



ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Srovnání povídkové tvorby Katherine Mansfieldové a Elizabeth Bowenové  
A Comparison of Short Stories by Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Studijní obor: Anglistika - amerikanistika

Praha, srpen 2011

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V Praze dne

## **Abstract**

This thesis compares short stories by the New Zealand-born author Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) and the Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973), namely Mansfield's short story collection *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) and Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945). It aims to offer a relatively complex view: it discusses the form as well as the content of the short stories, illustrating the arguments with concrete examples from the short stories, famous ones as well as less known; it suggests various influences that may reflect in the short stories, it offers opinions of notable critics on the individual authors and it also occasionally mentions the authors' own opinions on their work and literature in general. There are three chapters in the body of the thesis. One of them provides contextual information about the possible influences that may have shaped the authors' writing as well as about some critical approaches to their work. The other two chapters analyse the form and content of the stories, respectively. The discussion of formal aspects of Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories focuses on various features of the short stories that may be described as impressionist or lyrical, and on technical devices that may be compared to film. The analysis of content is concerned especially with themes, characters and also objects that appear in the stories and serve as means of characterization.

Key words: Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, short story, 20th-century literature, modernism, Bloomsbury group, female writers, New Zealand literature, Irish literature, *Bliss and Other Stories*, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*

## **Abstrakt**

Práce srovnává povídkovou tvorbu Katherine Mansfieldové (1888–1923), spisovatelky narozené na Novém Zélandu, a anglo-irské autorky Elizabeth Bowenové (1899– 1973), konkrétněji se zaměřuje na Mansfieldové sbírku *Blaho a jiné povídky* (*Bliss and Other Stories*; 1920) a Bowenové sbírku *Démonický milenec a jiné povídky* (*The Demon Love and Other Stories*; 1945). Práce usiluje o relativně komplexní pohled: analyzuje povídky po stránce formální i obsahové a je proložena konkrétními příklady z povídek více i méně známých, nastiňuje různé vlivy, které mohou být v povídkách spatřovány, mapuje názory významných kritiků a zmiňuje i názory samotných autorek, a to jak na své dílo, tak na literaturu obecně. Po formální stránce je práce rozdělena do pěti kapitol včetně úvodu a závěru. Další z kapitol se zaměřuje na různé vlivy, které mohly ovlivnit tvorbu obou autorek, a na několik kritických přístupů k jejich dílu. Následuje kapitola, která se zabývá formálními aspekty povídek, zejména rysy, které mohou být spojovány s impresionismem v literatuře, a vypravěčskými technikami, které se dají porovnat s filmovými prostředky. Další kapitola rozebírá obsahovou stránku povídek, přičemž se zaměřuje na typická témata, postavy a také na předměty, které se v povídkách objevují a které slouží jako prostředky charakterizace.

Klíčová slova: Katherine Mansfieldová, Elizabeth Bowenová, povídka, literatura 20. století, modernismus, skupina Bloomsbury, ženská literatura, novozélandská literatura, irská literatura

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In my BA thesis, I shall compare short stories by two 20th-century female authors Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen. Katherine Mansfield (1888 – 1923) was born and grew up in New Zealand, but spent the majority of her adult life in England. During her short life, she wrote tens of short stories, some of which are set in New Zealand. Eleven years her junior Elizabeth Bowen (1899 – 1973) came from an Anglo-Irish family and spent much of her life both in Ireland and Britain. She is known for several novels, such as *The Death of the Heart*, *The Heat of the Day* or *A World of Love*, and a number of short stories.

Both of the authors favoured the genre of short story. This is especially evident with Katherine Mansfield, who apart from several poems published only short stories, which, of course, may be due to her early death. Elizabeth Bowen published ten novels, but she is often recognized for her short stories. Victoria Glendinning wrote about her:

She made the short story particularly her own. In the stories [...] she achieved a mastery that gives the best of them a perfection and unity that the sustained narrative and shifting emphases of a novel do not attempt. It may be that posterity will judge the best of her stories over the novels [...].<sup>1</sup>

Elizabeth Bowen herself admitted her sympathies for short stories. In a preface to her short stories, she states:

The short story is at an advantage over the novel, and can claim its nearer kinship to poetry, because it is more concentrated, can be more visionary, and is not weighed down (as the novel is bound to be) by facts, explanation, or analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Elizabeth Bowen's and Katherine Mansfield's short stories are in many ways similar and critics often describe their writing with similar terms. For

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, "Stories by Elizabeth Bowen," *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962) 77.

example, H. E. Bates characterizes Katherine Mansfield's short stories as "vivid and clearly coloured."<sup>3</sup> Victoria Glendinning finds virtually the same quality in Bowen's fiction, pointing out her "evocations of colour, texture, flowers, landscape, neighbourhoods, rooms, furniture, [...] light, space, [and] mood."<sup>4</sup> Their short stories often do not have any major plot. Ian Gordon notices that Mansfield focused mainly on "the affairs of everyday,"<sup>5</sup> while Jocelyn Brooke observes that "[Bowen's] speciality is the minor yet significant *incident*, whether humorous or tragic, not the major *event*."<sup>6</sup> It might be argued that the above mentioned features are typical also for other writers, especially other writers of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Virginia Woolf or D. H. Lawrence. However, there are other similarities in the short stories of Bowen and Mansfield that seem more unique. For example, they have been both praised for the ability to depict a child's mind in a credible way. Gordon points out that Mansfield "portrays children as children, seen through their own eyes and the eyes of other children," and does not "contaminate" the children characters with the adult view.<sup>7</sup> Bates says of Elizabeth Bowen that she has "an uncanny ability to re-create childhood."<sup>8</sup>

Some parallels may be found also in the lives of the two authors. To start with, they were both what Elizabeth Bowen's lover and close friend Charles Ritchie called "an outsider-insider – one immersed [...] in English life but not an Englishman."<sup>9</sup> This dual national identity reflected in their writing. Ian Gordon notices in Katherine Mansfield's writing a "theme of exile with [...] elegiac undertones." He argues that her best short stories were written when she "turned for her themes to her origins" and when, consequently, a "note of elegy entered her work."<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Bowen said about herself in an interview that she considered herself an Irish writer:

As long as I can remember I've been extremely conscious of being Irish – even when I was writing about very un-Irish things such as suburban life in Paris or the English seaside. All my life I've been going

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<sup>3</sup> H. E. Bates, "Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard," *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1945) 129.

<sup>4</sup> Glendinning 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longmans, 1971) 19.

<sup>6</sup> Jocelyn Brooke, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Longmans, 1952) 30.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon 20.

<sup>8</sup> Bates 149.

<sup>9</sup> Glendinning 138.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon 5 - 6.

backwards and forwards between Ireland and England and the Continent, but that has never robbed me of the strong feeling of my nationality.<sup>11</sup>

Further, they both started to write short stories in their twenties, both moved to London in order to start their literary career and gradually made their way into the literary world. They were both meeting with people from the Bloomsbury group and both became friends with Virginia Woolf. This was, however, not at the same time, and Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen probably never met, due to Mansfield's early death. Nevertheless, we may say with certainty that by 1957, Elizabeth Bowen had been familiar with Katherine Mansfield's work as in that year, an American edition of Mansfield's short stories came out, edited and prefaced by Elizabeth Bowen.

Despite the fact that Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories as well as criticism of their work seem to bear a considerable resemblance, there is no published study comparing these two authors, which is the reason why I decided to pursue this problematic in my BA thesis. My aim is to find evidence for and of the similarities in Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories, to search for further biographical parallels and stimuli that influenced their writing, as well as to compare the critical response to their work.

It would be impossible to make an exhaustive comparative analysis of Mansfield's and Bowen's short story fiction within the scope of a BA thesis. Therefore, I must restrict my interest in several ways. At the same time, I wish to present a complex picture, discussing the form and the content of the stories as well as some contextual information. As a result, I focus only on selected issues from the above mentioned fields. Further limitation concerns selection of the concrete short stories that are to be analysed. I chose one short story collection by each author: *Bliss and Other Stories* by Katherine Mansfield and *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* by Elizabeth Bowen. The collection *Bliss and Other Stories* was first published in 1920 and consists of the following titles: "Prelude," "Je ne parle pas français," "Bliss," "The Wind Blows," "Psychology," "Pictures," "The Man without a Temperament," "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day," "Sun and Moon," "Feuille d'Album," "A Dill Pickle," "The Little Governess," "Revelations" and "The Escape." Bowen's

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<sup>11</sup> Glendinning 165.



short story collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* was first published in 1945 and includes these short stories: “In the Square,” “Sunday Afternoon,” “The Inherited Clock,” “The Cheery Soul,” “Songs My Father Sang Me,” “Careless Talk,” “The Happy Autumn Fields,” “Ivy Grippled the Steps,” “Pink May,” “Green Holly,” and “Mysterious Kôr.”

The reason for selecting these two collections was to find a representative sample of both of the authors. It might be argued that this choice is not the most logical one as there is a twenty-five year difference between the dates of publication of the two collections and the short stories from *The Demon Lover* collection were written during the Second World War and are very much reflections of it, while in Katherine Mansfield’s collection *Bliss and Other Stories*, published after the First World War, not a single short story is directly concerned with war, except for a few sporadic references to it. Moreover, the collection *Bliss and Other stories* is firmly set in the peak of the Modernist era, while by 1945, the date of publication of *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, for many, Modernism had extinguished. Thus, one might argue, the choice could have been made as to approximate in the date of publication, for example to choose Bowen’s short story collection *Encounters* that was published in 1923.

I can explain my choice of the short stories in three points. Firstly, as I have said, the focus is on finding a representative sample. I opted for Mansfield’s *Bliss and Other Stories* because it contains the short story “Prelude,” perhaps the best-known and highly esteemed piece of writing by Katherine Mansfield, with which, according to her biographer Antony Alpers, she herself was pleased<sup>12</sup>. In this collection, there are three other stories that, as Alpers informs us, Mansfield was proud of: “Je ne parle pas français,” “The Man Without a Temperament” and “Bliss.”<sup>13</sup> *The Demon Lover* collection is Bowen’s mature work; Neil Corcoran, for instance, considers it “her finest single volume of short stories,”<sup>14</sup> and Glendinning names three short stories from this collection, namely “The Happy Autumn Fields,” “Ivy Grippled the Steps” and “Mysterious Kôr,” as the best pieces of writing by

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<sup>12</sup> Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 326.

<sup>13</sup> Alpers 326.

<sup>14</sup> Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 147.

Bowen<sup>15</sup>. Perhaps I could have chosen the best known short stories by each of the authors from various collections, but as Bowen suggests in the postscript to *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, the collection is “an organic whole” (198). This, in my opinion, applies to any collection put together by the author, and it seems logical to respect it. It also has the advantage that both the highly esteemed short stories as well as the less famous ones are included in the selection.

