where her letters and diary were translated. In 1951 Murry published the full version of the letters, entitled *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry, 1913-1922*, and in 1954 a definitive edition of the *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*. Since the main subject of this thesis is the analysis of Katherine Mansfield's short stories, these will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

[26] Woods, Joanne, *cit.*, page 90.

CHAPTER 2. WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

2.1 The birth of the short story

The short story was first recognized as a distinct class of literature in 1842, when Poe's criticism of Hawthorne called attention to the new form of fiction. Short story writing had, however, been practiced for many years before that: perhaps the narratives of Homer and the tales of the first books of the Bible may be considered as the first examples; certainly, the short story is closely associated in its early history with narrative poems, allegorical tales, and mouth-to-mouth traditions. [27]

According to the author, the short story, a literary genre prized for its brevity and emotional impact, has a rich and diverse history dating back to the earliest recorded times and, as Paul March-Russell suggests, «to understand the artistic appeal of the short story, it is important to trace, first of all, the prehistory of the form»[28]. The origins of the short story can be found in ancient oral traditions of storytelling, in which the spoken word transmitted stories from generation to generation. The setting in which the story was told could vary, from a parent talking to his child, to a religious leader guiding a crowd, to a teacher addressing a class, to a storyteller entertaining an audience or to a friend exchanging anecdotes. These early tales were not only meant to entertain, but also to impart wisdom, cultural values, and philosophical insights. As James Nagel states:

these oral traditions are important in the formation of the genre of the "story" because they gave shape to how a tale could be told, how someone had to give voice to the account, how the events recited would be presented in a certain order and would somehow conclude in a satisfying way.[29]

Through a deeper examination of these stories, «readers had the opportunity to reflect about what values and traditions rest behind the actions of the characters»[30]. This helped readers to develop an appreciation for the cultural heritage these stories represented and the moral lessons they imparted. An important turning point in the evolution of the short

[27] Barrett, Charles Raymond. *Short Story Writing: A Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short Story*, New York, The Baker e Taylor Co, 1900, page 9.
[28] March-Russell, Paul. *The short story: an introduction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, page 13.
[29] Nagel, James. *The American Short Story Handbook*, Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, page 5.
[30] Ibidem, page 4.

story was the transition from oral to written narration. The development of writing systems has made it possible to record and preserve narratives, which have facilitated the dissemination and improvement of literary forms. The earliest examples of narrative texts, such as myths, legends, and epic tales, can be found in Mesopotamia on clay tablets dated to the third millennium B.C. Similarly, the tales of the gods, the pharaohs, and the valiant acts were preserved in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, which provided insights into the values and cultural beliefs of that period. Meanwhile, epic poems such as *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were immortalized by writers such as Homer, favoring a flourishing tradition of narrative written in ancient Greece. The moralizing animal fable also appeared at this time. The most notable example is *Aesop's Fables*, a collection of stories by the Greek author, whose earliest known collection dates from the fourth century B.C.E. Along with other literary forms, the short story continued to evolve in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, assuming new roles and dimensions that reflected the cultural and social context of the time. In Europe, allegorical tales gained popularity and some of the best examples of this can be found in *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, a masterpiece of English literature, presenting a group of pilgrims travelling from London to Canterbury each of which tells a short story. Chaucer's framing device provides an examination of medieval society, exploring themes such as love, chivalry, corruption, and moral ambiguity. Similarly, the works of Giovanni Boccaccio, such as the *Decameron*, which is a collection of one hundred stories told by ten young people trying to seek refuge from the devastating Black Death that occurred in Florence during the 14th century, explore the complexity of love, morality and human nature, illustrating the diversity of human experience and the ability of the human spirit to persevere while facing difficulties. Likewise, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Miguel de Cervantes published a collection of twelve short stories called *Novelas Ejemplares*, which offer an

early example of the author's ability to write stories in a versatile way. Investigating themes such as honor, deceit and the search for truth, these stories offer moral lessons and insights into the Spanish society of that period. Speaking about the 18th century, since England had established periodicals, literary journals and newspapers during the reign of Queen Anne, there were outlets for short fiction.

> The first publication in English of what might be regarded as a short story was Daniel Defoe's "A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal," which appeared in Britain in 1706. It recounts how the ghost of a woman who has died earlier that day nevertheless acts in a perfectly ordinary way in coming to tea with a close friend who has not heard about her demise. They have a pleasant chat. Although it has decided Gothic elements, this tale has a strong narrative line, dialogue, and a shocking ending when the truth of the situation is revealed.[31]

However, during this time, the short story genre was marked by a period of decline. The causes of this phenomenon were many, but the most significant were the emergence of the novel and a revived fascination with drama and poetry, the higher forms of classical antiquity; the popularity of drama was more exciting and sensational than that of the short story. The most fertile period for the short story was the 19th century, in fact, as Charles Raymond Barrett writes, «the short story as we know it today is a product of the nineteenth century and it owes its position in literature, if not its very existence, to the work of Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe»[32]. The genre of short stories experienced a significant transformation in the 19th century before taking on its present form; it had become a vibrant form which set the stage for the development of more sophisticated methods of storytelling in the decades to follow. The convergence of technological, social, and cultural elements contributed to this change, generating a greater demand for short but meaningful stories. This prompted the authors to try the form of the short story, they tried to condense the complexities of human experience into short but powerful narratives that were easy to read and understand for a wider audience through this creative

[31]Nagel, James, *cit*., page 12.
[32] Barrett, Charles Raymond, *op.cit*., page 9.

experimentation. Edgar Allan Poe, widely considered the progenitor of the modern genre of short stories, played a crucial role in its development through his narratives of suspense, terror, and mystery, emphasizing the importance of thematic, stylistic, and narrative unity with a singular focus. His early works exemplified this principle, demonstrating the potential for short stories to achieve a profound impact.

His postulations that a well-crafted tale should exhibit both thematic coherence and aesthetic congruence established a new standard for assessing the form, and his own work demonstrated that even within such rigorous standards fiction could be both entertaining and instructive.[33]

Along with Poe, the evolution of the short story during this period was also attributed to Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, an almost contemporary of Poe, were steeped in moral ideas while Poe's works were dominated by emotional effects. Hawthorne centered his creative pursuit on a single situation and gave the whole tale a unity of impression. Instead of elaboration and portrayal of external events he focused on symbolism and the psychological traits of the characters. His tales are almost allegorical with morals attached, but his attitude towards his material is that of an artist, detached, critical, sceptical.[34]

In the 19th century, the rise of realism as a literary movement also contributed to the short story's evolution, paving the way for its modern incarnation. Realist authors adopted a more multifaceted approach to the representation of human experience in an attempt to counter the idealized representations of the past that prevailed in romantic literature. They aimed to discover the complexities of human relationships, social hierarchies, and psychological dynamics by emphasizing everyday life aspects. Furthermore, the industrial revolution and urbanization during the 19th century had a significant impact on society, which was evident in the literary production of that period. Writers began to engage with themes that captured their uncertainty and discomfort about the rapid world's changes they were experiencing. Alienation, industrialization, and the breakdown of

[33] Nagel, James, *cit*., page 22.
[34] Manoram, Sen. The evolution and growth of short story, *Research Journal of English Language and Literature,* vol.4, issue 3, 2017, pp.332-337, http://www.rjelal.com/5.3.17a/332-337%20MANORAM%20SEN.pdf

traditional values were among these themes, which were fundamental to the literary movements of the time. In England, the rise of the short story

also brought with it a new interest in the internal workings of the form. In commentary by James, Frederick Wedmore, and Brander Matthews, among many others, we see developing the idea that the 'shortness' of the short story might be conceived of as, in Elizabeth Bowen's suggestive phrase, a 'positive' quality, rather than a matter merely of 'non extension'.[35]

During the 19th century various author used the short story to explore new narrative techniques and social issues. Thanks to the advent of periodicals, author such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy were able to use them not only to publish complete works, but also to publish a variety of short narratives that captured everyday life and social challenges. Dicken's *Sketches by Boz*, for example, is a compilation of short stories that were initially published in various newspapers and periodicals from 1833 to 1836. Moreover, «early in his career, Dickens tended to compose short stories as parts of larger projects, or as fillers for spare pages in the serial instalments of his novels. *Pickwick Papers*, for example, contains nine 'inset' tales within its narrative framework».[36] Another leading short story writer of this period is Thomas Hardy, who is considered «the poet of the short story»[37]; among his most important collection it has to be mentioned *A Group of Noble Dames*, a collection of ten stories each of which recounts the history of a noble dame and *Life's Little Ironies*, a series of tales focusing on the ironic twists of fate encountered by Hardy's characters. A standout story, *The Son's Veto*, explores themes of social class, love, sacrifice, and the limitations imposed by societal expectations. Elisabeth Gaskell also contributed to the use of the short story by retelling more melodramatic situations, such as in *The Squire's Story*, which tells the story of a highwayman and murderer who lives the life of a country gentleman, or in the ghostly

[35] Hunter, Adrian. *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, page 7.
[36] Ibidem, page 10.
[37] Beachcroft, O. T. *THE MODEST ART, A survey of the short story in English*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, page 145.

one *Old Nurse's Story*. Towards the end of the century, authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle introduced new narrative techniques and themes. With *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes,* Doyle revolutionized the mystery genre by using short story structure to construct intricate narrative puzzles that captured audiences' imaginations and stimulated critical thinking. This period not only consolidated the short story as an artistic form but also laid the foundation for further innovations in the twentieth century. During the 20th century, authors from all over the world experimented with new forms, themes and approaches to storytelling that led to a great variation and innovation in the genre of short stories. The literary production of this period was profoundly influenced by the advent of globalization, the emergence of totalitarian regimes and the consequences of the two World Wars. In this period of innovation and experimentation in the narrative genre, authors tried to reflect the complexities and contradictions of the turbulent century. In the early 20th century, literary modernists sought to challenge the conventions of narrative structure and character development in their works. These authors, such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Katherine Mansfield, sought to understand the human experience using unconventional methods such as fragmented narratives, nonlinear timelines, and stream-of-consciousness narration. These authors demonstrated the transformative potential of this literary genre through the innovative use of the short form, as in Joyce's *Dubliners*, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway,* and Mansfield's *The Garden Party*.

Virgina Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), is composed of chapters that Woolf thought of as individual stories. What this suggests is that the short story, while we may tend to think of it as the lesser fictional form, the apprentice piece to the novel, in fact played a fundamental role in the development of experimental modernist fiction. In Woolf's case, it was in the short story that she first began to devise the techniques of narration and characterization by which she hoped to render, more authentically than her Victorian predecessors, the texture of human consciousness and the nature of experience.[38]

[38] Hunter, Adrian, *cit.,* page 45.

These modernist writers were able to convey the complexities and ambiguities of the human condition in a way that was both aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating. The origins of the short story show the timeless ability of narratives to fascinate, enlighten and stimulate the mind. Its development was created by the evolution of cultures, eras, and continents, which brought with it a variety of stories that still fascinates readers today. Throughout its history, the short story has been transformed in order to adapt itself to shifting social, cultural, and technological contexts, from its beginnings to its current state. However, the fundamental purpose is still the same: to condense the human experience into brief but meaningful tales that have an impact on readers everywhere in time and space.

2.2 Aim and characteristics

> The term short story is applied to every piece of prose writing of 30,000 words or less, without regard to its matter, aim, or handling. […] A short story must lead up to something. It should have for its structure a plot, a bit of life, an incident such as you would find in a brief newspaper paragraph.... […], a story is something more than incidents and descriptions. It is a definite thing. It progresses constantly. It arrives somewhere. It must enforce some idea (no matter what). It must be such a reality that a man who read it would carry away a definite impression.[39]

According to the author, the term short story is used only to describe a short prose. It is a challenging form, with no room for complicated explanations, long descriptions, and superfluous dialogues. Typically, a short story has an incident at its center, a single plot, a single setting, a small cast of characters and covers a short period of time. Although it can also represent a character, a cause or convey a moral, the primary purpose is to amuse, which means the intellectual pleasure that comes from listening to a well told narrative. In order for a short story to be effective, it must feature a narrative capable of being conveyed through the use of characters, which are often drawn from real life and endowed

[39] Barrett, Charles Raymond, *cit*. page 12.

with a sense of humanity. Although the author may choose to include descriptive passages and vivid imagery, the primary focus of the short story is to bring these characters to life through their actions and interactions; there must be living beings who think or act to advance the story, the depiction of purely static scenes without living characters is not within the scope of the short story form. By implementing this simplified approach, authors can effectively communicate complex ideas and themes in a concise and impactful manner, avoiding unnecessary details and exposition in favor of essential narrative elements. In a relatively brief span of pages, the author skillfully immerses the reader in a richly detailed universe and provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and conflicts that drive the narrative forward.

> A story may be short, to begin with a basic distinction, for either or both of two fundamental reasons: the material itself may be of small compass; or the material, being of broader scope, may be cut for the sake of maximizing the artistic effect. The first reason has to do with distinctions as to the object of representation, while the second with distinctions as to the manner in which it is represented.[40]

In accordance with conventional standards, a short story is typically limited to 10,000 words or less, with a range of 3,000 to 5,000 words being most common. Some short stories may exceed 10,000 words, particularly if they are published in collections or anthologies with more flexible guidelines. However, the actual length of a story is not determined by an arbitrary word limit only, but rather by the topic being explored. The complexity of the plot and the number of words required for its proper development are the main factors in determining the optimal length of a particular story, the author must determine the ideal number of words for his specific story based on its thematic elements and narrative structure. The starting point of a short story is a crucial element that defines the tone and direction of the entire story. It can be a definite notion, an unexpected

[40] Friedman, Norman. "What makes a short story short", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 4, No.2, 1958, page 105.

accident or a surprising discovery that has the power to influence our vision of life, «also it must be applied to the development of one life course, one character»[41] and it does not necessitate the inclusion of a romantic component, which is typically considered essential to the conventions of the novel form. Many short stories are simply tales of extraordinary experiences, remarkable discoveries or inventions and particular events of various kinds, which are interesting because they also offer insights into psychological and sociological issues. These stories do not necessarily require love as the primary motivation or focus, since the narrator's originality is the main force that allows him to present life through his perspective, influencing readers to see the world from his point of view. The narrator's individuality and creative vision are the essential elements that make these stories exciting and inspiring.

> Also, and as if to compensate for the lack of the love interest, the short story has a "touch of fantasy" which gives it a distinctive charm. This quality is the hint of—not necessarily the supernatural, but rather the weird; it is a recognition and a vague presentation of the many strong influences that are not explainable by our philosophy of life. […] In its technique a short story demands the utmost care; it lacks the bulk of the novel, which hides minor defects. It must have a definite form, which shall be compact, and which shall have its parts properly proportioned and related; and it must be wrought out in a workmanlike manner. It requires extreme care from its conception to its completion, when it must stand forth a perfect work of art; and yet it must reveal no signs of the worker's tools, or of the pains by which it was achieved.[42]

Generally, short stories can be categorized into distinct groups and analyzed collectively rather than individually. Each short story is set according to its ruling class and the classes are organized progressively from the easiest to the most difficult. The tale is the first category of this classification. It is the narration of a simple incident or moving fact that has no bearing on the characters' lives and there is no plot in the sense that there is no problem to be solved. It is often a real true story, or it can be an imaginative tale. «The best examples are the stories of adventure found in the better class of boys' and children's

[41] Barrett, Charles Raymond, *cit*., page 20.
[42] Ibidem, page 15-16.

papers»[43]. The moral story is usually very educational. Its purpose is to preach, and its plot is usually sufficient to introduce morality. The story with a moral, tries to sweeten its sermon with a bit of narrative. There is a simple plot that shows the consequences of stealing, drinking alcohol or some other sin and it is usually brutally realistic or exaggerated. Aesop is obviously the most accurate example of this type of short story. The weird story owes its interest to the supernatural. It may have a specific plot in which supernatural beings are the actors, and often contains a careful psychological examination of less pleasant emotions. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* can be placed in this category. The story of ingenuity is one of the most modern forms of short stories. It can be called the "adult fairy tale" because its appeal is based on an interest in the wonderful. This type of short story requires a strong imagination, ingenuity, and persuasiveness. «Poe was the originator and great exemplar of the Story of Ingenuity, and all of his tales possess this cleverness in some degree»[44]. The humorous story is a simply funny story intended for laughter and entertainment. It can also teach an important lesson while making readers laugh. It is especially important for children because, through laughter, they improve their sense of humor, their reading habits and the stories are made more interesting. The final category of this classification is the dramatic short story. It is the inclusion of drama in fiction that makes it possible to focus not only on imaginary worlds but also on the emotional aspect of everyday life. Dramatic short stories are narratives that focus on characters at a turning point in their lives where they are forced to confront something that has always been there but is now more obvious than ever. Reading these stories means entering the minds of the characters, exploring their thoughts and feelings, and accompanying them on the journey to better

[43] Barrett, Charles Raymond, *cit*., page 24.
[44] Ibidem, page 33.

understand themselves and the relationships they have. Most of Katherine Mansfield's short stories can be placed in this category. Mansfield's narrative involves the rejection of conventional plot structures with a dramatic action which favors the presentation of the character. The author presents a kind of "truth" based on the observation of the everyday world, examining the characters, their relationships, and their emotional dynamics in detail with the aim of penetrating into their psychological depths. However, classification goes beyond mere thematic or genre distinctions; it encompasses the complex interplay of narrative style, structure, and authorial intent. Furthermore, short story classification transcends the boundaries of literary analysis to include cultural, historical, and regional contexts. The stories come from different cultural landscapes and reflect the unique customs, traditions and social dynamics of their respective environments.

2.3 The modernist short story

In the course of this analysis, it is important to focus on the characteristics of the modernist short story, as it is in this context where Katherine Mansfield most influenced and innovated the genre. The modernist short story is characterized by its ability to capture moments of high perception, it profoundly explores the inner mechanism of human consciousness, employing a narrative style that transcends the conventions of traditional storytelling. Central to these stories is the innovative use of fragmentation which serves not merely to break the narrative structure into pieces, but rather to reflect the complex and often chaotic reality of human existence. Rather than following a clear and linear progression, these stories could jump between times, places, and perspectives, reflecting the unpredictability of the characters. Equally distinctive in the English modernist short story is the use of stream of consciousness technique, a method

characterized by a continuous flow of the characters' thoughts. This technique is deeply introspective and highly subjective, offering insight into the complexity of human thought processes. By avoiding traditional dialogues and conventional narrative description, it focuses on the internal rather than the external, exploring the inner dialogues of the character's mind. The narrative style of modernist short stories often embodies a sense of ambiguity and open-endedness. These elements give the stories - which frequently end without the traditional resolution - a sense of unresolved tension. They often leave important narrative threads unresolved, inviting the reader to engage more actively with the text to consider the deeper meanings, implications, and uncertainties of the time that the story reflets. In *The modernist short story: a study in theory and practice,* Dominic Head states that the short story, with its emphasis on literary artifice, was a key site for modernist innovation during a period marked by revolutionary changes in fictional practice. «For many readers, the decisive moment in the short story's history is 1914, the year James Joyce published *Dubliners.* That book, more than any other, has become synonymous with our idea of what a modern short story is like».[45] *Dubliners* is a collection of fifteen short stories that marks the emergence of the modern short story through its innovative techniques and thematic depth. Each story is carefully crafted with attention to detail, allowing the author to explore the inner workings of his characters' minds. This aligns with modernist tendencies to delve into the complexities of human consciousness and to question traditional narrative forms. One of the most significant contributions of *Dubliners* to the modernist short story is Joyce's use of the epiphany defined by himself as «a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself»[46]. Joyce builds his stories around

[45] Hunter, Adrian, *cit.,* page 44.
[46] Joyce, James, *Stephen Hero*, edited by Theodor Spencer, New York, New Directions, 1963, page 211.

moments of sudden revelation that reveal fundamental truths about his characters' lives, often highlighting themes of paralysis and existential despair. Through *Dubliners*, Joyce redefined the short story turning it into a vehicle for a deep exploration of human consciousness. As Adrian Hunter expresses:

> More tangibly, however, one can point to numerous historical instances where the short story has served as a model. Modernism is one such instance. Not only did several landmark novels, such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, begin life as short stories, but in the case of Woolf, revolutionizing the theory and practice of 'modern fiction' was directly connected to her reading of, and experimenting with, the short story form.

Throughout her career, Virginia Woolf engaged in the craft of short fiction, beginning with her early unpublished narrative experiments like *Phyllis and Rosamund* (1906) and *The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn* (1906). However, the core of Woolf's contributions to the short story genre can be traced between 1916 and 1923. During these years, she described in a letter how she liberated herself from the 'conventional style' of her early work. This period also marked the beginning of her serious contemplation and theorization about the future of 'modern fiction.' It is notable how Virginia Woolf, in her essays, frequently refers to the modern short story to illustrate a concept or support an argument. The short story was the medium through which she transformed fiction and adapted it to the task of conveying the structure of human consciousness; «her central concern was with the relationship between the way the mind experiences reality and the way the writer conveys that experience in narrative form».[47]

> Woolf's short stories, however, often have an incomplete, investigative 'workshop' quality. In this respect, her stories form an interesting contrast with the work of Mansfield, a writer who conducts similar formal experiments. […] Mansfield displays a greater control, and her major innovations in the genre, far from being experimental, display an accomplishment unsurpassed by other modernist writers.[48]

[47] Hunter, Adrian, *cit.*, page 63.
[48] Head, Dominic. *The modernist short story: a study in theory and practice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, page 108.

Katherine Mansfield «was the only author who has placed herself in English literature, by a few short stories alone»[49], her ability to break with traditional narrative conventions, combined with precise language and profound psychological exploration, redefined the short story of the 20th century. She has a unique ability to portray the inner complexities of her characters, often highlighting their vulnerabilities, desires, and inner conflicts. Her stories are populated by characters dealing with moments of crisis or personal revelation, offering a penetrating look at human condition. Using innovative methods and techniques, Katherine Mansfield not only expanded the expressive capabilities of the short story, but also deepened the exploration of complex themes such as alienation, identity, and relationship dynamics. One of the most innovative elements of Katherine Mansfield's style in her short stories, is the use of stream of consciousness allowing a deep psychological insight into her characters. This technique allows her to express variations of thoughts and emotions with such immediacy that readers feel they are almost directly accessing the characters' inner thoughts. For example, in her short stories such as *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, the stream of consciousness technique reveals the internal tensions and constraints of the characters, exploring their inner world in response to external events, representing a significant departure from traditional fiction, which tends to favor a more explicit and less introspective approach. Additionally, Mansfield uses dialogues that capture the essence of her characters with great authenticity and accuracy. Her dialogues are often full of hidden meanings and reveal much more than what is explicitly said, inviting the reader to actively participate in constructing the meaning of the story. Moreover, Katherine approach to narrative structure represent a point of departure from the conventions of her time. Her short stories often break away from traditional, insightful conclusions by challenging readers' expectations and inviting them

[49] Beachcroft, O. T., *cit.*, page 162.

to consider deeper and less immediate interpretations. This aspect is particularly evident in stories such as *Her First Ball* or *The Fly*, in which the open endings not only avoid a clear conclusion but also pushes the reader to reflect on some complexity topics. This approach not only enriches the understanding of the text, but also stimulates a more active and personal interaction with the story, highlighting Mansfield's ability to use short stories as a power tool for psychological and social investigation. Ultimately, Katherine Mansfield's work represents a fundamental milestone in the history of the short story. Her importance in the context of modernist literature derives essentially from her extraordinary capacity to integrate form and content in an innovative way, examining the human condition with a renewed and deeply incisive and emotional sensitivity, and as Adrian Hunter writes «Mansfield elevated it from its modest origins in oral and popular print culture to a central form of British literary modernism»[50].