Secondly, it is true that the short stories from *The Demon Lover* collection are reflections of the Second World War, but as Bowen asserts, they are “wartime” not “war” stories, they are “studies of climate, war-climate” (196). In *Bliss and Other Stories*, Mansfield also focuses very much on climate, though not war-time climate. Moreover, it is interesting to see that despite the fact that the two collections differ in its subject matter, there are still many parallels in the themes.

My third point is about the relation of the two collections to Modernism. Mansfield has been recognized as the innovator of the genre of short story. Bates argues that she helped “the English story to a state of adult emancipation”<sup>16</sup>; Gordon insists that “she had the same kind of directive influence on the art of the short story as Joyce had on the novel”<sup>17</sup> and points out that she preceded Virginia Woolf in her experiments with the technique.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, when Bowen started her literary career, as Glendinning puts it, she “had been conscious of an ‘establishment’” embodied by the people from the Bloomsbury group; “Virginia Woolf was the acknowledged head of her profession, certainly as far as Elizabeth was concerned [...]”<sup>19</sup> Glendinning calls Bowen a “heir, in literary and aesthetic terms, to Bloomsbury.”<sup>20</sup> Corcoran suggests that Bowen is “deeply impressed by the ambitions of High Modernism, even if, until the final two novels, she never entirely loses touch with classic realism and its customary methods [...]”<sup>21</sup> It may be said that both *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* have modernist features, though the relationship to modernism in *The Demon Lover* collection is perhaps less direct. As mentioned earlier, both Mansfield and Bowen

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<sup>15</sup> Glendinning 1.

<sup>16</sup> Bates 124.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon 17.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon 21.

<sup>19</sup> Glendinning 77.

<sup>20</sup> Glendinning 74.

<sup>21</sup> Corcoran 4.

were meeting with people from the Bloomsbury Group, although they never belonged to the “inner” Bloomsbury Group; nevertheless, their names are included in the publication *Who’s Who in Bloomsbury*.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up, I will compare Mansfield’s short story collection *Bliss and Other Stories* and Bowen’s collection *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, examining various aspects of their writing. As to the structure of my thesis, the body consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides contextual information, namely studies various influences that may be found in Bowen’s and Mansfield’s fiction. The second chapter is concerned with the formal aspects of their short stories and the third chapter analyses the matters of content. All the chapters bear the title *Issues of...* This is to stress the selectiveness of this thesis explained above.

Naturally, there will be overlaps between the topics, as it is sometimes difficult to separate certain features from one another, for example it is impossible to describe the poetic character of their writing without touching upon the themes that appear there. However, this applies to any literature analysis. The content is always inseparable from its form, yet an analysis, in terms of the Western tradition, may hardly be made without attempting to discuss them separately.

There is a large number of books published about the individual authors, but as the aim of this thesis is to present the similarities in Bowen’s and Mansfield’s short stories and not to provide an exhaustive analysis of their writing, I selected only a few publications, the main criteria being relevance and availability. I shall refer to the following secondary literature on Bowen: Jocelyn Brooke’s booklet which was first published in 1952,<sup>23</sup> i.e. during Bowen’s lifetime, and which, as Glendinning shows us, Bowen liked;<sup>24</sup> R. F. Foster’s study of Bowen in *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland*,<sup>25</sup> observing Bowen’s work in the context of Irish literature; and *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* by Neil Corcoran, published in 2004.<sup>26</sup> I also use Bowen’s collected essays.<sup>27</sup> I shall refer primarily to the following

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<sup>22</sup> Alan and Veronica Palmer, *Who’s Who in Bloomsbury* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Jocelyn Brooke, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Longmans, 1952).

<sup>24</sup> Glendinning 196.

<sup>25</sup> R. F. Foster, “Prints on the Scene: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of Childhood,” *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 148 – 164.

<sup>26</sup> Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

publications on Mansfield: Ian Gordon's short study,<sup>28</sup> H. E. Bates's chapter on Mansfield's style of writing in *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey*,<sup>29</sup> and the parts of *Fictions of the Female Self* by Ruth Parkin-Gounelas that concern Mansfield.<sup>30</sup> Throughout the thesis, numerous other sources will be referred to when discussing a concrete problematic, for example in the next chapter I shall refer to several biographies: *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* by Victoria Glendinning,<sup>31</sup> first published in 1977, and *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, a rather detailed study by Antony Alpers from 1980,<sup>32</sup> and another biography of Katherine Mansfield by Jeffrey Meyers<sup>33</sup> that is written in a rather tabloid style and is occasionally referred to here in order to provide a different perspective.

Lastly, it remains to be said that although this thesis mostly stresses the points of contact between Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen, it does not want to suggest that there are no major differences between the two authors. The differences will be mentioned occasionally, nevertheless the main focus is on the similarities.

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, "Stories by Elizabeth Bowen," *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962) 75 – 81.

<sup>28</sup> Ian A. Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longman Group, 1971).

<sup>29</sup> H. E. Bates, "Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard," *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1945) 122 – 147.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978).

## Chapter 2

### Issues of Context

Before approaching the actual analysis of Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories in the subsequent two chapters, let me discuss here some context information. This chapter does not aim to present a biographical overview, but to suggest certain influences that are traceable in Mansfield's and Bowen's work, and to provide a brief overview of the critical responses to their writing. When relevant, I shall make a concrete reference to the short stories selected in the introductory chapter.

Much of this chapter actually deals with what may be considered biographical criticism. Some critics loathe this approach, not finding it relevant to the work itself. However, this approach seems conducive in this case for two reasons. Firstly, the parallels in Mansfield's and Bowen's lives are surprisingly plentiful and have not been studied yet. Secondly, their stories are often described as very personal. H. E. Bates, for example, observes that Katherine Mansfield's "art, and her particular application of it to the short story, was intensely personal"<sup>1</sup>. Ian Gordon also suggests that "Katherine Mansfield to a degree almost unparalleled in English fiction put her own experiences into her stories. She wrote of nothing that did not directly happen to her, even when she appeared to be at her most imaginative and fanciful."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many critics of Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories approach their work from this perspective, often with regard to the country of their origin or their experience with other forms of art.

Although Elizabeth Bowen herself declares in a preface to one of her short story collections: "I am dead against art's being self-expression. I can see an inherent failure in any story which does not detach itself from the author [...],"<sup>3</sup> she admits only several lines later that "any fiction [...] is bound to be transposed autobiography. I can, and indeed if I would not I still must, relate any and every story

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<sup>1</sup> Bates, H. E., "Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard," *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1945) 126.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longmans, 1971) 7.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, "Stories by Elizabeth Bowen," *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962) 77.

I have written to something that happened to me in my own life.”<sup>4</sup> It may seem that Elizabeth Bowen here contradicts herself, which according to Glendinning she often did.<sup>5</sup> However, her essay “Sources of Influence” sheds more light on what she meant. She opposes the “tendency to think that the direct transcription of experience [into a literary work] and the action of experience are synonymous”; rather, according to Bowen, “true action of experience on the creative powers is erratic, indirect and slow [...]” and “the experience which really influences art does not consist in drama or incidents; it is a sort of emotional accumulation [...]”<sup>6</sup> The biographical information provided in this chapter and its relation to Bowen’s and Mansfield’s short stories are treated in accordance with this attitude. Thus, the focus is rather on influences and their projection in the short stories rather than on the depiction of particular experiences. The chapter is divided into three sections, following the three sources of influence that Elizabeth Bowen recognizes, namely influence of environment, experience and art.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.1 The Influence of Environment

Bowen suggests in the above mentioned essay “Sources of Influence” that in the work of the majority of writers, “the shadowy, half-remembered landscape of early days” is imprinted. This primal landscape, she argues, is partly reconstructed from the memory and partly made up.<sup>8</sup> Her theory seems to take it for granted that one inevitably abandons the scene of childhood. Be it as it may, this definitely was her as well as Katherine Mansfield’s case.

This brings me to another factor that seems to play an important role in Elizabeth Bowen’s and Katherine Mansfield’s fiction. It is their dual national identity. Although this is rather a matter of experience and would thus belong to the next section, I shall mention it here because it is very much connected with the issue of the primal landscape. As Gordon suggests, some writings create a special effect due to the fact that the writer produces it away from his home country; then, not just

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<sup>4</sup> Bowen, “Stories by Elizabeth Bowen” 78.

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 31.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, “Sources of Influence,” *Afterthought: Pieces about Writing* (London: Longmans, 1962) 208.

<sup>7</sup> Bowen, “Sources of Influence” 206.

<sup>8</sup> Bowen, “Sources of Influence” 208.

the country of origin plays an important role but also looking at it from distance.<sup>9</sup> Both Mansfield and Bowen had this distance. Not only they spend much of their adult life in England, away from their home land, they were also constantly on the move, often moving from one home to another, often travelling.

The obvious representation of their home country is setting. Both Mansfield and Bowen set some of their short stories in their native land. There are several publications of Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories where the selection criterion is setting, respectively, Ireland and New Zealand. From these, I shall refer to an exhaustive selection of Katherine Mansfield's "New Zealand stories" edited by Ian Gordon,<sup>10</sup> and *Elizabeth Bowen's Irish Stories* with no stated editor.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand these publications document the number of Bowen's "Irish stories" and Mansfield's "New Zealand stories." Glendinning notes in the introduction to *Elizabeth Bowen's Irish Stories* that it is surprising that the number of the short stories set in Ireland is relatively small.<sup>12</sup> The book includes ten short stories, in some of which the setting is not even explicitly mentioned. Ian Gordon's edition of Mansfield's stories set in New Zealand is quite large, but on closer look it is revealed that not only does it also includes stories where the setting is not explicated, but also it consists of the early short stories, some of which are rather sketches. On the other hand, these publications document that critics are prone to approach Mansfield's and Bowen's fiction from regional perspective.

From Bowen's *The Demon Lover* collection, the short story "Sunday Afternoon" is explicitly set in Ireland. The main character, Henry Russel, is visiting his old friends and relations on the outskirts of Dublin, where he had grown up. Bowen depicts here the feeling of returning to a well known place after a long time: "[The] house, with its fanlights and tall windows, was a villa in the Italian sense, just near enough to the city to make the country's sweetness particularly acute." (18) Bowen's knowledge of the area is projected into the main character:

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon 1.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *Undiscovered Country: The New Zealand Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Ian A. Gordon (London: Longmans, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, *Elizabeth Bowen's Irish Stories* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> Victoria Glendinning, "Introduction," *Elizabeth Bowen's Irish Stories* by Elizabeth Bowen (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1978) 5.