[50] Hunter, Adrian, *cit.*, page 83.

CHAPTER 3. KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S SHORT STORIES: PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS THROUGH SYMBOLISM

Katherine Mansfield left behind a remarkable body of work that continues to fascinate readers with its portrayal of human emotions and experiences. Her stories are famous for their exploration of psychological nuances and careful observation of her characters' everyday lives.

Lorna Sage emphasizes how Mansfield 'put even more into the story form than her contemporaries, however, since it was really her only form,' reiterating once more how unusual was Mansfield's position in utilizing the short story as her sole narrative art form.[51]

Based on her own experiences and encounters, Katherine Mansfield often explores themes such as the complexity of human relationships, the fleeting nature of happiness, and the complexities of social class and identity. Through a delicate and subtle writing style, she explores the development of the human soul, often focusing on fleeting moments of introspection that reveal desires, insecurities, and emotional depths that would otherwise remain hidden. Her protagonists are usually women confronting their role in society and the expectations and constraints that come with it. Katherine Mansfield immerses us in their minds by showing their inner struggles, fears, and desires. In her short stories, even small everyday gestures can be charged with psychological significance and reveal emotional tensions that are often expressions of larger conflicts. The use of the stream of consciousness technique allows the reader to see the world through the eyes of her protagonists and to grasp their perceptions and thoughts. Additionally, the author does not always provide definitive conclusions or answers, preferring to leave room for reflection and ambiguity. Moreover, Mansfield often uses symbolism to reflect the psychological state of her protagonists. Landscapes, colors and

[51] Kimber, Gerri. *Katherine Mansfield and the Art of the Short Story*, London, Palgrave Pivot, 2014, page 5.

even objects become tools through which she communicates the emotional turmoil or inner calm of her characters. By examining some of her most significant short stories, we will better understand how the author constructs her characters, the internal conflicts they face and how these stories reflect the complexities of the human condition.

3.1 ***The Voyage***

One of the short stories analyzed from this perspective is *The Voyage*, written in 1921, published on 24 December of the same year in *The Sphere* and later reprinted in *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It is a short story that follows the point of view of Fenella Crane, a child whose age is not explicit. It is about a voyage made by this little girl and her grandmother, initially for no specific reason, who get on a boat that will take them from Wellington to Picton, in New Zealand. The reason of Fenella's journey is not explicitly stated in the story; however, readers can deduce the reason from contextual clues. For example, from the scene where Fenella's father says goodbye in tears or when the stewardess, talking about Fenella with her grandmother, calls her «poor little mite without a mother»[52] we can deduce that Fenella takes the trip because of the death of her mother.

> The separation from the loved ones is a common phenomenon which is seen in the human life. This separation is both physical and mental in which people are driven under psychological influences or rather disorders throughout their lives, especially when someone is physically separated from his or her parents by a death of either of the parents or both, that can lead into a psychological struggle in the particular person's mind. […] The voyage is a short story written by Katherine Mansfield in which she connects this psychological separation of a girl from her most loved ones, her parents, and how this psychological separation and its consequences are seen of what she sees and personally experiences during a voyage with her grandma.[53]

[52]Mansfield, Katherine. "The Voyage," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp 1-7, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 4.
[53] Wijesekara Mudiyanselage Sumith D., Ebenezer Breman V.. "The Projection of Subconscious through Symbolism: An Analysis of Mansfield's The Voyage," *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.8.11.2018.p8375, page 683.

In this short story Katherine Mansfield focuses more on the character's internal feelings and tries to represent her thoughts and emotions. *The Voyage* explores the theme of the psychological transition from childhood to adulthood, a theme implicitly visible through a wide use of symbolism. The structure of the story is divided into distinct parts through symbolic moments that highlight this theme. Within the short story there is a prominent use of words that are considered as a symbol. «The psychological collapse of the protagonist has been imaginatively brought out by Mansfield by relating the denotative and connotative words of darkness»[54]. Fenella's dark clothes, for example, are the symbol of grief. Moreover, the dark color symbolizes the unknown and the uncertainties of life, but also the fears and anxieties that Fenella experiences during the voyage since she is now going to live her life without her mother. The voyage itself is also another symbol. It symbolizes Fenella's journey from childhood to adulthood, her task to face reality and rise from darkness to go into the light. This is evident also by the employment of colors which are used to convey emotions and moods. At the beginning of the story Katherine Mansfield writes sentences such as «it was a beautiful night, mild, starry»[55] or «it was dark on the Old Wharf, very dark; the wool sheds, the cattle trucks, the cranes standing up so high, the little squat railway engine, all seemed carved out of solid darkness»[56], she uses this color palette that evokes a cold, dark and gloomy atmosphere. On the contrary, at the end of the story, which coincides with the end of the journey, the author uses a completely different color palette as can be seen in sentences such as «a white mist rose and fell»[57], «her white waxen cheeks were blue with cold, her chin trembled, and she had to keep wiping her eyes and her little pink nose»[58], «one Golden Hour»[59].

[54] Wijesekara Mudiyanselage Sumith D., Ebenezer Breman V.. *cit.*, page 683.
[55] Mansfield, Katherine, *op. cit*., page 168.
[56] Ibidem.
[57] Ibidem, page 178.
[58] Ibidem, page 179.
[59] Ibidem, page 181.

By using these colors Katherine Mansfield highlights the transition from grief and the uncertainty of life it causes to the awareness of new responsibilities. The responsibility of adulthood is another important aspect of the story, represented by the umbrella. It is the most important symbol that always appears from the beginning to the end of the story and symbolizes Fenella's growing maturity. It belongs to her grandmother, who asks her to keep an eye on it during the trip. At the beginning of the story, Fenella behaves passively towards the object she is carrying. However, as the story progresses, Fenella begins to view the umbrella as an important item. During the voyage, for example, she fears it might fall as the boat rocks back and forth. Fenella's relationship with the umbrella reflects her development from an innocent and clueless child to a conscious and mature adolescent. Finally, the sea also symbolizes this mental transition.

> The sea on which the entire voyage takes place becomes a symbol of the subconscious transition that takes place in the inner self of Fenella. The past experiences through which she had come through, and the saturation over the voyage, helps her to have her mental environment transformed. This change that takes place in the subconscious is indicated through the voyage. From this side of the shore to the other a significant subconscious change is indicated through the sea being utilized as a symbol. Thus, the sea becomes the medium through which the necessary transition is done while the two shores become the different states of mind where Fenella finds her new home to be on the other shore. She had left behind a childhood that was probably traumatic and painful to bear as a child and she finds her new world on the other shore with her grandparents.[60]

Fenella's journey on the sea represents the path that leads her to a new understanding of herself and the world around her. The two extremes of the journey, i.e., the two sides, mark a change in her mental state: from a childhood marked by loss to a new beginning with her grandparents, which symbolizes the transition to a new level of maturity. Katherine Mansfield's *The Voyage* uses rich symbolism to explore complex themes of loss, transition, and maturity. From this analysis, it is evident how everyday objects and environments are transformed into powerful psychological symbols that reflect the

[60] Wijesekara Mudiyanselage Sumith D., Ebenezer Breman V, *op.cit.*, page 686.

protagonist's development process. This narrative approach invites the reader to delve into Fenella's psyche and understand the profound impact life changes can have on a person's emotional development.

3.2 ***The Garden Party***

The Garden Party is a short story written in 1922 and published for the first time in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and it later appeared in the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It is a story dealing with themes such as social class differences, maturity, and moral issues related to social inequality. The story takes place in a country villa where the Sheridan family, a wealthy family with high social status, is organizing a garden party. Laura, the protagonist, is supervising the preparations when she discovers that a man who lives near her house has passed away in an accident at work. This event shocks Laura, who feels uncomfortable at the idea of continuing the party after this tragedy and suggests canceling it, but the members of her family, especially her mother who minimizes the incident, convince her that the party must go on and that it should not be affected by these events. Despite her reservations, Laura attends the party and tries to enjoy the event. However, she cannot forget the tragedy that occurred near their property. After the party, her mother asks her to bring a basket of food to the deceased's family as a gesture of kindness. Laura accepts and goes to that house where she experiences an impactful contrast between her privileged surroundings and the poverty conditions in which the deceased's family lives. The focus of *The Garden Party* is to draw attention to the worrying tensions that currently exist between different social classes. The party itself is a metaphor for the extravagant and excessive comforts enjoyed by the upper class while the working class suffers in pain. Laura Sheridan and her siblings are spoiled with superfluous things like fancy hats, cream puffs, and lilies during the garden party, while

the people across the street are deprived of the essential things. However, as the story progresses, Laura experiences a psychological growth as she begins to develop new awareness. When she finds out about the worker's death, something within her changes. Her decision to cancel the party to respect the deceased's family reflects an internal conflict between social expectations and her developing moral conscience. This aspect can be seen through the use of symbolism and Laura's hat is one of the most important examples.

Laura's new black hat is a gift from Mrs. Sheridan, who originally bought it for herself. Remarking that it's too young for her, she gives it to Laura in an attempt to distract Laura from her desire to cancel the party. It works. In her own bedroom Laura sees herself in the mirror and quickly forgets about the dead man down the road. "Never had she imagined she could look like that," the narrator says as Laura gazes at herself in the mirror. The hat makes Laura look and feel very grown up, and she assumes the role of party hostess while wearing it. It's a symbol of Laura's desire to be a mature woman. Life on the Sheridan estate is perfect when Laura is wearing the hat. Everyone is happy, and Laura herself seems to glow. In her new hat, the Scott family's unhappiness seems "blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper." But when Laura leaves the estate for the village, the hat suddenly seems ridiculous. It's entirely out of place among the "little mean dwellings" of the poor families. The hat and the lifestyle it represents embarrass Laura, and she actually apologizes to Scott's corpse for wearing it. In this moment, the hat represents the pampered lives the Sheridans lead. Laura feels ashamed for flaunting her good fortune in front of those who are suffering.[61]

Laura's hat is a powerful symbol that represents her journey of psychological growth and transition from innocence to consciousness. She realizes the huge gap between the world she lives in and the world in which others live. This comparison between the elegance of the hat and the sadness of the house she is in, makes her realize how out of place her luxurious accessory is in that context of sadness and grief. This is the moment when the hat becomes a symbol of her transformation: from an unconscious person to an individual who begins to understand the complexity of the world and the reality of social inequalities. «Laura's psychological and moral growth are interconnected with her new

[61] "The Garden Party Study Guide", *Course Hero*, 2019, https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Garden-Party/.

perception of death»[62]. When she looks at the body of the dead man, Laura does not feel uncomfortable or desperate but calm. Mr. Scott appears to be sleeping peacefully and she realizes that death completely ignores the differences between social classes. When Laura leaves the deceased's house at the end of the story, she meets her brother Laurie, who asks her if the experience was terrible. Laura replies «It was simply marvellous»[63], she tries to express her complicated thoughts and feelings, but she fails. She says, «Isn't life»[64]. Readers do not learn exactly what she discovered about life. However, by leaving her safe home, Laura has matured and gained a new understanding of life, death, and social classes. By analyzing this short story, it becomes clear how Katherine Mansfield once again inserts the psychological aspect into her works. Laura Sheridan undergoes a profound inner change that leads her to reflect on the nature of life and death and to understand that these events transcend class barriers.

3.3 ***The Daughters of the Late Colonel***

The Daughters of the Late Colonel is a short story written in 1920. It was first published in the *London Mercury* and later reprinted in the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It is narrated in a chronological order, divided into chapters, and it is the story of two sisters, Josephine and Constantia, who are trying to face the recent death of their father, Colonel Pinner. After years of living under his strict authority, the sisters are now alone in their home with the freedom to make their own decisions, but neither the courage nor the ability to do so. From the story's beginning, Constantia and Josephine emerge as extremely indecisive and ambivalent, unable to act decisively and preferring to think

[62] Sorkin, Adam J. "Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party': Style and social occasion," *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1978, pp. 439–55. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26281993, page 448.
[63]Mansfield, Katherine. "The Garden Party," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-14, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 14.
[64] Ibidem.

about possible options and argue with each other. *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*'s main themes include grief, addiction, and the difficulty of taking personal responsibility. It also highlights the complex relationship between the sisters and their sense of loss and shows how the authoritarian figure of the Colonel shaped their personalities and life choices. The sisters' inability to move forward reflects a profound lack of self-esteem and independence. The story begins a week after the Colonel's death with Constantia and Josephine discussing about the funeral arrangements and deciding whether they should share some of the father's belongings with their closest relatives. Their inability to make decisions is evident right from the beginning of the story when the two sisters are discussing whether or not to give their father's hat to the porter, but they cannot decide. Constantia says «we can decide tomorrow»[65] trying to delay avoiding the stress of an immediate decision and making even more evident the lack of security in her decision-making skills. According to this perspective, the figure of Nurse Andrews is also relevant.

> Even getting rid of their maid is something they flirt with, but seem unable to act on, even though they feel they don't need her anymore. She, too, scares them (she does appear to have an almost superhuman ability to burst into a room as though she were bursting through the wall, in one of Katherine Mansfield's finest comically absurd touches), another indication that these women have lived their lives in fear, thanks to an overbearing father.[66]

After their father's death, Con and Jug (the two sisters' nicknames for each other) invited Nurse Andrews to stay with them as their guest for a week. Because of their insecurity and their difficulty in adjusting to life without the father, the idea of having an authority figure gives them comfort but, although in the course of the story the sisters realize that Nurse Andrews' presence is no longer necessary, they cannot find the courage to let her

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[65] Mansfield, Katherine. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel", *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp.1-17, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.
[66] "A Short Analysis of Katherine Mansfield's 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel'", *Interesting Literature,* https://interestingliterature.com/2018/05/a-short-analysis-of-katherine-mansfields-the-daughters-of-the-late-colonel/.

go. This behavior is once again in line with their personality: the sisters hesitate from making decisions that could disrupt their routine or put them in unpleasant situations because they are still tied to old habits. Within the story, the two sisters act as if they think that their father is still alive, living with the terror of what the father will do to them as soon as he discovers their actions against him.

> Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. "Buried. You two girls had me buried!" She heard his stick thumping. Oh, what would they say? What possible excuse could they make? It sounded such an appallingly heartless thing to do.[67]

In this passage of the story, Josephine experiences a moment of absolute terror when she realizes that her father's funeral and burial took place without his permission. The fact that Josephine wonders what her father would say if he knew he was buried without his consent highlights the depth of psychological conditioning to which she and Constantia were subjected. The idea that the father will always find the truth shows that the Colonel was an omniscient figure in her life, able to detect any slight infraction or inappropriate behavior. Josephine's fantasy of his father's reaction and the sound of his stick hitting the ground reinforce the idea that the Colonel is still a powerful presence in their minds that even after his death Josephine fears she has done something typical of someone with a heart of stone. The following section of the story also highlights this feeling. Con and Jug enter their father's room to arrange his things, but even on this occasion Jug has the feeling that they are doing something wrong and that somewhere in the room their father is watching them.

> But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? He was in the top drawer with his handkerchiefs and neckties, or in the next with his shirts and pyjamas, or in the lowest of all with his suits. He was watching there, hidden away–just behind the door-handle–ready to spring.[68]

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[67] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 5.
[68] Ibidem, page 7.

Josephine is so influenced by her father that she feels his presence even in the furniture of the house. The detailed description of the drawers containing the father's various personal effects evokes an atmosphere of constant observation, and the fear of doing anything that might disappoint the Colonel or provoke his anger is so strong that Josephine cannot shake this feeling that he is always present, hidden, and ready to step in.

Part of the Pinner family's dysfunction might be attributable to the death of the colonel's wife. Josephine seems to think that their lives may have been better—perhaps more independent—if their mother had lived, since they would not have had to uproot themselves so frequently. Mansfield seems to be suggesting that while mothers are nurturing, patriarchy is limiting.[69]

Near the end of the story, as Josephine looks at a picture of her mother, she wonders if things would have been different if her mother had not died. She thinks that if her mother had still been alive, she might have married, but with her death and the need to care for her father, she never had the luck to meet a man and make him more than a stranger. The story ends with the two sisters who are about to say something meaningful, but then claim they have forgotten it. The interrupted conversation can be seen as a symbol of their emotional silence, an indication that they are not yet ready to face the reality of their situation without their father's guidance. Although the Colonel is dead, his influence continues to weigh heavily on the sisters, preventing them from freely expressing their thoughts and feelings. The atmosphere created by this ending is melancholic and uncertain, leaving the reader thinking about the sisters' situation and what the future might have in store for them. *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* is full of symbols that reflect the main themes of the story and provide a deeper analysis of the psychological dynamics of the protagonists. The mouse that Constantia thinks she hears in her and her sister's

[69] Krolewski, Sara. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," *LitCharts* LLC, February 17, 2019 https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-daughters-of-the-late-colonel/summary-and-analysis

bedroom, for example, symbolizes despair. As Josephine tells her sister that there are no crumbs in their room, Constantia worries about the mouse having nothing to eat and tells her sister «I can't think how they manage to live at all»[70]. Her sentence reflects the situation in which they find themselves, comparing the despair of the mouse to their situation as they now must face a life without their father. The Colonel himself is also another symbol. He symbolizes authority and, moreover, his title gives him the authority of a military officer.

Time is also used symbolically in the narrative to show how the daughters are unable to free themselves from their father's influence. In deciding whether to send their father's watch to Ceylon, Constantia comments "And of course it isn't as though it would be going – ticking I mean', said Constantia…at least, she added, it would be strange after all that time if it was" (p.62). The watch and its ability to continue ticking is symbolically representative of the Colonel. He may be dead but like the watch he is still very much alive (and ticking) and influencing the daughters. It is significant that the daughters wish to pass the watch to another male member of the family, almost as if they are passing on the patriarchal influence it represents.[71]

Finally, the silence that often occurs within the short story symbolizes the lack of communication and emotional suppression. The sisters' conversations are often interrupted or incomplete, reflecting their inability to openly express their feelings due to the paternal authority that made it difficult for the sisters to find their own voice. Using symbolism, Katherine Mansfield illustrates how the Colonel's oppressive presence left a lasting impact on the sisters' psyches. The story is a poignant exploration of grief, addiction, and the challenge of personal growth against an overwhelming authority. It invites us to reflect on the effects of strict parental control and the possible consequences of a life lived in fear.

[70] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 2.
[71] Edensor, L. "Creative Evolution: Symbolist representations of Bergson's duration in the works of Katherine Mansfield," *Katherine Mansfield Symposium*, 2010, pp. 1-12, page 10.

3.4 ***Miss Brill***

Miss Brill is a short story written in 1920, published for the first time in November of the same year in the *Athenaeum* and later reprinted in *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It is the story of a middle-aged woman, Miss Brill, who goes to the Jardins Publiques every Sunday and observes other people's lives. The story begins with Miss Brill, while preparing for her Sunday routine in the park, taking out her old fur collar from its box, which, although worn-out, has a special meaning to her. As she walks into the park, Miss Brill is happy, she sits down on her usual bench and begins to watch the people around her enjoying the music the orchestra is playing. She is thrilled to be part of this scene and imagines herself as an actress in a theater performance in which every person has a role to play. She sees the park as a stage and sees herself as part of a group of actors, which gives her a sense of belonging and connection with others. But as the day goes on the atmosphere changes. Miss Brill observes a young couple sitting next to her and hears their contemptuous and cruel comments: they laugh at her fur collar and her lonely presence in the park. This moment is devastating for Miss Brill, who begins to see herself as everyone else sees her: a poor spinster, old and alone. Disappointed and hurt by the couple's words, Miss Brill returns home. Back in her room, disconsolate, she places her fur collar in the box from which she had pulled it out before, and as soon as it is closed, a suffocated cry seems to begin suggesting that Miss Brill has begun to cry even if Katherine Mansfield does not specifically say so. In this short story one of the most important themes explored is «the woman alone in the world»[72]. Miss Brill's loneliness is expressed in the narrative through her monotonous and isolated life. She is so desperate and in search of communication with others that, to feel part of something, she seeks

[72] Gordon, Ian A. *Katherine Mansfield*, London, Green & Co, 1954, page 19.

consolation through her imagination to find a sense of connection with them. At the beginning of the story,

the way that Miss Brill talks to her coat – a decidedly odd thing to do – suggests to the reader that she might be crazy. Yet the precision of her observations quickly makes it clear that she isn't really crazy, while the details about bringing her coat out of storage and "rubbing the life into it" clearly refer to Miss Brill herself as well. And so, it becomes clear that Miss Brill is someone who has herself been in a kind of "storage" – who is intensely alone and lonely – and these trips to the park are what "rub the life into her." Yet her loneliness seems not entirely evident to her, and she seems to intensely love this trip to the park, and to feel a kind of power in her connection to what's going on.[73]

Two other themes highlighted in this short story are illusion and reality, underscored by the gap between Miss Brill's imaginary world and her actual lonely condition. Miss Brill lives in a kind of fantasy world imagining she is part of a play, but soon the words heard by the couple sitting next to her bring her back to the reality of the facts.