Drawing a cane chair into the circle, he looked from face to face with concern. His look travelled on to the screen of lilac, whose dark purple, pink-silver and white plumes sprayed out in the brilliance of the afternoon. [...] Where the lilac barrier ended, across the sun-polished meadows, the Dublin mountains continued to trace their hazy, today almost colourless line. (17)

From Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*, "Prelude" is explicitly set in New Zealand landscape, here seen through child's eyes:

It was the first time that Lottie and Kezia had ever been out so late. Everything looked different – the painted wooden houses far smaller than they did by day, the garden far bigger and wilder. Bright stars speckled the sky and the moon hung over the harbour dabbling the waves with gold. They could see the lighthouse shining on Quarantine Island, and the green lights on the old coal hulks. (16)

Although many critics ascribe major importance to where the two authors came from, the fact is that not so many of their stories are explicitly set in their country of origin. However, as Bowen argues, the landscape of childhood influences also one's imagery. She also suggests that the writer adapts the picture of the primal landscape and creates a fixed image which he "carries about in him."<sup>13</sup> What Mansfield and Bowen seem to carry about with them is attention to the setting in general.

According to Brooke, "landscape, in the wider sense, is of the first importance" in Bowen's writing.<sup>14</sup> Glendinning observes that since childhood, "places were as important to her as people."<sup>15</sup> Mansfield's focus on landscape is also remarkable. Most of Bowen's as well as Mansfield's stories have a particular setting; though the name of the place is not always mentioned, it is obvious that they mostly had a particular place in mind. About a half of the short stories in *The Demon Lover* collection are set in London, the rest in various parts of England, and two in Ireland, if we accept that the dream scenes in "The Happy Autumn Fields" are pictures from Irish countryside. The setting in the short stories tends to be described in detail. The following example is from the opening of "In the Square":

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<sup>13</sup> Bowen, "Sources of Influence" 208.

<sup>14</sup> Jocelyn Brooke, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Longmans, 1952) 5.

<sup>15</sup> Glendinning 23.



At about nine o'clock on this hot bright July evening the square looked mysterious; it was completely empty, and a whitish reflection, ghost of the glare of midday, came from the pale-coloured façades on its four sides and seemed to brim it up at the top. The grass was parched in the middle; its shaved surface was paid for by people who had gone. The sun, now too low to enter normally, was able to enter brilliantly at a point where three of the houses had been bombed away [...]. (7)

Mansfield tends to be less specific about the particular location of her short stories, and in some cases the reader is hardly able to decipher in which country the story is set, but she always describes the environment in detail, which gives the impression that she had a particular place in mind. For example, in "The Escape" we may guess from the context that it is set in the south of France. There is no direct evidence for that, nevertheless, the description is very detailed:

They had left the last of the houses, those small straggling houses with bits of broken pot flung among the flower-beds and half-naked hens scratching round the doorsteps. Now they were mounting a long steep road that would round the hill and over into the next bay. (214)

The environment of their early days had an influence also on the choice of the themes. For example, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, their style is often associated with portraying children and both the authors have been praised for depicting a child's mind veraciously. In *Bliss and Other Stories*, only "Prelude" and "Sun and Moon" focus on children's perspective:

The big piano was put in a corner and then there came a row of flower pots and then there came the goldy chairs. That was for the concert. When Sun looked in a white faced man sat at the piano – not playing, but banging at it and then looking inside. He had a bag of tools on the piano and he had stuck his hat on a statue against the wall. Sometimes he just started to play and then he jumped up again and looked inside. Sun hoped he wasn't the concert. (From "Sun and Moon," 165-6)

In *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, there are three stories that include childhood scenes: "The Inherited Clock," "Songs My Father Sang Me" and "Ivy Gripp'd the Steps." However, unlike the above mentioned Mansfield's short stories, the

childhood scenes are part of a frame narrative, they are being remembered by the central character, now grown-up. The following example is from “Songs My Father Sang Me,” where the main character, a young woman, remembers the day her father left the family: “[...] the policeman kept nodding and jotting things on a pad. [...] I sucked blobs of chocolate off the front of my frock while my mother described my father to the policeman.” (79)

## 2.2 The Influence of Experience

Bowen writes that “experience as an influence [...] is taken for granted – perhaps too much so.” She complains that too much attention tends to be paid to the supposed transference of the writer’s experience into the action of the literary piece.<sup>16</sup> Gordon too seems to be discontent with this kind of biographical approach, observing that “[b]oth critics and biographers have been led astray by a too-ready and facile identification of her characters and the real-life figures that lay behind them.”<sup>17</sup>

One of the controversial points in biographical approach to Mansfield’s and Bowen’s fiction is their placement among lesbian writers. While Mansfield’s diaries reveal that she was attracted both to men and women and thus the homosexual reading of her stories as well as her presence in the encyclopaedia *Lesbian Histories and Cultures*<sup>18</sup> may be justifiable, there is no such evidence as far as Bowen is concerned. Nevertheless, her name is too included in the said encyclopaedia. Glendinning suggests that “enough lesbian sensibility has been discerned in Elizabeth’s fiction for at least one critic to include her in a study of lesbian literature; and enough in her manner for some people to have presumed that, however conventional her married life, it was towards women that her true inclinations lay.”<sup>19</sup> Glendinning was referring to Jane Rule’s *Lesbian Images*,<sup>20</sup> a collection of short stories by alleged lesbian authors. Today, there are more publications on homosexual cultures where Bowen’s work is discussed; apart from the above mentioned encyclopaedia it is for example Renee C. Hoogland’s study *Elizabeth Bowen: A*

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<sup>16</sup> Bowen, “Sources of Influence” 208.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Gordon, “Introduction,” *Undiscovered Country: The New Zealand Stories of Katherine Mansfield* by Katherine Mansfield, ed. Ian Gordon (London: Longmans, 1974) xvi.

<sup>18</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman, ed., *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopaedia* (New York: Garland, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Glendinning 189.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Rule, *Lesbian Images* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

*Reputation in Writing*,<sup>21</sup> or *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fictions* by Patricia Juliana Smith.<sup>22</sup>

Let us look at the concrete short stories that have invited homosexual reading. From Bowen's *The Demon Lover* it is "Mysterious Kôr" and "The Happy Autumn Fields." "Mysterious Kôr" is a story of sexual frustration of two lovers, Pepita and Arthur, in search of a private place, which seems to be impossible to. Pepita lives with Callie, her "prudish or innocent" friend, who ignores all Callie's pleas to leave the flat and let her and Arthur be there alone. Corcoran suggests that "there are [...] intimations of a perturbedly unselfknowing lesbian sexuality in Callie [...]." Further, Corcoran observes that the story "The Happy Autumn Fields" is also undertoned with suppressed sexuality, perhaps homosexuality, in both the layers: in presence it is the character of Clara, a woman who stays in her barely standing flat during an air-raid, sleeping, taking pleasure in her dreams that form the second layer of the story. As Corcoran suggests, "[she] appears to have a less than satisfactory relationship with her lover, Travis, for whom she feels only 'indifference', and from whose touch she flinches." The dream layer depicts a family in a distant past, where the central motif is an "extreme, it appears more than merely sibling, affection between two sisters, compounded by their extreme sexual rivalry over the same man."<sup>23</sup>

Mansfield's short story "Bliss" might be interpreted in terms of homosexuality. It suggests a queer triangle between the main character Bertha, her husband Harry and certain Miss Fulton. Bertha is attracted to Miss Fulton and invites her to dinner, Harry mocks Miss Fulton whenever Bertha mentions her, but at the end it seems that Harry has an affair with her. The story is told from Bertha's perspective and as most of Mansfield's stories, it is very subjective. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between what really happens and what Bertha imagines. Nevertheless, there are numerous hints that invite homosexual reading. Firstly, Bertha's relationship with Harry seems to be based rather on friendship than physical attraction. They have a child, but Bertha admits her sexual aversion:

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<sup>21</sup> Renee C. Hoogland, *Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Juliana Smith, *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fictions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 156.

[...] 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...’ [...] Oh, she’d loved him [...] 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. (107-8)

She seems to have fallen in love with Miss Fulton, “as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them.” (99) She feels “bliss – absolute bliss! – as though you’d suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon sun and it burned in your bosom, sending a little shower of sparks into every particle, into every finger and toe?” (95) Despite the fact that they hardly talk to each other, Bertha is certain that there is a quiet understanding between them. This is what Parkin-Gounelas refers to as “the pleasure that comes from a certain type of communication which exists only among women,” which she traces back to Mansfield’s statement in the fragment of her teenage novel *Juliet* that “a woman cannot be wholly natural with a man.”<sup>24</sup> After a moment of the seeming understanding with Miss Fulton, “for the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband.” (107)

### **2.3 The Influence of Art**

Although in “Sources of Influence” Bowen discusses only the influence of literature on a writer, I shall pay attention also to visual art and music. Nevertheless, let me begin by comparing the literary influences that are ascribed to Mansfield and Bowen. Mansfield and Bowen were diligent readers and they were also writing reviews. Mansfield’s inspiration by Chekhov is perhaps the most frequently mentioned. However, I shall focus here on those sources of inspiration that are traceable both in Mansfield’s and Bowen’s short stories. Both of the authors are said to have been influenced by French literature. There is a book focusing on French influence in Mansfield as well as the reception of Mansfield’s writing in France, *Katherine*

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<sup>24</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 134-5.

*Mansfield: The View from France* by Gerri Kimber.<sup>25</sup> Kimber observes that Mansfield's style shows an influence of Colette, whose writing she admired. It is especially "the lack of conventional plot [...], the simplicity of her presentation, belying the complexity of the underlying themes," Kimber argues, that resemble Colette's writing.<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Bowen also liked Colette. She admitted that after Virginia Woolf died, Colette was one of a few living authors she "really admire[d]."<sup>27</sup> Victoria Glendinning also likens Bowen's style to Colette's, especially her attention to flowers in her writing,<sup>28</sup> and generally her attention to details when describing the environment and its atmosphere.<sup>29</sup> In fact, both of these characteristics apply both to Bowen and Mansfield. The lyrical character of their writing is discussed in the following chapter and the occurrence of flowers in Chapter 4.

Another author that is said to have influenced both Mansfield and Bowen was Charles Dickens, especially in the use of satirical humour. C. K. Stead refers to D. H. Lawrence's opinion that "Mansfield's nearest literary relation was Dickens – the Dickens who pounces quick and sharp on funny details and by a slight (often satirical) exaggeration, and by the repetition of certain magically comic phrases, expands an insignificant scene or event until it becomes unforgettably significant."<sup>30</sup> Victoria Glendinning writes about Bowen that "she combines an emotional intensity second to none with a humour that ranges from the subtlest social comedy to Dickensian burlesque."<sup>31</sup> But it is not only the critics who see Dickens' influence in their writing. Both Mansfield and Bowen recognized him as their source of inspiration. Mansfield was especially conscious of being influenced by Dickens when writing "Je ne parle pas français."<sup>32</sup> The short story is full of self-irony:

‘Ah!’ I cried, staring at the clock on the mantelpiece, and then, realizing that it didn't go, striking my forehead as though the idea had nothing to do with it. ‘Madame, I have a very important appointment with the director of my newspaper at nine-thirty [...].’ (79 – 80)

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<sup>25</sup> Gerri Kimber, *Katherine Mansfield: The View from France* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Kimber 113-4.