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.
"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."
"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all–who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"
"It's her fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."
"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chère"
"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."
On her way home she usually bought a slice of honeycake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present–a surprise–something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.
But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room–her room like a cupboard–and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on, she thought she heard something crying.[74]

In this passage of the story, Miss Brill is suddenly and brutally confronted with the reality of her loneliness and isolation. This moment represents a painful break in her perception

[73] Goldman, Ben. "Miss Brill," *LitCharts* LLC, June 17, 2015, https://www.litcharts.com/lit/miss-brill.
[74] Mansfield, Katherine. "Miss Brill," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-4, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 3-4.

of the world around her. The couple's words bring her back to reality and make her realize that she is not accepted and is perceived as a lonely old woman who no one needs. They have ruined her mood so much that she no longer stops at the bakery to buy a piece of cake on the way home like she used to. At home, she puts her fur collar back in its box and the fact that Miss Brill thinks she hears crying when she closes the box suggests that her soul is broken and that she feels a deep sense of sadness and rejection. This moment represents an emotional turning point in the story, highlighting Miss Brill's vulnerability and the deep feeling of loneliness that comes with it. This shows us that the need to connect with others can be a powerful but fragile force in the fight against people's indifference and cruelty. Miss Brill's character reveals a complex psychological framework that suggests an existence characterized by isolation. Her refuge in fantasy is a sign of a defense mechanism: it is a way of feeling connected to a community that in reality excludes her. The imagination allows her to maintain a meaningful and participatory self-image while being at the same time a passive observer of other people's lives. The collapse of her fantastic world exposes her fragility and shows how the cruel awareness of her exclusion can destroy the fragile psychological balance she has built to survive. To highlight the themes discussed within the text, Katherine Mansfield once again inserts the symbolic element, and the most important is of course Miss Brill's fur collar. «The fur actually parallels her experience; it comes out of a dark little box just as she comes out of a dark little "cupboard" of a room»[75] and when, at the end of the story, Miss Brill puts it back in its box, it is as if she is putting herself back in her dark and lonely room. The fur collar is a worn-out and old object, a symbol of the past. Its use represents the protagonist's attempt to hold on to a younger, vibrant identity in the

[75] Thorpe, Peter. "Teaching 'Miss Brill.'" *College English*, vol. 23, no. 8, 1962, pp. 661–63. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/373778, page 2.

memory of her youth, but the fact that it is consumed symbolizes her own aging. The orchestra also plays a significant role. «The symbol of the orchestra is much less specific than that of the fur, but we can be pretty sure that it functions as an objectification of Miss Brill's emotions».[76] It can be seen as a symbol of connection and harmony but also as a soundtrack that accompanies the "comedy" that takes place in the park. However, there is also a darker aspect to the symbolism of the orchestra. Although the music has a positive effect on Miss Brill, suggesting cheerfulness and harmony, there is a change of tone and emotion in the story, that is when Miss Brill hears the cruel comments of the young couple. This contrast between the joyful music and the painful reality underlines the disconnection between the inner world of Miss Brill and what really happens around her. Another symbolic element is the park which the protagonist, as already mentioned, imagines as a large stage with a lot of people acting.

> Finally, the symbol of the theater, although it isn't explicitly stated until near the end, is implicit throughout most of the story. From at least as early as the second paragraph, in which we learn of her response to the park orchestra as she sits in her " 'special' seat," it is apparent that Miss Brill considers herself a spectator of a pageant. Although she doesn't make the transition from audience to actress until near the climax, there is a hint in the beginning that she aspires to act as she costumes herself with the fur-piece in preparation for her entrance into the park.[77]

From the analysis of this story, it is evident how Katherine Mansfield emphasizes the fragility of human existence, the need for connection with others and the pain of loneliness. Miss Brill's disillusionment highlights how difficult it can be to find a place in the world and how insensitive comments can shatter hope. Through the protagonist, Katherine Mansfield invites us to reflect on human vulnerability and to exercise kindness towards others, since we often do not know the inner battles they are fighting.

[76] Thorpe, Peter, *cit.*, page 3.
[77]Ibidem, page 2.

3.5 ***Her First Ball***

Her First Ball is a short story written and published on 28 November 1921 in *The Sphere* and later reprinted in the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It narrates the story of Leila, a young girl from the countryside, attending her first ball in the city. The story begins with Leila traveling to the event in a taxi shared with her cousins, the Sheridan. Despite being surrounded by her relatives, Leila is immersed in her thoughts, being at the same time excited and a little nervous. Upon her arrival, Leila is overwhelmed by a thousand sensations: the music, the lights and the crowd arouse her wonder and admiration. As she prepares to enter the ballroom, Leila reflects on her rural upbringing and how different this new urban world is. During the dance, she interacts with different partners, each of whom offers her a new perspective on the social world she is just beginning to learn about. These interactions range from young men enthusiastically asking her to dance to a meaningful encounter with an older man. This interaction is particularly touching and gives Leila a more mature and melancholic view of the ball experience. As Dermot McManus suggests, «in *Her First Ball* by Katherine Mansfield we have the theme of experience, youth, independence, reliance and gender»[78]. Leila's lack of experience is evident from the very beginning of the story when her cousin asks her if she has ever attended a ball before. «Have you really never been to a ball before, Leila? But, my child, how too weird»[79], from this sentence we can assume it is her first time as Katherine Manfield also suggests later in the story «but every single thing was so new and exciting»[80]. Another moment that highlights this concept occurs when, once in the drill hall, Laura tells Leila to stay with her otherwise she might get lost, «hold on to

[78] McManus, Dermot. "Her First Ball by Katherine Mansfield", The Sitting Bee, 20 December 2014, http://sittingbee.com/her-first-ball-katherine-mansfield/
[79] Mansfield, Katherine. "Her First Ball," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-5 https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.
[80] Ibidem.

me, Leila; you'll get lost, said Laura»[81]. Leila's lack of experience in social settings like the ball is further highlighted when the girls are in the ladies' room, where Leila's uncertainty about whether she should take a program is evident. Mansfield underlines Leila's hesitancy and desire to ask someone «am I meant to have one too? »[82]. By focusing on these details of Leila's uncertainty, the author underscores Leila's inexperience in this new social world. In the story, Katherine Mansfield also delves into the exploration of gender roles through the interaction between Leila and an older man's portrayal. The man's comments to Leila highlight the prevailing social expectations about the roles women are expected to play as they age. He implies that as Leila grows older, her participation in balls will not be as a dancer but rather as a chaperone, marking a transition from being an active participant to a simple observer. Furthermore, his remarks about her physical appearance in the future - suggesting her «pretty arms will have turned into little, short fat ones»[83] - highlight a focus on physical beauty and its association with youth. Mansfield might be critiquing the superficial values placed on a woman's appearance and suggesting that as a woman's youthful beauty fades, so also her value within social engagements, according to the male perspective represented by the older man. This interaction could be seen as Mansfield commenting on the gendered perceptions that prioritize the physical image of women, and the societal implications of aging for women who are valued primarily for their appearance.

Leila gave a light little laugh, but she did not feel like laughing. Was it–could it all be true? It sounded terribly true. Was this first ball only the beginning of her last ball, after all? At that the music seemed to change; it sounded sad, sad; it rose upon a great sigh. Oh, how quickly things changed! Why didn't happiness last forever? Forever wasn't a bit too long.
"I want to stop," she said in a breathless voice. The fat man led her to the door.

[81] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 1.
[82] Ibidem, page 2.
[83] Ibidem, page 4.

"No," she said, "I won't go outside. I won't sit down. I'll just stand here, thank you". She leaned against the wall, tapping with her foot, pulling up her gloves and trying to smile. But deep inside her a little girl threw her pinafore over her head and sobbed. Why had he spoiled it all?[84]

For a moment, the words of the older man, seem to spoil Leila's evening as she begins to reflect on the fleetingness of youth and the inevitable aging process, but when another young man approaches her and asks her to dance, the atmosphere changes.

But presently a soft, melting, ravishing tune began, and a young man with curly hair bowed before her. She would have to dance, out of politeness, until she could find Meg. Very stiffly she walked into the middle; very haughtily she put her hand on his sleeve. But in one minute, in one turn, her feet glided, glided. The lights, the azaleas, the dresses, the pink faces, the velvet chairs, all became one beautiful flying wheel. And when her next partner bumped her into the fat man and he said, "Pardon," she smiled at him more radiantly than ever. She didn't even recognize him again.[85]

The conclusion of the story is particularly open and intriguing as it shows how Leila changes her attitude quite quickly. Mansfield describes how, after accidentally being bumped into by the older man while dancing, Leila smiles at him brighter than ever, because she does not recognize him. This moment, according to some critics, is full of possible interpretations. One possibility is that Leila, still excited about her first dance, is able to ignore the older man's pessimistic comments because of her youthful enthusiasm. This suggests that the joy of the moment overshadows any negative thoughts about the future. Alternatively, some critics suggest that Mansfield may be alluding to Leila's lack of maturity, suggesting that she is not yet able to fully comprehend the more complex and depressing aspects of life. However, another interpretation could be that the author is showing Leila' resilience. Despite the older man's negative comments, Leila's bright smile and the fact that she no longer recognizes him may indicate an inner strength and ability not to be influenced by cynicism. This could reflect her youthful innocence, protecting her from the cynicism often found in older and more experienced people. Leila's story provides a rich opportunity to explore the psychological dynamics of this

[84] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 5.
[85]Ibidem.

story. Mansfield paints a vivid portrait of a young girl who experiences a range of emotions and changes over the course of an evening, symbolizing the gentle and sometimes painful process of growing up. The ball serves as a metaphor for the transition into adulthood and introduces Leila to a new social world. The wide range of emotions Leila experiences – from excitement to fear, from joy to disappointment – demonstrates that her decision to continue to enjoy the evening reflects her ability to recover from emotional challenges while maintaining a positive sense of self. Her reaction also demonstrates a psychological adjustment in which Leila, despite her inexperience, finds strength in her youth and indomitable spirit. In *Her First Ball*, symbolism also plays a key role in reinforcing the central themes. The ball itself emerges as a central symbol. It is Leila's first official occasion in an urban society and represents a world full of possibilities and new experiences, as well as a threshold that separates the innocence of childhood from the more complex adulthood. Music symbolizes Leila's swinging emotions. When she is happy and carefree, the music is lively and joyful; as she thinks about the old man's words about the future, the music becomes sad and melancholic. This change reflects Leila's inner change and her growing awareness of the transience of youth. Moreover, the men Leila dances with represent various aspects of life and offer a glimpse into the past and the future. The young men are full of energy and joy and symbolize fleeting youth and beauty. The old man, on the other hand, symbolizes decay, aging, and a certain melancholic wisdom about the reality of life that progresses over time.

There is also some symbolism in the story which is worth noting. Mansfield appears to be using bright colors to symbolize youth. There is Jose's long loop of amber hair, Laura's white fur and pink velvet coat, Laurie's tissue paper (white), the marble-white gloves worn by the girls at the ball and Leila's pink satin feet, highlighted when she is sitting down. By using bright colors, particularly pink, which is a warm color, Mansfield may also be placing an emphasis on the excitement that Leila and the other girls at the ball feel. Mansfield also appears to be using darker colors to symbolize or highlight the idea of experience. The chaperones, who would be older than the girls at the ball, are described as being darkly dressed. The older man also tells Leila that in

time (as she gets older and more experienced) she will be, like the chaperones, standing on stage dressed in black velvet and holding a black bony fan. Mansfield also appears to be using imagery (waltzing lampposts) at the beginning of the story to highlight to the reader the excitement that Leila feels about attending her first ball.[86]

3.6 ***The Doll's House***

The Doll's House is a short story written in 1922, published for the first time in *The Nation and Atheneum* on 4 February of the same year and later appeared in the collection *The Doves' Nest and Other Stories*. It is a story focusing on Isabel, Lottie and Kezia, the daughters of the wealthy Burnell family, who receive a doll's house as a gift by Mrs. Hay. The doll's house is large, elaborated, and rich of details, with carefully decorated rooms and a small lamp that Kezia finds particularly charming. The three sisters are enchanted and excited to show their new gift to their schoolmates, so Mrs. Burnell gives her daughters the opportunity to invite two girls at once to the house but following some strict social rules imposed. The school the Burnell sisters are attending, being the only one near their home, is attended by children whose families come from all social classes, and for this reason some parents forbid their children from interacting with those belonging to low-class families. Mrs. Burnell, for example, forbids her daughters from speaking to Lil and Else Kelvey, the daughters of a washerwoman and a suspected jailbird. Marginalized and despised by everyone, including their teachers, they are the only ones not invited by the Burnell sisters. The only one not to be cruel to Lil and Else is little Kezia who would like to invite the two girls to see the doll's house. After receiving a refusal from her mother, towards the end of the story, Kezia anyway decides to invite them to see the doll's house when she notes the Kelvey sisters walking down the street near her house. Lil Kelvey is a little hesitant knowing that Kezia's mother forbids her from speaking to them,

[86] McManus, Dermot. "Her First Ball by Katherine Mansfield", The Sitting Bee, 20 December 2014, http://sittingbee.com/her-first-ball-katherine-mansfield/

but when she sees her little sister Else pleading her eyes and hearing Kezia reassuring her that no one will see them, she decides to enter the courtyard. However, when Kezia begins to show the doll's house, her aunt Beryl notices them. She yells at Lil and Else and tells them to walk away and never return. As they leave the house, despite their humiliation, the Kelvey sisters share a moment of joy when Else realizes that she has seen the little lamp in the doll's house which was the object of Kezia's attention. This touching ending shows the sensitivity of the Kelvey sisters, who along with Kezia represent the purity of good feelings, in contrast to the hypocrisy of the other characters. The older sister Isabel, for example, represents the acceptance of social norms. She proudly presents the doll's house to her classmates with a superiority that reflects the class differences inculcated in society. The social status of the Kelvey sisters relegates them to the margins of society, and even children despise them, following the example of adults. Isabel's decision to exclude Lil and Else is in fact a consequence of the education imparted by her parents. «These girls are, in many ways, simply representations of the society in which they are being raised, and their behavior reflects what their parents and elders have taught them»[87]. Kezia, on the other hand, represents the innocence and generosity of childhood. Her natural kindness prompts her to invite Lil and Else to see the doll's house, going against the strict social rules established by adults. This gesture shows how children can look beyond social barriers and behave according to the principles of empathy and compassion, rather than follow the unfair norms of society. *The Doll's House* is an incisive work that examines social dynamics and class differences. Through a simple but meaningful narrative, Katherine Mansfield exposes the cruelty and injustice of society and uses children as a vehicle to show both the innocence and harshness of societal conventions.

[87] Kravatz, Jillian. "*The Doll's House*." LitCharts LLC, August 21, 2018, https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-doll-s-house

The main themes of the story, class prejudice, social hierarchy, innocence, and marginalization are also portrayed using symbolism. From the very beginning of the story, Mansfield establishes the concept of social classes by describing the doll's house, a symbol of privilege.

> Its two solid little chimneys, glued on to the roof, were painted red and white, and the door, gleaming with yellow varnish, was like a little slab of toffee. Four windows, real windows, were divided into panes by a broad streak of green. There was actually a tiny porch, too, painted yellow, with big lumps of congealed paint hanging along the edge. But perfect, perfect little house! […] "O-oh!" The Burnell children sounded as though they were in despair. It was too marvellous; it was too much for them. They had never seen anything like it in their lives. All the rooms were papered. There were pictures on the walls, painted on the paper, with gold frames complete. Red carpet covered all the floors except the kitchen; red plush chairs in the drawing-room, green in the dining-room; tables, beds with real bedclothes, a cradle, a stove, a dresser with tiny plates and one big jug[88]

When it is taken into the Burnell's courtyard, the doll's house literally becomes a house within a house, a mirror of their own house and by the fact that they are the only ones to own it, Katherine Mansfield suggests that the Burnell family's social status is higher than other families'. Its detailed and luxurious construction reflect their privilege and its physical presence in the courtyard is a symbol of their prestige and distance from the less wealthy families. The symbolism of the dollhouse is further deepened through the lamp inside which is, especially in Kezia's eyes, the most fascinating object.

> But what Kezia liked more than anything, what she liked frightfully, was the lamp. It stood in the middle of the dining-room table, an exquisite little amber lamp with a white globe. It was even filled already for lighting, though, of course, you couldn't light it. But there was something inside that looked like oil and moved when you shook it. […] the lamp was perfect. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say, "I live here." The lamp was real.[89]

The innocence and hope that this lamp symbolizes is unmistakable. Kezia, the youngest member of the Burnell family, differs from her older sister Isabel in her ability to see the

[88]Mansfield, Katherine. "The Doll's House", *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-6, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.
[89] Ibidem, page 1-2.

beauty in this small, insignificant object. While Isabel remains uninterested, the lamp becomes a beacon of hope for Kezia and the Kelvey sisters too, especially for Else. It serves as a silent connection between Else and Kezia allowing them to overcome the prejudices of the adult world. What they have in common is the capacity to appreciate the simplicity of the lamp rather than being captured by the grandeur of the rest of the doll's house. Katherine Mansfield uses the lamp to highlight the similarities between these two girls and the way they share admiration for it shapes their perception of the world. This can be seen at the end of the story when Else says «I seen the little lamp»[90]. This simple phrase is full of meaning and symbolism. Despite the constant humiliation and exclusion faced by the Kelvey sisters, the sight of the lamp offers Else a moment that is enough to illuminate her daily experience of discrimination and marginalization. The lamp becomes a symbol of light in a dark world, a sign that even in the most difficult situations there is something beautiful that can be appreciated. Despite her immature age and marginalized position, Else finds strength in having seen the lamp, and this allows her to endure the humiliation she has suffered and to find a small glimmer of hope in her difficult life. Using these symbols, Mansfield criticizes injustice and social division and shows how kindness and children's innocence can emerge and offer hope even in a world marked by discrimination and prejudice.

[90] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 6.

3.7 ***The Fly***

The Fly is a short story written in 1922, in Paris. It was first published in *The Nation and Athenaeum,* and it later appeared in *The Doves' Nest and Other Stories* in 1923. The story begins with Mr. Woodifield visiting the office of his old boss. Mr. Woodifield is a sick old man who, due to a previous stroke, is forced by his family to stay at home most of the time, except on Tuesdays when he can go out. During this visit, Mr. Woodifield becomes increasingly frustrated that he cannot remember a key detail he wants to share with the boss, and after a brief initial conversation, the boss offers him a shot of whiskey, which he accepts and drinks happily while complaining that in his house he is not allowed to drink alcohol. After drinking, Mr. Woodifield remembers what he wanted to say: during a visit to Belgium, his daughters saw the boss' son's grave next to his son Reggie's grave. This memory revives the boss' grief over the loss of his son six years earlier in the First World War. After Mr. Woodifield leaves the office, the boss decides to take a break to mourn his son, but he is shocked to find out that he is unable to do so. Despite his best efforts, no tears come to his eyes and the grief that once overwhelmed him, now seems to have disappeared. Lost in his thoughts, the boss notices a fly that has fallen into his inkpot and is trying to get out. He decides to help it by placing it on a blotting paper and removing the ink from it. The fly begins to clean its wings but driven by a cruel impulse, the boss tortures it again and again by dropping some ink on its body every time it manages to clean itself. Finally, the fly dies and the boss' sudden horror at killing it, realizing the cruel reality of his son's death, leads him to experience a kind of intentional amnesia. Seized by a feeling of emptiness, he forgets the previous pain and calls his secretary to get new blotting paper. The story is inspired by the death of a soldier during the First World War, and an autobiographical element can be glimpsed. As we know, in October 1915, Katherine Mansfield's young brother, Leslie Beauchamp, died during a grenade exercise in Belgium, and like the young soldier in *The Fly*, Leslie had worked for his father's

company before joining the army. Katherine Mansfield's short story explores themes of loss, grief, and change, particularly in the postwar context. The story takes place in an office where the main character, simply called the boss, is talking to his former employee, the elderly Mr. Woodifield. Both men have lost their sons in the war, and Woodfield's remark about their boys' well-kept graves forces the boss to confront the painful consequences of the conflict, even though six years have already passed. War and its lasting effect are central themes in Mansfield's narrative, both personally and socially: the memory of the boss's son highlights his concerns about business succession and mortality. His fear about his company's legacy and his own mortality reflects the effect of war on a personal level because losing his only son, the boss also loses the heir to his company. He believed that his son and the security of business succession were the motivating forces in his life. Furthermore, as Georgie Archibald suggests in his analysis of *The Fly*, Katherine Mansfield emphasizes the importance of memory for a meaningful life. The boss tries to avoid this memory, and this removal of the overwhelming pain of his son's tragic death protects him from grief but at the same time deprives his life of meaning and satisfaction. The boss is affected by a moment of amnesia, suggesting that the author sees coming to terms with painful memories as a necessary part of a truly fulfilling life.

The fly was dead. The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paperknife and flung it into the wastepaper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey. "Bring me some fresh blotting-paper," he said, sternly, "and look sharp about it." And while the old dog padded away, he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was… He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.[91]

[91] Mansfield, Katherine. "The Fly," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-4, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 4.

This feeling also expresses the spiritual death of the boss. In the six years since his son's death, he could have transformed the pain of loss into the love he felt for him. If the boss still had the ability to remember and, therefore, to grieve, he would still be alive inside but since he could neither remember nor grieve, he is spiritually dead. From a psychological perspective, *The Fly* is a powerful portrait of loss, trauma, and psychological defenses. It explores the depth of how the boss deals with the loss of his son through denial and repression. He clearly shows an inability to deal with painful memories, as evidenced by his inability to cry despite his intentions to do so.

> The boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep. […] But no tears came yet. In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him.[92]

Such suppression of grief demonstrates a defense mechanism that allows him to maintain a semblance of normality, but at the cost of a deep emotional and spiritual death. The boss is trapped in repressed suffering and in an inability to process pain, which leaves him emotionally empty. The boss' intention to mourn is expressed in the story through the vision of his son's photography resting on his desk, which becomes one of the most important symbolic objects. For the boss, this photograph, which has remained unchanged for six years, symbolizes the freezing of time and emotions. Although the years have passed, the boss' grief is still present and unresolved, and like the photo, it does not change and remains the same. It also shows that the boss has failed to come to terms with the reality of his son's death: as he tries to evoke sadness by looking at it, he finds out that he is unable to cry like he expects. This symbolizes an emotional block: the photo which should be a means of remembrance and perhaps comfort, instead becomes a symbol of

[92] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 3.

his inability to deal with loss. The fighting fly is also a very important and meaningful symbol that offers many interpretations. Firstly, it symbolizes the struggle for survival, endurance, and the cruelty of fate. When it falls into the inkpot and desperately tries to get out, it reflects man's struggle against adversity and life's inevitable challenges. It also represents the boss himself and his inability to overcome the pain as he constantly observes the fly's struggle, in a way he sees himself reflected in it. His decision to repeatedly torture the fly symbolizes how he himself is trapped in a cycle of suffering from which there is no escape. Finally, the fly's death also represents the mental and emotional death of the boss, unable to free himself from torment. By torturing the fly, he is somehow expressing his frustration and inner pain, he cannot find relief and remains trapped in despair. *The Fly* is a story that offers not only a psychological portrait of grief and loss, but also a subtle social critique of the devastation and lasting effects of the war. Through an evocative and symbolic narrative, Katherine Mansfield succeeds in conveying the protagonist's torment and failure to find a sense of peace, emphasizing the importance of dealing with grief to truly live.