<sup>27</sup> Glendinning 177.

<sup>28</sup> Glendinning 83.

<sup>29</sup> Glendinning 2.

<sup>30</sup> C. K. Stead, "Introduction," *Letters and Journals: A Selection*, by Katherine Mansfield, ed. C. K. Stead (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 18.

<sup>31</sup> Glendinning 2.

<sup>32</sup> Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 270.

“Green Holly” is one of Bowen’s short stories that is reminiscent of Dickens’ humour:

Mr Rankstock entered the room with a dragging tread: nobody looked up or took any notice. With a muted groan, he dropped into an armchair – out of which he shot with a sharp yelp. He searched the seat of the chair, and extracted something. ‘*Your* holly, I think, Miss Bates,’ he said, holding it out to her.

Miss Bates took a second or two to look up from her magazine. ‘What?’ she said. ‘Oh, it must have fallen down from that picture. Put it back, please; we haven’t got very much.’

‘I regret,’ interposed Mr Winterslow, ‘that we have any: it makes scratchy noises against the walls.’

[...]

‘[...] If there were not a draught, the leaves would not scratch the walls. I cannot control the forces of nature, can I?’

‘How should I know?’ said Mr Rankstock, lighting his pipe. (166)

Apart from literature, Bowen and Mansfield were influenced by visual art. Elizabeth Bowen at first tended towards fine arts. She enrolled an art school, but soon learned that her talent was not sufficient.<sup>33</sup> Painting, however, affected her style of writing and she was aware of that; she wrote about herself: “It seems to me that often when I write I am trying to make words do the work of line and colour. I have the painter’s sensitivity to light. Much (and perhaps best) of my writing is verbal painting.”<sup>34</sup> The impression of colour and light remains even in the memory of the woman in “Songs My Father Sang Me”:

It was an outsize June day. The country below us looked all colours, and was washed over in the most reckless way with light; going on and on into the distance the clumps of trees and the roofs of villages and the church towers had quivering glimmers round them; but most of all there was space, sort of moulded space, and the blue of earth ran into the blue of sky. (76)

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<sup>33</sup>Glendinning 41.

<sup>34</sup>Glendinning 41.

In case of Katherine Mansfield, the influence was indirect. In her late teens, she read a diary of a Russian painter Marie Bashkirtseff that very much affected her. It stimulated her need of self-expression and inspired her to write personal lyrical short stories.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, in 1910 Katherine Mansfield visited the exhibition of post-impressionists organized by Roger Fry, and claimed that Van Gogh's paintings "suggested a new way to capture bright splashes of colour and to make her writing more visually vivid."<sup>36</sup> To illustrate Mansfield's attention to colour and light, let me quote from "The Man without a Temperament":

"The late sunlight, deep, golden, lay in the cup of the valley; there was a smell of charcoal in the air. In the gardens the men were cutting grapes. He watched a man standing in the greenish shade, rising up, holding a black cluster in one hand, taking the knife from his belt [...]" (148)

Katherine Mansfield was influenced to a great extent by music. In her early teens, she fell in love with a violoncello child prodigy, later known under the pseudonym Arnold Trowell, and started to learn to play violoncello herself, taking lessons from his father. This aroused her lifelong passion for music. She had two other relationships with musicians, with Arnold Trowell's brother Garnet and with a singer George Bowden, whom she finally married but left him after the very first day of their marriage.<sup>37</sup> Music often figures in Mansfield's short stories. For example, the central character of "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day" is a musician and teacher of music, in "Pictures" it is a singer in search of an employment, in "The Wind Blows" a girl taking music lessons. Let me quote from "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day":

As was his daily habit, while the bath water ran, Reginald Peacock tried his voice. '[...] Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded...' and upon the world 'wedded' he burst into such a shout of triumph that the tooth-glass on the bathroom shelf trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause. [...] 'Wedded,' he shouted again, seizing the towel with a magnificent operatic gesture [...]. (156-7)

It seems that Mansfield's knowledge of music had an influence not only on the content but also on the form. Dominic Head quotes a passage from her diary

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<sup>35</sup> Alpers 51.

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978) 59.

<sup>37</sup> Meyers 45.

describing finalisation of one of her short stories: “I read it aloud – numbers of times – just as one would *play over* a musical composition [...]”<sup>38</sup> Gordon refers to her “her insistence on the importance of half-tones and ‘quarter-tones’” in the sphere of meaning of words.<sup>39</sup>

Bowen’s writing also seems to show some musical influence in terms of the form. For example Corcoran has a feeling that Bowen “regards writing, or at least certain types of writing, as almost a kind of jazz improvisation.”<sup>40</sup> Brooke likens the technique of her mature short stories to “orchestra” which enables to “see things on a number of planes simultaneously.”<sup>41</sup> As far as the content of Bowen’s short stories is concerned, music occurs there far less often than in Mansfield’s stories. One of Bowen’s short stories where music plays an important role is “Songs My Father Sang Me,” where music being played in a bar makes the central character remember her father who used to sing the same piece:

He often *began* to sing – when he hammered away at the pergola, when something he thought suddenly struck him as good [...]. He was constantly starting to sing, but he never got very far – you see, he had no place where he could sing unheard. [...] when he had got to the fourth or fifth bar of either, [mother] would call out to know if he wanted to drive her mad. [...] When he came to the end of his first tune he said, ‘Pom-pom’, like a drum, then started through it again [...]. (71-5)

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided some contextual information to Mansfield’s and Bowen’s short stories. On the one hand, it has added to the biographical parallels between the two authors mentioned in the introductory chapter and suggested certain influences that may be relevant for the analysis of their short stories, namely the influence of the landscape of their childhood, the dual national identity, and different forms of art. On the other hand, this chapter has studied also various critical approaches to their work that may be associated with expressive theories: regionalism and queer cultures.

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<sup>38</sup> Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 111.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon 28.

<sup>40</sup> Corcoran 3.

<sup>41</sup> Brooke 19.



However assailable both these approaches may be, they are relatively frequent and cannot be overlooked if a complex picture is desired. It has been also showed that the biographical approach to Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories belongs among the most frequent because their short stories tend to be very personal.

## Chapter 3

### Issues of Form

This chapter compares selected formal aspects of Katherine Mansfield's and Elizabeth Bowen's short stories. This topic is very broad and it would be impossible to make an exhaustive analysis within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I focus here on explication of the three most frequent words that have been used for description of Bowen's and Mansfield's style of writing: "sensibility," "lyricism" and "impressionism." Various critics understand these words differently and point out different qualities of Bowen's and Mansfield's writing as their representation, but some universal conclusions may be arrived at. Further, I discuss why their short story technique may be compared to film.

#### 3.1 Impressionism

Let me begin with discussion of impressionism in Mansfield's and Bowen's stories. Jocelyn Brooke writes that "there is, undoubtedly, a quality in Miss Bowen's writing which suggests the work of the French Impressionists – in particular, one remembers her intense feeling for light."<sup>1</sup> According to Glendinning, "she is a writer whose atmospheric descriptions of place, other-worldly perceptions, hyperaesthetic responses to shifts of mood, light, pace, mass, make one characterize her as an impressionist."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Bates writes about Mansfield that "her eye takes in the imagery of surrounding life in a series of wonderfully vivid and excited impressions."<sup>3</sup> O'Sullivan suggests that the "sense of flow which Mansfield so admired in painting, the quick fluidity in what she called 'the flowing shade and sunlight world' is also the flow that insists finally on isolation, on the nostalgia at the centre of all impressionist art [...]."<sup>4</sup> There is also a book on Mansfield devoted to

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<sup>1</sup> Jocelyn Brooke, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London: Longmans, 1952) 7.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 98.

<sup>3</sup> H. E. Bates, "Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard," *Modern Short Story* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1945) 126-7.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent O'Sullivan, *Finding the Pattern, Solving the Problem* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1989) 7.

the representation of impressionism in her stories: *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* by Julia Van Gunsteren.<sup>5</sup>

To conclude, various critics recognize that Mansfield's and Bowen's fiction may be described as impressionist but they consider different features of their writing impressionist. Neither do theoreticians of literature fully agree on how impressionism is represented in literature and often begin their definition by stating that the term is rather vague and may be interpreted in various ways. Therefore, I do not follow a single definition of the term. I selected the most prominent qualities associated with impressionist art that may be found in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* and Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* and discuss them individually below. Where relevant, I shall refer to the study *Literary Impressionism* by Maria Kronegger<sup>6</sup> and occasionally to various definitions of the term impressionism.

The first two points I shall make are perhaps not that much related to my topic, i.e. the formal aspects of writing, and they may seem rather obvious. However, no analysis of impressionism would be complete without mentioning them. Firstly, impressionist writing is compared to painting, as the term was originally coined to describe the style of painting of the group of French painters around Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Camille Pissarro and Pierre Auguste Renoir in 1870s and 1880s. Secondly, it is often viewed as a French influence, not only because the first so called impressionist painters came from France but also because in the sphere of literature it were at first the French naturalists such as Flaubert and Maupassant whose writing started to be described as impressionist and later for example Verlaine or Proust.<sup>7</sup> Both the influences of painting and French literature on Mansfield and Bowen have been discussed in Chapter 2.

Thirdly, according to *OED* definition impressionists tend to focus on a "scene" or an "object."<sup>8</sup> In literature this goes often hand in hand with what Dominic Head calls de-emphasis of plot.<sup>9</sup> Setting in Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories has been

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<sup>5</sup> Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Maria Elisabeth Kronegger, *Literary Impressionism* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Kronegger 25-7.

<sup>8</sup> "impressionist, n. (and adj.)," *OED Online*, March 2011, Oxford University Press, 17 May 2011 <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/view/Entry/92732?redirectedFrom=impressionist>>.

<sup>9</sup> Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 17.

discussed in the previous chapter and objects will be discussed in Chapter 4. “The lack of conventional plot” has been named as one of the features which are ascribed to Collette’s influence on Mansfield. Bowen’s short stories may be regarded also often plotless. Glendinning suggests that rather than a plot there is a tension in Bowen’s fiction.<sup>10</sup> It might be argued that there are stories by Bowen as well as Mansfield that do have a plot or at least a considerable amount of action. Such stories are for example Mansfield’s “The Little Governess,” “Pictures,” “Feuille d’Album” or “Sun and Moon,” and Bowen’s “The Demon Lover,” all the longer short stories, i.e., “The Inherited Clock,” “The Happy Autumn Fields” and “Ivy Grippled the Steps,” as well as “Songs My Father Sang Me” and “The Cheery Soul.” However, the plot or action does not seem to be of primary importance in the story, rather, at the core of the short story appears to be a certain feeling. Mansfield’s “The Little Governess” primarily depicts the feeling of loneliness, estrangement and fear culminating in the emotion of terror and disappointment, “Pictures” focus on self-deceiving optimism as well as life-weariness of an unmarried destitute woman, “Sun and Moon” depicts excitement and disappointment of a child’s mind, Bowen’s “The Demon Lover” focuses on the feeling of horror, “The Inherited Clock” and “The Happy Autumn Fields” are dominated by a feeling of tension and strangeness, etc.

Fourthly, the word “impressionism” is derived from the word “impression” that implies two characteristics, well expressed in the definition of impressionism in *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* by Edward Quinn: “[i]n the impressionist literary style, emphasis falls on the creation of a mood or atmosphere reflecting a world filtered through an individual consciousness.”<sup>11</sup> Let me focus here on the “creation of a mood or atmosphere,” while the subjective perception will be discussed separately below as point five. In the previous chapter it has been observed that both Mansfield and Bowen pay attention to colour and light in their short stories. This may be viewed as part of a larger tendency to create a special mood or atmosphere achieved by setting the stories into particular atmospheric conditions. Mansfield’s and Bowen’s stories usually take place in a particular part of day and/or season, in particular weather or light conditions. This is mostly reflected in the

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<sup>10</sup> Glendinning 2.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Quinn, “impressionism,” *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2006) 210.

description of the scenery or objects, be they in the interior or exterior. It is perhaps more obvious in Bowen's stories, where the setting is often described at the beginning. For example, in the first paragraph of "The Demon Lover," there is the following description:

It was late August; it had been a steamy, showery day: at the moment the trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out. (82)

Mansfield's stories usually do not begin with such a description, but throughout the story the particular weather conditions, or other details of this kind, are often revealed. For example, in "Revelations" it is a windy "wild white morning" (207), in "The Escape" it is a boiling hot afternoon, in "Reginald Peacock's Day" it is a lovely spring day, in "Prelude" and "Bliss," moonlight creates a special atmosphere. As I have mentioned, it is not only the outdoor scenery that is depicted with focus on light and colour but also the interiors and objects there:

Mary brought in the fruit on a tray and with it a glass bowl, and a blue dish, very lovely, with a strange sheen on it as though it had been dipped in milk. [...] There were tangerines and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had brought to tone with the new dining-room carpet. (From "Bliss," 96)

Joanna looked round the restaurant [...]; between the net-curtained windows, drowsy with August rain, mirrors reflected heads in smoke and electric light and the glitter of buttons on uniforms. (From "Careless Talk," 91)

Fifthly, impressionist art is based on subjectivity. The object or scenery is captured as seen by particular person, whose emotions are reflected in the depiction. This is especially notable in Mansfield's short stories due to her narrative technique. Although she mostly uses a third-person narrator, the stories are often based on interior monologue of one of the characters. As Gordon suggests, "[i]n her best stories the world is always seen through the eyes of one of her characters. Where she describes scenery, it is not merely the backcloth to a situation. It is conveyed to the

reader emotionally, and uniquely, as only the person in the story can feel it.”<sup>12</sup> Although Bowen uses mostly a detached third-person narrator, there are stories which are highly subjective. Leaving aside “Cheery Soul,” the only short story told by a first-person narrator, other instances of stories with a subjective point of view are undoubtedly “Pink May” and “Songs My Father Sang Me.” These stories are based on a monologue of the main character, which is, naturally, subjective. In the same way most of “The Happy Autumn Fields” is subjective because a considerable part of the story is the main character’s dream vision.

Sixthly, as Cuddon suggests, impressionist paintings as well as writings are “not interested in precise representation.”<sup>13</sup> They avoid explicit closures and leave a space for the reader’s own interpretations. When discussing the stylistic features of impressionist writing, Kronegger quotes Mallarmé: “To name an object is to sacrifice three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which comes from the guessing bit by bit. To suggest it, that is our dream.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, by “object” Mallarmé means what is at the core of the poem. Since at the core of the stories by Mansfield and Bowen often is, as observed in point three, a feeling, it is the feeling that is *suggested*. Suggesting seems to be the key word here. Glendinning uses the opposition of *describing* and *suggesting* to explain her point about Bowen’s style of writing.<sup>15</sup> Foster mentions Bowen’s “*oblique* psychological insights.”<sup>16</sup> Gunsteren often uses the word “oblique” to describe Mansfield’s style and also relates it to what seems to be at the core of the stories, claiming that Mansfield “believed in presenting a profound experience indirectly, by means of apparently trivial incidents, which have significance for what they reveal of a character’s inner mood. Feelings are never explained, analysed, but suggested.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Brooke observes that “the word ‘impressionism’ is apt to suggest a certain vagueness; but the Impressionists themselves were far from being vague, and in fact based their methods of work upon strictly scientific principles. The same might be said of Elizabeth Bowen: for she is,

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longmans, 1971) 24.

<sup>13</sup> John Anthony Cuddon, “impressionism,” *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 416.

<sup>14</sup> Kronegger 70.

<sup>15</sup> Glendinning 2.

<sup>16</sup> R. F. Foster, “Prints on the Scene: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of Childhood,” *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 149.

<sup>17</sup> Gunsteren 86.

above all, a highly conscious and deliberate artist; nothing in her work is left to chance, none of her effects is unpremeditated.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Gordon says about Mansfield: “There is nothing vague or nebulous – or naive – about her writings. She is assured in her craft, and knowledgeable even to the placing of comma. She writes with precision, knowing the effect she intends, and achieving it in all her best work with an accuracy and an inexplicable rightness in prose expression [...]”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Bowen’s and Mansfield’s stories are full of impressionist incomplete images but it is an intentional omission, a device of their narrative strategy.

Let me conclude the discussion of impressionist features in Mansfield’s and Bowen short stories with Gunsteren’s observation that “Literary Impressionism is not the only impulse discernible in Mansfield’s short stories. Her work touches on a range of literary movements, but Literary Impressionism is far more than an occasional tendency.”<sup>20</sup> The same may be said about Elizabeth Bowen. Then let me continue with the other aesthetic tendencies that may be found in Bowen’s and Mansfield’s stories.

### 3.2 Sensibility and Lyricism

The other two words frequently used by critics of Mansfield’s and Bowen’s work are “sensibility” and “lyricism.” In many ways they are connected with the impressionist character of their writing. As Kronegger suggests, “the major effect of impressionist prose is lyrical [...]”<sup>21</sup> The *OED* definition of “lyric” accentuates that it is a form of poetry “directly expressing the poet’s own thoughts and sentiments.”<sup>22</sup> This is largely related to the subjective mode discussed in point five. Lyric also dismisses the plot, a feature that has been discussed in point three. Also Mansfield’s and Bowen’s style of writing has been also compared to a poet’s technique. For example, Gordon relates Mansfield’s “concentrated diction” to poetry.<sup>23</sup> Corcoran quotes Bowen’s opinion that when writing one must “be sensitive, imaginative as to

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<sup>18</sup> Brooke 28-9.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon 29.

<sup>20</sup> Gunsteren 11.

<sup>21</sup> Kronegger 87.

<sup>22</sup> “lyric, adj. and n.” *OED Online*, March 2011, Oxford University Press, 17 May 2011 <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/view/Entry/111676?rskey=Whs2uB&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon 25.

words themselves – for they are there not merely to serve *our* purpose: they are charged with destinies of their own, haunted by diverse associations” and claims that “this sounds much more like a lyric poet’s than a prose writer’s intense sensitivity to the semantic, acoustic, and etymological interconnections between words [...],” referring to “the ‘vibrating force’ of her language.”<sup>24</sup> Apart from the density and the attention to denotations and connotations as well as the sound of words, another feature associated with poetry is figurative language. The occurrence of figurative language is much more frequent in Mansfield’s *Bliss and Other Stories* than Bowen’s *The Demon Lover*, but in the latter there are also some examples. Perhaps the most frequent figure of speech in both of the collections is simile. For instance, in Bowen’s “Songs My Father Sang Me” the narrator relates that “on the floor dancers drifted like pairs of vertical fish” (66), the main character in the same story says about her mother’s reproachful voice that it was “as unmusical as a gramophone with the spring broken” (73) and the woman in “Pink May” narrates: “[...] I did notice that the veil on my white hat wasn’t all that it ought to be. When I had put that hat out before my bath the whole affair had looked as crisp as a marguerite – a marguerite that has only opened today.” (160) In Mansfield’s “Prelude,” “[...] Lottie staggered on the lowest veranda step like a bird fallen out of the nest. If she stood still for a moment she fell asleep; if she leaned against anything her eyes closed. She could not walk another step.” In “The Man Without a Temperament” the narrator observes that “[the] two coils of knitting, like two snakes, slumbered beside the tray” (139) and later “[the] laughing voices charged with excitement beat against the glassed-in veranda like birds.” (144)

“Sensibility” is defined in *OED* as “quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences; sensitiveness.”<sup>25</sup> It has been observed in point three of the analysis of impressionist features that a feeling is often at the core of Mansfield’s and Bowen’s short stories, often overweighing or replacing traditional plot. Often the characters may be characterized as sensitive, being driven by emotions, closely observing the

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<sup>24</sup> Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 4.

<sup>25</sup> “sensibility, n.” *OED Online*. June 2011. Oxford University Press. 15 June 2011 <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/view/Entry/175969?redirectedFrom=sensibility>>.



surroundings and reacting to it. However, this is rather a matter of content that shall be analysed in the next chapter. Sensibility also suggests focus on sensual perception. While this is also connected with discussion of characters, i.e., the content, it is also reflected on the level of form. Various kinds of sensual perception serve as means of enriching the description passages. The most dominant is the perception by sight, which goes hand in hand with the attention to colour and light discussed in the previous chapter and description of atmospheric conditions analysed in the fourth point of the discussion of impressionist features in Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories. However, other senses are often involved:

She lay on one of the hard pink-sprigged couches and watched the other passengers, friendly and natural, pinning their hats to the bolsters, taking off their boots and skirts, opening dressing-cases and arranging mysterious rustling little packages, tying their heads up in veils before lying down. *Thud, thud, thud*, went the steady screw of the steamer. The stewardess pulled a green shade over the light and sat down by the stove, her skirt turned back over her knees, a long piece of knitting on her lap. On a shelf above her head there was a water-bottle with a tight bunch of flowers stuck in it. "I like travelling very much," thought the little governess. She smiled and yielded to the warm rocking. ("The Little Governess," 189)

The kitchen was my objective [...]. I pushed at a promising baize door: it immediately opened upon a vibration of heat and rich, heartening smells. [...] Warm, and spiced with excellent smells, it was in the dark completely but for the crimson glow from between the bars of the range. A good deal puzzled, I switched the light on [...]. I looked about – to be staggered by what I did not see. Neither on range, table, nor outside dresser were there signs of preparation of any meal. Not a plate, not a spoon, not a canister showed any signs of action. [...] A tap drip-drop-dripped on an upturned bowl in the sink – but nobody had been peeling potatoes there. ("The Cheery Soul," 57-8)

### 3.3 Film technique

Apart from impressionism, lyricism and sensibility, Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories have been also related to film. O'Sullivan claims that Mansfield's "rapid transition of tenses and time levels, the future not simply anticipated but narratively held within the present, that present already contained in the past" is a method that she "became aware of through hitting on the very simple fact that the technique of film could be applied to the short story."<sup>26</sup> From *Bliss and Other Stories*, short stories that resemble the film technique are for example "The Little Governess," "A Dill Pickle," "Feuille d'Album," "Sun and Moon," "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day" or "Pictures." Corcoran finds Bowen's short story "The Demon Lover" to be "prominently cinematic in technique," and although he mentions that this is done "in several ways," he points only to the flashbacks of the main character.<sup>27</sup> Bowen was conscious of the influence of film and admitted that her stories were "suitable for films [...] of the decorative [...] kind."<sup>28</sup> It is not only "The Demon Lover" that resembles film, but also "The Cheery Soul," "Green Holy," "Mysterious Kôr" and all the longer stories.