3.8 ***Marriage à la mode***

This short story was written by Katherine Mansfield in 1921, it first appeared in the literary magazine *The Sphere* on 31 December, and it was later reprinted in *The Garden Party and Other Stories.* The story focuses on the marriage of William, a hardworking man who spends his week in London and his weekend in the countryside where his wife Isabel and their two sons Paddy and Johnny live. The couple lived in the city until Isabel felt she was being suffocated by that life and William, hopelessly in love with her, agreed to let her move to the countryside with the children, whom he could only see on weekends. On the way back home, William is disappointed that he hasn't brought anything special

for his children, who are always waiting for a gift from him, and he decides to buy them some fruit, hoping that his wife's constant guests won't eat it like they have been eating their children's candies for the past few weeks. On the train, William fantasizes about his wife waiting for him at the station as usual, but he also thinks about her recent changes. Isabel is no longer the same; she is interested in the bohemian life surrounding herself with artist and intellectual friends. She even got rid of her sons' old toys, considering them «dreadfully sentimental and so appallingly bad for the babies' sense of form»[93]. William feels alienated from this version of his wife and tries to understand her changes. When he arrives at the train station, Isabel is waiting for him with her usual friends, including Moira, who "saved" Isabel from city life by taking her to Paris and introducing her to young poets. William feels distant from her world and finds it difficult to compete with the influence of her wife's friends when he returns home. During these few days, William has no time to be alone with his wife until she goes with him to take the taxi just before returning to London. On the train, William thinks about it and decides to write a long letter to Isabel, telling her that he does not want to be a drag on her happiness and implicitly suggesting they should divorce. When his wife receives it and mistakes it for a love letter, she reads it in front of her friends, turning an intimate moment into a public spectacle. This event highlights the superficiality and lack of sensitivity of Isabel and her new surroundings. It takes her a while to realize that William is talking about a divorce, and when she does, she goes into her bedroom where her marital situation becomes clear to her. While she thinks about writing a response to William, her friends invite her to swim and after a moment of indecision faced with the choice of staying and writing to her husband or going swimming, Isabel decides to go with her friends and to write her

[93] Mansfield, Katherine. "*Marriage à la mode*," Katherine Mansfield Society, pp. 1-8, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.

husband in another moment. *Marriage à la mode* explores several deep and complex themes related to the dynamics of marriage, the search for identity, the need for social acceptance, and the emotional disconnection between the two main characters. With his attachment to traditional values and family roles, William represents a man rooted in routine with a desire for security and stability. His inability to understand and accept Isabel's changes contributes to his feelings of exclusion and inadequacy, which cause him to feel alienated from his family. Isabel, on the other hand, is in a phase of personal transformation. She surrounds herself with bohemian and intellectual friends and tries to define herself and her new identity. This change is characterized by a powerful desire for social acceptance, which leads her to behave in ways that may seem superficial and insensitive. This desire to be accepted and admired by others forces her to make decisions that threaten the stability of her marriage.

"Do, do tell us," said the others. "You must tell us."
"I'm longing to," gurgled Isabel. She sat up, gathered the letter, and waved it at them.
"Gather round," she said. "Listen, it's too marvellous. A love-letter!"
"A love-letter! But how divine!" "*Darling, precious Isabel*." But she had hardly begun before their laughter interrupted her.
"Go on, Isabel, it's perfect."
"It's the most marvellous find."
"Oh, do go on, Isabel!"
"*God forbid, my darling, that I should be a drag on your happiness*."
"Oh! oh! oh!"
"Sh! sh! sh!"
And Isabel went on. When she reached the end, they were hysterical: Bobby rolled on the turf and almost sobbed.[94]

This passage in which Isabel reads William's intimate letter aloud in front of her friends, is a prime example of how her behavior is driven by the need to impress and amuse herself, rather than by sensitivity towards her husband's feelings. William's letter is kind and sentimental, but also decisive. He realizes he cannot make his wife happy and decides to step aside. If he had a stronger personality, he might have expressed his concerns to

[94] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 7-8.

Isabel long before and avoid the current situation. However, his tendency to please his wife and make her happy becomes his ruin. William finances her lifestyle and mostly ignores her freeloading friends, hoping that Isabel will return to him if he does not interfere with her freedom. Compared to her husband, Isabel is a woman who is confident of her ideas. In her new home, she can do whatever she wants, neglecting her responsibilities as a wife and mother. She even seems indifferent to her children's well-being and is careful about which toys they can and cannot use. She does not encourage them to wake up to see their father, she removes their toys from their play area allowing her friends to invade the room with their poetry and art. The children hardly appear in the text, which illustrates their insignificance in Isabel's new life. Based on a psychological analysis, a complex picture of the emotional dynamics and interpersonal conflicts of the two main characters emerges. In addition to what has been analyzed so far, another important psychological aspect is Isabel's avoidance of problems. Instead of dealing directly with the problems of her marriage, she prefers to immerse herself in social and cultural activities and to avoid confrontation with her husband and his feelings. This defense mechanism allows her to temporarily escape realty, but over time it increases the emotional distance between her and William. In fact, the story culminates in Isabel's symbolic decision to prefer her friends over writing to her husband, suggesting that although she is aware of her emotional bitterness, she is neither ready nor willing to change. This represents her constant avoidance of problems and her inability to face the consequences of her actions. In the narrative, the themes analyzed so far are also reinforced by symbolism. One of the most important symbols is William and Isabel's house, especially in the comparison between the house in which they lived in London and the new house in the countryside.

Every morning when he came back from chambers it was to find the babies with Isabel in the back drawing-room. They were having rides on the leopard skin thrown over the sofa back, or

they were playing shops with Isabel's desk for a counter, or Pad was sitting on the hearthrug rowing away for dear life with a little brass fire shovel, while Johnny shot at pirates with the tongs. Every evening, they each had a pick-a-back up the narrow stairs to their fat old Nanny. Yes, he supposed it was a poky little house. A little white house with blue curtains and a window-box of petunias.[95]

The London house represented their traditional family life, filled with games and objects that represented childhood and simplicity.

He followed her into the sitting-room. It was a long room, colored yellow. On the wall opposite William someone had painted a young man, over life-size, with very wobbly legs, offering a wide-eyed daisy to a young woman who had one very short arm and one very long, thin one. Over the chairs and sofa there hung strips of black material, covered with big splashes like broken eggs, and everywhere one looked there seemed to be an ash-tray full of cigarette ends. William sat down in one of the armchairs.[96]

Isabel transforms the country house into a sophisticated and artistic space by removing her sons' old toys and filling it with more sophisticated objects, making it the expression of her new identity and her desire to belong to the bohemian world. The weekly journey is another symbol Mansfield uses to represent William's efforts to maintain his family's bond and unity. Each journey is a symbol of his physical and emotional movement in an attempt to return to a point of stability that seems increasingly unattainable. Through these symbols, Katherine Mansfield paints a detailed and complex portrait of the psychological difficulties that can arise in a marriage in crisis, reflecting the tensions that emerge from attempting to reconcile traditional values with modern aspirations.

[95] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 3.
[96] Ibidem, page 5.

3.9 ***Bliss***

Bliss is a short story written in 1918. It first appeared in August in the *English Review*, and it was later published in the collection with the same title, *Bliss, and Other Stories*, in 1918.

> In this second volume, we have a much more polished artist who is gaining a good deal of self-confidence while remaining viciously self- critical. […] She makes a change in her method. She begins to use daydreams to show the innerworkings of a character's mind. [97]

The short story *Bliss* focuses on a dinner party given by the main character, Bertha Young, a thirty-year-old woman who often feels young and full of energy despite her age, and her husband Harry. It begins with Bertha feeling great happiness as she walks home. She is so excited that she wants to run, dance, and laugh for no apparent reason. After returning home, she interacts with her nanny and her daughter Little B. Meanwhile, she prepares for the dinner party attended by several guests: the Norman Knights, Eddie Warren, a young poet, and Pearl Fulton, Bertha's new friend who particularly fascinates her. During the dinner, Bertha is still extremely happy, her guests discuss a variety of topics, both light and mundane, and her bond with Pearl becomes clear to her when they share an intimate moment looking at a blooming pear tree in the garden. This tree becomes a symbol of Bertha's bliss and represents the purity and beauty of her happiness. Over the course of the evening, Bertha notices that her husband Harry seems cold and distant towards Perla, and she interprets this as a lack of sympathy for her friend. But as the guests prepare to say goodbye, Bertha unknowingly witnesses something shocking: Harry and Pearl exchange intimate caresses and loving words, and she realizes that her husband is having a secret affair with Pearl. This discovery leaves Bertha deeply confused and hurt; her happiness is suddenly interrupted by the reality of Harry's betrayal.

[97] Morrow, Patrick, D., *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*, Ohio, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993, page 47.

Nevertheless, the story ends with Bertha looking once again at the blooming pear tree. The tree remains beautiful and unchanged, perhaps symbolizing the continuity of life and the possibility of still finding beauty and joy despite disappointments. *Bliss* offers a profound and complex analysis of happiness, illusion, deception, sexuality, and desire. Bertha, at the beginning of the story, feels an almost childlike happiness. She sees nothing wrong with her life; in her eyes everything is perfect: se has a loving husband, a beautiful daughter, and a charming home. However, it is important to note that she is unable to express her happiness as she would like to. She is aware of the social restrictions and prejudices that can result from a too obvious manifestation of her bliss. «Oh, is there no way you can express it without being "drunk and disorderly"? How idiotic civilization is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?»[98]. This passage is significant because Mansfield seems to suggest that, at the time in which the story is set, any overt manifestation of a woman's joy might be considered unusual, highlighting the theme of women's role and social constraints. Bertha understands she cannot openly display her happiness and feels forced to conform to social norms; this causes her a sense of frustration. This concept is further explored when Bertha visits her daughter, Little B, who is being cared for by the nanny. Bertha feels excluded from the experience of raising her daughter and questions, once again, social conventions by asking herself «why have a baby if it has to be kept–not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle– but in another woman's arms?»[99]. Additionally, the feeling of Bertha's happiness is fragile, and the revelation of her husband's betrayal quickly destroys it. The discovery of the affair between Harry and Pearl Fulton not only shakes Bertha's joy, but also forces her to face the reality and to realize how deeply she has deceived herself about her life

[98] Mansfield, Katherine. "Bliss," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp. 1-12, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.
[99] Ibidem, page 2.

and the relationship with her husband. In *Bliss*, one of the key themes explored is desire and sexuality. As the story progresses, Bertha experiences a sexual desire caused in part by the presence of Pearl, described as an enigmatic and fascinating figure. Bertha feels she has a close connection with Pearl and during the dinner she waits for a sign from her, a gesture that confirms that Pearl also feels the same. It is important to remember that Katherine Mansfield herself had relationships with women, so Bertha's experience may reflect her personal struggle as a homosexual woman in a repressive society. At the beginning of the 20th century, homosexuality was not only illegal but also socially unacceptable and rarely discussed. In this context, Bertha's sexual desire for Pearl is portrayed with ambiguity, reflecting the critical attitude of a society that forced people to hide their feelings of love and desire to conform to social conventions. Bertha feels an intense and complex attraction to Pearl, but she cannot express it openly. It becomes clear when they both share an intimate moment looking at a blooming pear tree in the garden.

> At that moment Miss Fulton "gave the sign."
> "Have you a garden?" said the cool, sleepy voice.
> This was so exquisite on her part that all Bertha could do was to obey. She crossed the room, pulled the curtains apart, and opened those long windows.
> "There!" she breathed.
> And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. 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. How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands? For ever–for a moment? And did Miss Fulton murmur: "Yes. Just *that.*" Or did Bertha dream it?[100]

This symbolic moment not only represents the beauty of nature, but it is also a powerful emotional and sensual experience for Bertha. The beauty of the pear tree and its white flowers reflect the purity of her desire. When they pause to look at it, they seem to share a deep intimacy and understanding, and Bertha sees this as a confirmation of their special

[100] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 9.

bond. Another important aspect is Bertha's desire for her husband. For the first time she feels a strong sexual desire that emerges in parallel with her connection with Pearl.