I shall analyse here three techniques in Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories that may be associated with film, all of which have been implied in the previous paragraph: transitions in time layers that are in cinematographic speech called flashbacks, shifts in point of view and dialogism. As to the first mentioned, Gordon quotes Mansfield's comment on one of her short stories: "What I feel the story needs so particularly is a very subtle variation of 'tense' from the present to the past and back again – and softness, lightness, and the feeling that all is in bud, with a play of humour over the character." Gordon argues that "the 'subtle variation of tense' is a notable feature of all her later stories. It is often used with peculiar appropriateness as one of her means of quietly unfolding character."<sup>29</sup> Here is an example of oscillation between the past and present in "A Dill Pickle":

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<sup>26</sup> O'Sullivan 6.

<sup>27</sup> Corcoran 160.

<sup>28</sup> Glendinning 198.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon 22.

‘[...] Do you remember that first afternoon we spent together at Kew Gardens? You were so surprised because I did not know the names of any flowers. I am still just as ignorant for all your telling me. But whenever it is very fine and warm, and I see some bright colours – it’s awfully strange – I hear your voice saying: “Geranium, marigold, and verbena.” And I feel those three words are all I recall of some forgotten, heavenly language.... You remember that afternoon?’

‘Oh, yes, very well.’ She drew a long, soft breath, as though the paper daffodils between them were almost too sweet to bear. Yet, what had remained in her mind of that particular afternoon was an absurd scene over the tea table. A great many people taking tea in a Chinese pagoda, and he behaving like a maniac about the wasps – waving them away, flapping at them with his straw hat, serious and infuriated out of all proportion to the occasion. How delighted the sniggering tea drinkers had been. And how she had suffered.

But now, as he spoke, that memory faded. His was the truer. Yes, it had been a wonderful afternoon, full of geranium and marigold and verbena, and – warm sunshine. Her thoughts lingered over the last two words as though she sang them.

In the warmth, as it were, another memory unfolded. She saw herself sitting on a lawn [...]. (Mansfield 182-3)

Glendinning also notices Bowen’s “shifts in time.”<sup>30</sup> For example, in the story “In the Square,” the narrator moves from the present to the past and back smoothly:

One taxi did now enter at the north side and cruise round the polish to a house in a corner: a man got out and paid his fare. He glanced round him, satisfied to find the shell of the place here. In spite of the dazzling breach, the square’s acoustics had altered very little: in the confined sound of his taxi driving away there was nothing to tell him he had not arrived to dinner as on many summer evening before. He went up familiar steps and touched the chromium bell. (Bowen 11-2)

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<sup>30</sup> Glendinning 2.

In many stories by Bowen and Mansfield, there are also interesting shifts in point of view. This is apparent in both of the examples quoted above. In “A Dill Pickle,” the man’s view and the woman’s view constantly alternate. In “In the Square,” there are three views of three characters, Rupert, Ginny and Bennet, and that of the third-person narrator; in the excerpt quoted above, the narrator’s view switches to Rupert’s view.

As in a film, in Bowen’s and Mansfield’s stories dialogues are often used instead of the third person narrator. Bowen’s “Songs My Father Sang Me” and “Pink May” consist almost entirely of a dialogue. In *Bliss and Other Stories*, Mansfield does not use dialogues as extensively as Bowen in the above mentioned stories, but for example in “Feuille d’Album,” the main character is introduced through women gossiping:

“Who is he, my dear? Do you know?”

“Yes. His name is Ian French. Painter. Awfully clever, they say. Someone started by giving him a mother’s tender care. She asked him how often he heard from home, whether he had enough blankets on his bed, how much milk he drank a day. But when she went round to his studio to give an eye to his socks, she rang and rang, and though she could have sworn she heard someone breathing inside, the door was not answered.... Hopeless!” (173-4)

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Mansfield’s and Bowen’s short stories have much in common on the level of form. This chapter focused on those features that may be associated with the three labels “impressionism,” “lyricism,” and “sensibility” that are frequently used to describe their writing. Primarily, these words seem to refer to the focus on depiction of certain mood or atmosphere, subjectively perceived, described emotionally through reference to various senses. This chapter also analysed three formal features that may be related to the film technique, namely transitions in time layers, shifts in point of view and the use of dialogues as to replace the omniscient narrator. It appears that the short stories tend to be often compared to other forms of art: film, painting and poetry.

## Chapter 4

### Issues of Content

While the previous chapter compared the formal aspects of Katherine Mansfield's and Elizabeth Bowen's short stories, this chapter focuses on what may be classified as content, particularly themes and characters. Additionally, one section is devoted to objects that appear in the stories. Although this might seem unusual an issue in literary analysis, it will be demonstrated that various kinds of objects are of importance in the majority of stories in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* as well as Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*.

#### 4.1. Themes

Some sweeping generalizations may be made, such as that Mansfield and Bowen depict the contemporary modern life and they especially pay attention to relationships that often reflect the modern era. However, such generalizations may apply to many modernist writers. Therefore, I shall focus on more particular representations of these themes. The analysis is not exhaustive, rather, the most interesting issues are selected.

Ian Gordon recognizes three major themes in Katherine Mansfield's short stories: a "woman alone in the world," "a happy relationship seems impossible" and "children in their relationships with one another and with the adults in the family."<sup>1</sup> All these themes are present in *Bliss and Other Stories*. The topic of a solitary woman is elaborated for example in "The Little Governess": a young woman travels alone to Germany where she is to work as a governess, scared of the people she meets during her journey she entrusts herself to an old man who finally proves not to be her benefactor but a pervert; because of him she is late to meet her employer and she ends up totally forsaken and helpless in a Munich hotel. This topic is present also in other Mansfield's stories, such as "Je ne parle pas français," "Pictures" or "Revelations." Misunderstanding between a man and a woman is a theme for example of "The Escape," "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day" or the above mentioned "Je

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longmans, 1971) 19.

ne parle pas français.” In the last mentioned short story, there seems to be a strange tension between Dick and his lover “Mouse,” finally ending in Dick abandoning her embittered in Paris to return to his mother. The theme of children, appearing in “Prelude” and “Sun and Moon,” has been already discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Although the major theme in Bowen’s *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* is the war, the above mentioned themes are there also traceable. The theme of childhood has been already discussed, so let me only name the short stories where this theme appears: “The Inherited Clock,” “Songs My Father Sang Me” and “Ivy Grippled the Steps.” An exemplary short story with the theme of a solitary woman is “The Cheery Soul.” A single young woman who has nowhere to spend Christmas holiday is happy to be invited by the management, three siblings, to come to their home; when she arrives there, she finds out that nobody but an odd old aunt is present, and gradually discovers that not only no one is to come but also that she has been involved in some queer business. The theme of a solitary woman appears also to some extent in other stories from *The Demon Lover* collection, for example “The Demon Lover” itself, where the main character has a husband and children, but the story focuses on her being alone in the deserted quarter of the bombed out London. The other theme of impossibility of a happy relationship between a man and a woman can be found for example in “Songs My Father Sang Me,” “Ivy Grippled the Steps” or “Green Holy.” In “Songs My Father Sang Me” the misunderstanding between a man and a woman is present in both of the two layers of the story: the main character remembers the tension and arguments in the relationship of her parents and she herself does not seem to be able to communicate with her partner:

‘Didn’t I ever tell you about my father? [...] Wasn’t it you I was telling about my father?’

‘No. I suppose it must have been someone else. One meets so many people.’

‘Oh, what,’ she said, ‘have I hurt your feelings? But you haven’t got any feelings about me.’

‘Only because you haven’t got any feelings about me.’

‘Haven’t I?’ she said, as though really wanting to know. ‘Still, it hasn’t seemed all the time as though we were quite a flop.’

‘Look,’ he said, ‘don’t be awkward. Tell me about your father.’

‘He was twenty-six.’

‘When?’

‘How do you mean, “when”? Twenty-six was my father’s age. [...]’ (67)

As in “Songs My Father Sang Me,” in many other Bowen’s stories the problems in relationships are often accounted for by something that had happened in the past. This is not that common in Mansfield’s short stories, yet sometimes we may find a similar tendency there. For example, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas suggests that Kezia in “Prelude” seems to have inherited her mother’s fear of men, pointing out a connection between Kezia’s dream of swelling animals that ‘rush at her’ and Linda’s fear of the physical in her husband that transforms for example to the dream about a tame bird swelling into enormous dimensions and becoming a baby.<sup>2</sup>

There are other themes that appear both in Mansfield’s *Bliss and Other Stories* and Bowen’s *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*. The most prominent one is the escape from reality. Elizabeth Bowen observes that there is “a rising tide of hallucination” in *The Demon Lover* collection. She explains it as some kind of an overflow of the subconscious suppressed during the war. However, she stresses that “the hallucinations in the stories are not a peril; nor are the stories studies of mental peril,” rather they are a “saving resort on the part of the characters.” (Bowen 197-8) These “hallucinations” are either reminiscences of the past that was for example observed in “In the Square” in the previous chapter, they are dreams as for instance in “The Happy Autumn Fields,” a dream land as in “Mysterious Kôr,” or apparitions as in “Green Holy” or “Pink May.”

In Mansfield’s *Bliss and Other Stories*, characters also often escape the reality by dreaming and even more often daydreaming or just playing with the imagination. “Prelude” is full of such escapes. I have already mentioned Kezia’s and Linda’s dreams about animals swelling; further, looking at the aloe in their garden Linda dreams about floating in a ship: “She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: ‘Faster! Faster!’ to

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, *Fictions of the Female Self* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 156-7.

those who were rowing.” She returns to the reality for a while, saying to her mother: “‘I believe those are buds,’ said she. ‘Let us go down into the garden, mother. I like that aloe. I like it more than anything here. [...]’” However, then she returns to the world of dreams: “Looking at it from below she could see the long sharp thorns that edged the aloe leaves, and at the sight of them her heart grew hard... She particularly liked the long sharp thorns... Nobody would dare to come near the ship or to follow after.” (54-5) As Parkin-Gounelas observes, both Linda and Kezia imagine things coming alive, be it the objects depicted on the wallpaper, pieces of furniture or bed clothes.<sup>3</sup> For example, Linda immerses herself into her thoughts:

Things had a habit of coming alive like that. Not only large substantial things like furniture but curtains and the patterns of stuffs and the fringes of quilts and cushions. How often she had seen the tassel fringe of her quilt change into a funny procession of dancers with priests attending... For there were some tassels that did not dance at all but walked stately, bent forward as if praying or chanting. How often the medicine bottles had turned into a row of little men with brown top-hats on; and the washstand jug had a way of sitting in the basin like a fat bird in a round nest. (27-8)

Stanley and Beryl daydream about the future. Stanley pictures the ideal life after moving to the country, while Beryl imagines meeting a rich man who would marry her. Finally, the servant Alice imagines things she would say but never does.

A frequent minor theme that appears in stories both by Mansfield and Bowen is some kind of hedonism, love of life, appreciating the little things in life. Naturally, in Bowen’s *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* this may be connected with the atmosphere of war. The main character in “Pink May” describes how she enjoyed herself despite the war, thinking always: “Whatever happens tomorrow, I’ve got tonight.” She describes her usual evening before going out: “While the bath ran I used to potter about and begin to put out what I meant to wear, and cold-cream off my old make-up, and so on. I say “potter” because you cannot hurry a bath. I also don’t mind telling you that I whistled. Well, what’s the harm in somebody’s being happy? Simply thinking things over won’t win this war.” (158) In “Carless Talk” a

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Parkin-Gounelas 157.



group of friends meets for lunch in a restaurant in London, talking primarily about food, drink, etc.:

‘Now you must talk to Joanna,’ said Mary Dash. ‘She’s just brought me three eggs from the country and she’s longing to know about everything.’

Ponsonby gave Joanna a keen, considering look. ‘Is it true,’ he said, ‘that in the country there are no cigarettes at all?’

‘I believe there are sometimes some. But I don’t –’

‘There are. Then that alters everything,’ said Ponsonby. ‘How lucky you are!’

‘I got my hundred this morning,’ said Eric, ‘from my regular man. But those will have to last me to Saturday. I can’t seem to cut down, somehow. Mary, have you cut down?’

‘I’ve got my own, if that’s what you mean,’ said she. ‘I just got twenty out of my hairdresser.’ She raised her shilling-size portion of butter from its large bed of ice and spread it tenderly over her piece of toast. (93)

The love of life and all its little pleasures appear frequently in Mansfield’s stories. For instance, the woman in “Psychology” takes delight in food:

Carefully she cut the cake into thick little wads and he reached across for a piece.

“Do you realize how good it is,” she implored. “Eat it imaginatively. Roll your eyes if you can and taste it on the breath. It’s not a sandwich from the hatter’s bag—it’s the kind of cake that might have been mentioned in the Book of Genesis. . . . And God said: ‘Let there be cake. And there was cake. And God saw that it was good.’” (119)

It would be possible to continue thus quoting from other stories such as “Bliss,” “Prelude” or “A Dill Pickle,” but I would like to draw the attention to “The Escape.” Although the story is full of dissatisfaction it ends with an optimistic, reassuring statement: “The voice murmured, murmured. They were never still. But so great was his heavenly happiness as he stood there he wished he might live for ever.” (219) “The Escape” being the last story in the collection, the ending gives a tone of *carpe diem* to the whole collection.

## 4.2 Characters

Most of the typical features of the characters that appear in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* and Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* can be derived from what has been discussed in the previous parts of the thesis, especially the section on themes. I shall shortly recapitulate it here and further focus on only one aspect of the characters, their mental health. Further, more light on the characters will shed the next section discussing the objects that appear in the stories, which are, as shall be demonstrated, closely connected with the characters.

Naturally, both in Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories, the central character is often a woman. However, there are stories where the main perspective is male as for example in Bowen's "Sunday Afternoon" and "Ivy Gripp'd the Steps," or Mansfield's "Mr Reginald Peacock's Day," "Je ne parle pas français" and "Feuille d'Album." As it has been mentioned several times, in some of the stories by both of the authors, there are children characters. Most of the characters in the two collections analysed in this thesis are young, lead a modern life, are sometimes outsiders, sometimes they have something of a hedonist and often have a rich imagination.

Perhaps the most interesting thing that the characters in *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* have in common is that they are often mentally ill. This tends to reflect in the dreams and hallucinations of the characters, discussed above. In *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, the mental disorders are again connected with the war. The characters mostly live in London, in a constant tension if the air-raids will deprive them of the roof over their heads, their personal belongings, their own life, and above all, their identity. Consequently, their mental health sometimes deteriorates. Often there are only hints that the character's mind is not completely fit, but in "The Happy Autumn Fields" it is clear that the woman, persisting in her half shattered flat in the part of London on which the air-raids were currently directed, suffers from a mental disorder. Having gone through a box of old documents she starts to dream about the people mentioned there while the house grows more and more unstable. Her partner continually persuades her to leave the place, but she is obsessed with her dreams and is hardly able to see the reality.

Do listen, Mary,' he said. 'While you've slept I've been all over the house again, and I'm less satisfied that it's safe. In your normal senses you'd never attempt to stay here. There've been alerts, and more than alerts, all day; one more bang anywhere near, which may happen at any moment, could bring the rest of this down. You keep telling me that you have things to see to – but do you know what chaos the rooms are in? Till they've gone ahead with more clearing, where can you hope to start? And if there were anything you could do, you couldn't do it. Your own nerves know that, if you don't [...]. (104-5)

Unlike in Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* the characters are usually aware of their illness and are diagnosed. Although the reader does not know the diagnosis, there are often hints that it is a mental illness. Linda in "Prelude" is indifferent to her children, oversensitive to noise, and seems to suffer from sexual aversion. She takes pills and has vivid dreams and hallucinations. The woman in "The Man Without a Temperament" is ill. She is weak and dependent upon her husband. The illness seems to have physical roots but it definitely affects her mental health. The woman in "Revelations" suffers from depressions. The central character in "The Escape" confesses she is "*un peu souffrante*," adding "*mes nerfs*," (218) while it has been revealed before in the story that her bag is full of pills and tablets. The stream of her consciousness as well as her exclamations reflect her mental state. They are quick, full of hyperboles and repetitions:

And then the station – unforgettable – with the sight of the jaunty little train shuffling away and those hideous children waving from the windows. "Oh, why am I made to bear these things? Why am I exposed to them?..." The glare, the flies, while they waited, and he and the stationmaster put their heads together over the time-table, trying to find this other train, which, of course, they wouldn't catch. The people who'd gathered round, and the woman who'd held up that baby with that awful, awful head... [...].

"Oh, the dust," she breathed, "the disgusting, revolting dust." And she put down her veil and lay back as if overcome.

“Why don't you put up your parasol?” he suggested. It was on the front seat, and he leaned forward to hand it to her. At that she suddenly sat upright and blazed again.

“Please leave my parasol alone! I don't want my parasol! And anyone who was not utterly insensitive would know that I'm far, far too exhausted to hold up a parasol. And with a wind like this tugging at it... Put it down at once,” she flashed, and then snatched the parasol from him, tossed it into the crumpled hood behind, and subsided, panting. (213-5)

### 4.3 Objects

In Mansfield's “The Escape” the male character observes the content of the woman's hand bag: “her powder-puff, her rouge stick, a bundle of letters, a phial of tiny black pills like seeds, a broken cigarette, a mirror, white ivory tablets with lists on them that had been heavily scored through,” thinking “[i]n Egypt she would be buried with those things.” Indeed, objects are important for most of the characters in Mansfield's as well as Bowen's stories and characterize them in a way. Let me focus on the most prominent objects that appear in *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Demon Lover* collection.

As mentioned in the second chapter, Glendinning notices frequent occurrence of flowers in Bowen's fiction. In *The Demon Lover* collection, flowers do not appear perhaps that often but they are undoubtedly important for the characters. In the postscript to the collection, Bowen observes that during the war “people paid big money for little bunches of flowers” to enjoy at least some pleasure (199). In “Green Holy” Miss Bates insists on hanging a holy twig, however poor, on the wall to represent Christmas in the desperate place they live in, bare and draughty with poor electric light given by naked bulbs, in a muddy village where public life extinguished. Mary Dash in “Careless Talk” does her best to be surrounded with the things she was used to before the war, to get good wine and sufficient amount of cigarettes and to dress nicely. Although wearing “her last year's black,” she manages to get orchids to attach on to her dress to refine it and look “much as ever” (91).

Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* abound in flowers. As in Bowen's stories, they are important for the characters, although obviously their importance is not connected with the atmosphere of war. They enjoy the colours and smells and know their names. In "The Man without a Temperament," the woman describes plants passionately:

'Oh, those trees along the drive,' she cried. 'I could look at them for ever. They are like the most exquisite huge ferns. And you see that one with the grey-silver bark and the clusters of cream-coloured flowers, I pulled down a head of them yesterday to smell, and the scent' – she shut her eyes at the memory and her voice thinned away, faint, airy – 'was like freshly ground nutmegs.' (141)

Little Kezia in "Prelude" inspects the garden by their new house and describes all the various kinds of plants she sees there in great detail:

The camellias were in bloom, white and crimson and pink and white striped with flashing leaves. You could not see a leaf on the syringa bushes for the white clusters. The roses were in flower—gentlemen's button-hole roses, little white ones, but far too full of insects to hold under anyone's nose, pink monthly roses with a ring of fallen petals round the bushes, cabbage roses on thick stalks, moss roses, always in bud, pink smooth beauties opening curl on curl, red ones so dark they seemed to turn black as they fell, and a certain exquisite cream kind with a slender red stem and bright scarlet leaves.

There were clumps of fairy bells, and all kinds of geraniums, and there were little trees of verbena and bluish lavender bushes and a bed of pelargoniums with velvet eyes and leaves like moths' wings. There was a bed of nothing but mignonette and another of nothing but pansies – borders of double and single daisies and all kinds of little tufty plants she had never seen before.

The red-hot pokers were taller than she; the Japanese sunflowers grew in a tiny jungle. (33-4)

Naturally, both in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, the attention of the characters to flowers is connected with the theme of love of life, appreciation of the little things in life.