I shall try to tell you when we are in bed tonight what has been happening. What she and I have shared.
At those last words something strange and almost terrifying darted into Bertha's mind. And this something blind and smiling whispered to her: "Soon these people will go. The house will be quiet–quiet. The lights will be out. And you and he will be alone together in the dark room–the warm bed…"
She jumped up from her chair and ran over to the piano.
"What a pity someone does not play!" she cried. "What a pity somebody does not play."
For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband. Oh, she'd loved him–she'd been in love with him, of course, in every other way, but just not in that way. And equally, of course, she'd understood that he was different. They'd discussed it so often. It had worried her dreadfully at first to find that she was so cold, but after a time it had not seemed to matter. They were so frank with each other–such good pals. That was the best of being modern.
But now–ardently! ardently! The word ached in her ardent body! Was this what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to?[101]

Katherine Mansfield describes this desire with surprise on Bertha's part, as if it was a new discovery for her. This is significant because it suggests that, despite her marriage, she has never felt such strong physical desire for Harry. The writer's portrayal of Bertha's desire is tender but intense, full of intimacy and sensuality. Bertha feels a burning need to share this moment with her husband, and the word "ardent" is repeated to emphasize the intensity of her desire and the newness of this experience.

For the first time in her life, we are told, she feels sexual desire for her husband, and it is a "strange and almost terrifying" thought. Somehow, she feels perplexed that her bliss has been leading up to Harry; it was Pearl, after all, who seemed to fan the flames of her ardor. "But then then- "why Harry? or, if Harry, what has Miss Fulton had to do with her excitement? Bertha breaks off, not pursuing the implications even this far.[102]

This awakening desire is particularly important because it coincides with Bertha's discovery of Harry's infidelity with Pearl Fulton. Her discovery is devastating, not only because it reveals her husband's betrayal, but also because it shatters her illusion of perfect happiness and, moreover, she realizes that «the sign she had so much desired has

[101] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 10.
[102] Anderson, Walter E. "The Hidden Love Triangle in Mansfield's 'Bliss'", *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1982, pp. 397–404. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/441250, page 402.

been reserved for Harry»[103]. When all her guests leave, she goes to the window to observe the pear tree. She is confused and in pain, feeling empty and hopeless: «oh, what is going to happen now? she cried. But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still»[104]. This pear tree is a powerful symbol that plays a crucial role in the narrative and understanding of the story's main themes. As we have already analyzed, it symbolizes the purity and perfection of Bertha's happiness, and it also represents the connection between her and Pearl. However, the pear tree also plays a symbolic role in Bertha's disillusionment. At the end of the story, the tree remains unchanged, reflecting Bertha's state of emotional paralysis. She is stuck in a complete uncertainty and does not know whether to ignore what she has discovered or deal with it. Her perception of the world has been turned upside down: what began as a day of extreme happiness has turned into a disturbing and destabilizing situation. In this short story Katherine Mansfield uses Bertha's complex psyche to explore the nuances of happiness, desire, and disillusionment. Through Bertha's thoughts and feelings, the reader is led to a deeper understanding of the inner conflicts and struggles that characterize her experience.

[103] Anderson, Walter, *cit.*, page 402.
[104] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 12.

3.10 ***The Lady's Maid***

The Lady's Maid is a short story written and published in 1922 and it belongs to the collection *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. It is a short story that explores the life of Ellen, a maid devoted to her lady. The narrative is presented as a monologue in which Ellen speaks to Madame, an unidentified interlocutor, perhaps another maid or guest of the lady. It starts with Ellen apologizing for disturbing the lady she is addressing by explaining that, after serving a cup of tea to her mistress, and seeing that there was an extra cup, she thought of offering it to her. Ellen describes how every night she prepares tea for her lady who drinks it after prayers to warm up before going to bed. She tells how the lady kneels on the hard mat to pray, refusing any pillow to ease the discomfort. Successively, the narrative focuses on Ellen who begins to talk about her childhood. She recalls how her mother died of tuberculosis when she was only four years old and how she was raised by her grandfather, who owned a hair salon. She recounts an incident when, as a child, she cut off all her hair, triggering his anger; as a result, her grandfather punished her severely by shutting her fingers in the hot tongs. Ellen's monologue is enriched by childhood memories and significant episodes in her life. She reveals that she had a relationship with Harry, a florist, and that they were engaged to be married. However, when her mistress' health began to deteriorate, she felt she could not leave her. She decided to break off her engagement returning to Harry all his gifts. This act of sacrifice shows Ellen's deep loyalty and devotion as she reflects on her life and her emotional dependence on her lady. The story ends with Ellen expressing uncertainty about what she would do without her mistress, showing how much her identity is tied to her role as a maid. *The Lady's maid* is a short story that explores social expectation in the relationship between masters and servants. Ellen is deeply devoted to her mistress, a commitment that goes beyond mere work duties. This devotion reflects the social expectations of the time, in which servants were expected to be extremely completely loyal to their masters. Ellen

sacrifices her personal happiness giving up a marriage and an independent life to care for her mistress. Katherine Mansfield offers a deeply sensitive and complex portrait of Ellen, shedding light on the internal dynamics that determine her behavior and life choices revealing several psychological elements that enrich the understanding of the character and her motivation. Ellen gives up her own happiness and the possibility of a married life with Harry, to stay close to her mistress. Her sacrifice is the symbol of her loyalty and devotion, which is furthermore expressed in the loving care that Ellen gives to her lady. Her loyalty is so strong that she puts her mistress's needs above her own, even at the expense of her own happiness. Moreover, this sacrifice leads to the isolation of Ellen. Her relationship with her mistress, although an affectionate one, cannot fully fill the void left by her lack of a personal life and meaningful relationships outside the working place. Her loneliness is compounded by her self-sacrifice as she gives up the possibility of creating a family of her own to entirely devote herself to her mistress. This loneliness is also reinforced by the narrative itself, which unfolds as a monologue in which Ellen makes a kind of intimate confession. Symbolically, there are many objects throughout the text that help highlight the most important themes. At the beginning of the story, Ellen tells Madame that her mistress, described as a very pious woman, has a small red book in which she writes down the names of all the people she knows and for whom she prays that their sins be forgiven. «You see, madam, we know such a lot of people, and they've all got to be prayed for—everyone. My lady keeps a list of the names in a little red book.»[105] In the biblical tradition, the color red is often associated with sin, something that needs to be washed away, but it also the color of the blood of Jesus Christ, poured for the redemption of sinners and symbolizing sacrifice. Ellen deeply admires her

[105] Mansfield, Katherine. "The Lady's maid," *Katherine Mansfield Society*, pp-1-4, https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/, page 1.

mistress, recognizing her devotion to others. In the passage in which Ellen talks about Harry and how she refused the proposal returning to him his gifts, she mentions a «ducky little brooch»[106]. «The brooch had a silver bird with a chain in its beak, and on the end of the chain a heart with a dagger».[107]

This brooch is also very symbolic. In the bible, the fact that ducks' outer feathers are waterproof is linked to anointing, and it symbolizes blessing and protection. The chain, that the bird had in its beak, connects the animal to the heart and is a symbol of servitude, slavery, oppression, and pain. The heart with a dagger also has a biblical meaning – the Sacred Heart of Mary, an externalization of Mother Mary's pain and suffering due to her son's sacrifice. In this sense, it is possible to infer that this brooch given by Harry symbolizes how Ellen would always be imprisoned to her suffering, and to her life of servitude – if she married Harry, she would still be serving her husband. It seems that the character, in this part, opted to continue serving her lady.[108]

Additionally, in *The Lady's Maid*, various flowers are used as symbols, each carrying its own distinct meaning. The main flowers featured are pansies, daffodils, and lilies of the valley. Pansies represent fragility and beauty; they also represent Ellen's respect for her mistress. Their fleeting beauty also symbolizes the mortality and transience of life. By remembering these flowers, Ellen also reflects on the past and loss; lilies are flowers known for their high toxicity, but in the story, they are compared to daffodils, which usually symbolize a new beginning. This comparison creates a strong dichotomy. Ellen is clearly confused and faces a difficult decision: to marry Harry or to continue to serve her mistress.; the daffodils could represent the possibility of a new beginning through marriage, the possibility of happiness and change. On the other hand, the lilies of the valley with their poison could represent her mistress and her current role as a servant, which involves devotion but also sacrifice and possible suffering. However, these flowers may symbolize an oppressive relationship, suggesting that the marriage with Harry may

[106] Mansfield, Katherine, *cit.*, page 3.
[107] Ibidem.
[108] Tiedt, E., Sakita, A., Favaretto, G, "Symbolism in The Short Story 'The Lady's Maid' (1920) by Katherine Mansfield, *Mastigando Letras*, 2021, https://www.mastigandoletras.com.br/in%C3%ADcio/literatura/symbolism-in-the-short-story-the-ladys-maid-1920-by-katherine-mansfie.

not represent freedom but rather another form of servitude. This complexity reflects Ellen's inner conflict as she must choose between two paths that offer both potential advantages and disadvantages. The story's flowery symbolism enriches the understanding of Ellen's emotional struggles and personal choices, suggesting that her decision is anything but simple. *The Lady's maid* is a reflection on the complexities of human relationships and the often-invisible sacrifices made in the name of loyalty and duty. Ellen's monologue testifies the quiet endurance and emotional depth of servitude and offers a nuanced perspective on the intersection between personal desires and social roles.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted confirmed Katherine Mansfield's importance in the 20th century literary landscape and showed how her ability to challenge traditional narrative conventions significantly influenced the representation of human psychology and emotions. Through short but intense stories, Mansfield was able to explore the inner complexities of her characters in innovative ways, using storytelling techniques that remain relevant today. One of her narrative innovations is reflected in the use of stream of consciousness technique, which allows the reader to delve into the characters' internal thoughts. With this narrative technique and the use of inner monologue, Mansfield captured the complexity of the human mind and revealed its fears, hopes, and desires. One of the main goals of this thesis was to explore how Katherine Mansfield managed to challenge readers' expectations, and to offer new perspectives on the psychology of her characters. This analysis has shown how Mansfield's short stories, despite their brevity, provide a rich and complex depiction of the characters' interiority. This skill is a testament to Mansfield's talent and her ability to innovate the short story genre. In her stories, the narrative does not always follow a linear path and the conclusions are often open-ended, inviting the reader to reflect and interpret the stories in a personal way. This approach not only enriches the reading experience, but also promotes a deeper understanding of the topics explored. By analyzing some selected short stories, it became clear how Katherine Mansfield managed to portray the deeper nuances of human emotions. Her characters, often women, face situations of personal crisis that expose their vulnerability, desires, and inner conflicts. Transforming them into complex and realistic characters, she allows the reader to identify with their experiences and understand their inner struggles. This ability to portray the psychology of characters with such precision and sensitivity is one of the main reasons why Mansfield's works are still relevant and appreciated. Another central aspect of this analysis was the role of symbolism. Every detail in her stories, from

everyday objects to settings and situations, is charged with symbolic meaning, contributing to a vivid portrait of human experience. This use of symbolism allows the author to communicate her character's inner tensions and relationship dynamics subtly but powerfully, providing the reader with a reading that goes beyond the simple recounting of events. Additionally, Katherine Mansfield was able to explore universal and timeless themes such as personal growth, grief, loneliness, and the search for identity, making her stories still relevant to the modern reader. Her ability to treat these topics with sensitivity and depth has allowed her to create stories that not only tell a story, but also offer a profound reflection on the human condition.

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