Corcoran notices that in Bowen's fiction, "[l]etters figure everywhere." He names among others two instances of letters in *The Demon Lover* collection. First, he mentions "The Happy Autumn Fields" where the woman's dreams seem to be initiated by going through a box full of old letters and photographs. Second, he points out to the terrifying letter in "The Demon Lover," a note from her former lover which Mrs Drover finds in her unused flat.<sup>4</sup> Letters appear in many other stories in the collection. Instead of enumerating them, I shall focus on the functions they have. As Corcoran suggests, letters often affect the action or plot of the story.<sup>5</sup> This is the case of "The Demon Lover" where upon reading the letter, Mrs Drover's memory and fantasy is activated and the horror story truly begins. In "Pink May" the lover's letter causes the break-up of the married couple. In "The Cheery Soul" the main character finds a letter of hatred from the former cook employed in the house upon which she starts to discover more and more strange things. As one may notice, the letters frequently bring unpleasant information or even function as a threat. Moreover, as Corcoran suggests, "they are slippery with secrets, duplicities, treacheries, betrayals, the second selves [...]."<sup>6</sup>

In Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* letters also appear frequently. Except for the letter from Dick to Mouse in "Je ne parle pas français," they do not influence the plot or action of the story. They rather represent an everyday activity. As in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, in Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* letters sometimes document the double-sidedness of the character's mind. The best instance is the passage in "Prelude" where Beryl writes a letter to her friend:

*My darling Nan,*

Don't think me a piggy wig because I haven't written before. I haven't had a moment, dear, and even now I feel so exhausted that I can hardly hold a pen. [...]

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004) 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> Corcoran 1.

<sup>6</sup> Corcoran 3.

Beryl sat writing this letter at a little table in her room. In a way, of course, it was all perfectly true, but in another way it was all the greatest rubbish and she didn't believe a word of it. No, that wasn't true. She felt all those things, but she didn't really feel them like that.

It was her other self who had written that letter. It not only bored, it rather disgusted her real self.

"Flippant and silly," said her real self. (57-8)

In "The Man Without a Temperament" a letter is mediated to the reader by the main character who reads the key phrases in the letter aloud to her husband. This primarily serves as a means of enriching the narrative technique of the story:

"From Lottie," came her soft murmur. "Poor dear... such trouble... left foot. She thought... neuritis... Doctor Blyth... flat foot... massage. So many robins this year... maid most satisfactory... Indian Colonel... every grain of rice separate... very heavy fall of snow." (142)

One may find perhaps many other instances of objects appearing in both Bowen's and Mansfield's short stories. However, let me conclude this section by noticing the frequent occurrence of mirrors in *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Demon Lover* collection. They often serve there as an interesting literary device. Mostly the characters examine themselves in the mirror, trying to see themselves as the others see them. This not only gives the reader a glimpse of an objective view, which is otherwise especially rare in Mansfield's stories, but it serves also as means of further characterization. When discussing the occurrence of letters in Bowen's and Mansfield's stories, it has been pointed out that they often reflect the ambivalence of the character's mind. So do the mirrors. In Bowen's "The Demon Lover," Mrs Drover feels urge to look into the mirror upon reading the letter from her former lover:

She dropped the letter on the bed-springs, then picked it up to see the writing again – her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white. She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror, polished a clear patch in it and looked at once urgently and stealthily in. She was confronted by a woman of forty-four, with eyes

starting out under a hat-brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down.  
(84)

In Mansfield's "Bliss," there is a similar situation when Bertha comes home "overcome [...] by a feeling of bliss – absolute bliss":

It was dusky in the dining-room and quite chilly. But all the same Bertha threw off her coat; she could not bear the tight clasp of it another moment, and the cold air fell on her arms.

But in her bosom there was still that bright glowing place—that shower of little sparks coming from it. It was almost unbearable. She hardly dared to breathe for fear of fanning it higher, and yet she breathed deeply, deeply. She hardly dared to look into the cold mirror—but she did look, and it gave her back a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes and an air of listening, waiting for something... divine to happen... that she knew must happen... infallibly. (95-6)

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

On the level of content, there are numerous similarities between Katherine Mansfield's and Elizabeth Bowen's short stories in the two collections analysed in this thesis. This chapter focused on some parallels in the choice of themes and characters, the latter being complemented by discussion of several instances of objects that play an important role in characterization. In Bowen's *The Demon Lover* war is the underlying theme. However, within this topic, there are numerous other themes some of which coincide with themes in Mansfield's *Bliss*. For example, one may find there representations of themes that Gordon recognizes in Mansfield's stories, namely the theme of a solitary woman, the seeming impossibility of a happy relationship between a man and a woman, and the theme of childhood. Further, two other themes have been analysed; they might be called "escape from reality" and "love of life." In the section devoted to characters, only one issue has been discussed in detail, i.e., the fact that both in *Bliss* and *The Demon Lover* characters often suffer or at least seem to suffer from a mental disorder. The last section of the chapter focused on objects which, as it has been shown, reveal much about the characters and



thus serve as means of characterization. Letters and mirrors suggest a double-sidedness of the character's mind, while flowers often reveal their love of life.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This thesis compared selected short stories by Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen with the aim to find the most interesting parallels between the two authors. To meet the extent of a BA thesis, the area of interest was restricted in several ways. Firstly, only two short story collections, Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories* and Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories*, were compared. Secondly, this thesis focused on similarities and only occasionally expanded on differences between the two authors. Thirdly, only selected issues from each topic were discussed. Nevertheless, the thesis offered a relatively complex view on Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories: it discussed the form as well as the content of the short stories, illustrating the arguments with concrete examples from the short stories, famous ones as well as less known; it suggested various influences that may reflect in the short stories, it offered opinions of notable critics on the individual authors and it occasionally mentioned the authors' own opinions on their work and literature in general.

The analysis of the short stories focused separately on the form and the content to provide a detailed study. It is also interesting to notice that critics of Mansfield's short stories seem to reach consensus with critics of Bowen's stories about the formal characteristics of their writing, while no such agreement seems to be reached on the level of content, although this thesis revealed that there are also many parallels. Nevertheless, the formal issues are very much related to the content. Therefore, let me summarize the most prominent features, concerning both the form and the content, that arouse from the comparison of the two authors:

1. Focus on a scene or object that frequently co-occurs with lack of a major action or plot that tend to be substituted by a central feeling that unites the story, repeatedly for example feeling of horror, misunderstanding, loneliness or love of life.

2. Setting the story in a special mood or atmosphere, in particular part of day, season and weather and close attention to the light and colours these conditions create.
3. Favouring subjective mode. Characters are driven by emotions, they are exceptionally observant and sensitive. This may be often ascribed to their mental instability, a repeated motive in the stories. The story tends to be influenced by the emotions and sensual perception of the characters. Various sensual perceptions enrich the description passages in the story. The narrative strategy tends to be indirect, it avoids straightforward conclusions. The characters may be often viewed as ambivalent. This is often revealed in their correspondence and by looking into a mirror that frequently figure in the stories. Moreover, it is supported by the narrative technique: frequent smooth transitions in time layers, especially from the present to the past that may be compared with film “flash-backs,” shifts in point of view, i.e., offering a subjective view of the character and subsequent shift to another point of view to gain another perspective, and finally, frequent usage of dialogues to ensure natural transitions.

Many of these features seem to be typical manifestations of modernist aesthetic principles. For example, Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska observe that modernist writers often experimented with “new possibilities of visual and musical representation” as result of the “far-reaching distrust of mimetic methods.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this thesis saw many comparisons of Mansfield’s and Bowen’s writing to various other forms of art, namely painting, music and poetry, and film. Not only critics are prone to use these comparisons but also the two authors themselves suggested these influences in their work. Some critics rather use the words “impressionism,” “lyricism” and “sensibility” to describe Mansfield’s and Bowen’s style of writing. They seem to refer to the same qualities proposed by the comparisons to the other forms of art. All these are related to modernist aesthetics, although many critics do not mention this connection. Further, the ambiguous “message” of the story as well as ambiguous characterization may be seen as another representation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, “Literature and the Other Arts,” *Modernism: A Comparative History of Literatures in European Language*, eds. Ástráður Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007) 449.

modernist movement away from the universal truths promoted by 19<sup>th</sup> century science. It may well be that all the features analysed in this thesis may be found in short stories by other modernist authors. However, I do not think that only features common to all modernist arouse from this comparison. It is the co-occurrence of those particular features in stories by Mansfield and Bowen that seems to be worth of our attention.

Moreover, the comparison revealed that although critics of Bowen's short stories are sometimes hesitant to place her among modernist authors, and her stories tend to be less experimental in comparison with the works of other modernist authors, in *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* there are undoubtedly many modernist features. Generally, it is problematic to place Bowen and Mansfield into a single category. Sometimes, they are categorized as regional writers. Critics often attempt to trace concrete representations of New Zealand in Mansfield's writings and identify Irish scenes in Bowen's stories. These do not seem that numerous, although it is a significant part of their work. On a more abstract level, part of their work may be viewed as "exile" literature. Another attempt to find a stable place for Mansfield and Bowen in non-mainstream literature branches may be seen in their occurrence in some anthologies of queer cultures. Both of these elements may be traced in Mansfield's and Bowen's short stories. However, from the whole body of their work it is but a fraction. Therefore, interpreting the authors' work solely from one of these perspectives would belittle their literary achievement. On the other hand, some critics would like to see these two authors to be as famous as the most prominent modernist figures and they especially compare their achievement with that of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. However, both Mansfield and Bowen appear irregularly in anthologies of British literature. This largely depends on the definition of Britishness or Englishness as well as on whether we consider Mansfield a New Zealand author or an English or British one, colonial, or perhaps European; and Bowen an Irish, Anglo-Irish or English writer.

A question may be raised why to compare Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth Bowen. There may be several reasons, one of them being the above outlined discussion about where to place the two authors if national literatures are concerned. Apart from that, there are other, perhaps rather obvious, grounds for comparison.

Firstly, Mansfield and Bowen are notable short story writers. As Dominic Head suggests, the genre of modern short story has been marginalized by the critics and theoreticians of literature, especially in comparison with the novel. He argues that the genre of short story “ought to be seen as centrally involved in the modernist revolution in fictional practice.”<sup>2</sup> A comparison of Mansfield’s and Bowen’s short stories may shed more light on the theory of modernist short story. Secondly, both Mansfield and Bowen may be seen as part of the outer Bloomsbury group. It would be interesting to study in what ways their aesthetic principles correspond with other Bloomsbury group members and in what ways they differ. Thirdly, they are female writers. Again, comparing these two writers could be part of a larger analysis of female writers of the first half of the twentieth century. Fourthly, they can be described as “exile” writers and their work may be compared to other non-English born writers living in England, or on the other hand, as Ian Gordon suggests, with English writers residing in a foreign country, who, consequently “turn their eyes resolutely homewards.”<sup>3</sup> On a more abstract level, comparison seems to be the basic device in Western thinking about literature, or Western thinking in general. As Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett argues, comparison is “the primary scaffolding [...] of human thought.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) x – xi.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (Harlow: Longmans, 1971) 5.

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, “The Comparative Method and Literature,” *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, eds. David Damrosh, Natalie Melas and Mbongiseni Buthelezi (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009) 51.

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