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My ‘Many’ Selves: A Psycholinguistic and Cognitive Study of Mansfield’s Work

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In her private writings, Katherine Mansfield often questioned the possibility of identifying a unique self. On 29 April 1920, she pointed to the absurdity of Polonius’s fatherly leave-taking recommendation to his son Laertes (*Hamlet*, I, iii, 77): ‘This above all – to thine own self be true’. In reply, she exclaimed: ‘True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many – well really that’s what it looks like coming to – hundreds of selves’.ⁱ This formulation of Mansfield’s parallels ideas in psychology studies that the self might not be stable nor identified once and for all. In *The Principles of Psychology*, which was, as Clare Hanson has noted, a bestseller in the 1910s,ⁱⁱ William James had insisted on the fragmented aspect of the self, the ‘division of the man into several selves’.ⁱⁱⁱ Although one cannot prove that Mansfield had actually read the works of William James or Sigmund Freud, it is likely that such debates were part of her milieu.

What Mansfield seems mainly concerned with is the cognitive instability of the self, its elusiveness, the fact that no stable criteria can be found to identify it. This brings to mind the experience described by the famous deconstructionist of the self, the empiricist and sceptic Scottish philosopher, David Hume: ‘I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception’.^{iv} Hume’s so-called ‘bundle theory’ identifies the self only with collections of perceptions, where the self cannot be a unified subject of experience. Similarly, Mansfield often emphasises how difficult it is for her to know or even to feel any sense of a unique self at all. This is why I will not focus in this article on what may have been described as her histrionic, chameleon-like personality, nor on her social and even national lack of specific or stable identity; rather, I will try to show how this recurrent psycho-cognitive experience – being many selves – might be studied both as cognitive material constituted by her work as a writer and as a resulting technique endowing her characters with meaningful emotions. Mansfield’s aesthetics, her style and her professional experience all record a multiplication (or opening, as we will see) of the self/ves.

Theoretical framework and credos

Following cognitive theorists such as Langacker and Cotte, I believe in the symbolic meaning of grammar:

Grammatical structures do not constitute an autonomous formal system or level of representation: they are claimed instead to be inherently symbolic, providing for the structuring and conventional symbolization of conceptual content. Lexicon, morphology and syntax form a continuum of symbolic units, divided only arbitrarily into separate components.^v

Grammar is ‘symbolic’ in so far as each category of speech expresses a specific and *meaningful* apprehension of extralinguistic reality: nominal phrases, for example, typically refer to defined and perceptible, concrete entities; which a speaker intuitively knows, and exploits. Nominalising other parts of speech such as adjectives or verbs thus transfers more perceptibility to abstract referents. Grammar means as much as lexicon, but mostly it means in an implicit, symbolic way, in Langacker’s terms. Linguistic markers help the linguist access the speaker’s cognitive world. I believe in the motivation of language, a motivation that most of the time is unconscious.

Language might thus reveal the way we think and the way we feel. Studying the works of writers interested in feelings such as Mansfield is rewarding because they exploit linguistic possibilities and motivation to the highest degree. Grammar might be a powerful tool of lyricism (when defined as the personal expressions of emotions), which I call ‘indirect lyricism’,^{vi} particularly when the speaker is cognitively implicated. I consider, as does the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in all his works,^{vii} that emotions are a part of cognition, and that the self, if it exists, primarily comprises such emotive states. The more the speaker is implied, the more implicitly meaningful their grammar becomes. Experiences of emotions constitute typical implicative enunciative situations, because emotions imply the experiencer and, when h/she tries to speak them, they disrupt language and thus appear at its surface as meaningful linguistic markers. Lexical metaphors are a good and well-known example of such indirect lyricism. Compare a) and b):

a) Juliet is the sun

b) I love Juliet

Romeo’s explicit presence is nowhere to be seen in (a), which looks like an objective identification of Juliet with the sun (and is in reality a highly subjective association of two cognitively distinguishable entities), whereas (b) resorts to the usual categories of speech of explicit lyricism – ‘I’ is the personal pronoun referring to the experiencer, ‘love’ the typical verb to designate a process which lexicon identifies as love, etc. Indirect lyricism is specifically what Mansfield’s writing aims at performing, because the New Zealand writer considered emotions to be a core constituent of her characters’ true inner lives, that needed, however, *not* to be rendered in explicit terms.

Emotions in Mansfield’s writings: a miniature aesthetics

Both in her personal and fictive writing, it appears that what matters for Mansfield is expressing emotions but without sentimentality. Sentiment should not be lavish or deep-rooted; self-fashioned chains of aesthetic ‘mushiness’^{viii} will keep choking female literature, as she denounced in a notebook jotting in May 2008: ‘It is the hopelessly insipid doctrine that love is the only thing in the world, taught, hammered into women, from generation to generation, which hampers us [female writers] so cruelly’. She detested what she called ‘sentimental toshery’.^{ix} However, lyricism there must be, or the characters remain opaque and soulless, grotesque beings whose actions seem gratuitous, as Mansfield mocks in her famous caustic comment about Forster’s writing in *Howards End* (in a 1917 notebook entry), wondering ‘whether Helen was got with child by Leonard Bast or by his fateful forgotten umbrella. All things considered, I think it must have been the umbrella’.^x

Emotions must be rendered but writers should not indulge in excessive, explicit sentimentality. The equilibrium is, however, hard to achieve. She manages it by creating a crowd of highly emotional characters whose lyric capacity is minimal. For social, psychological, familial or unknown reasons and constraints, most of her (female) protagonists are very bad at expressing clearly, in lexicalised discourse, their emotions. Either their body gives them a means of expression, or it is the narrative voice. Ma Parker is one example among many, whose need for letting out grief is vital:

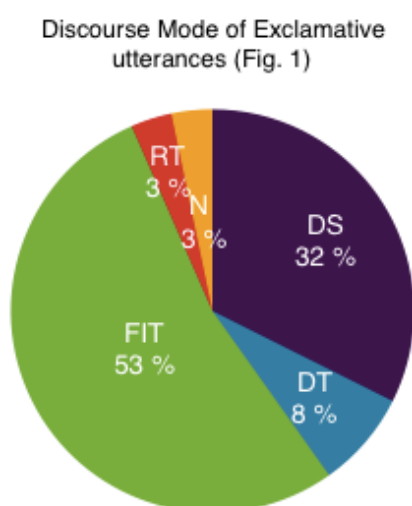
If she *could* only cry now, cry for a long time, over everything [...] But to have a proper cry over all these things would take a long time. All the same, the time for it had come. She must do it. She *couldn’t* put it off any longer; she *couldn’t* wait any more . . . Where *could* she go? [...] Wasn’t there anywhere in the world where she *could* have her cry out – at last [...] There was nowhere.^{xi}

This passage shows repetition of the modal past tense form, ‘could’, indicating a radical rupture with the present situation. The use of ‘could’ here thus highlights the paradoxical intensity of the need and its counterfactual quality: the need will not be met, and Ma Parker ends up swallowing her tears as small Kezia literally does in ‘Prelude’ (SS, p.81). Even the first-person narrator of ‘Je ne parle pas français’, whose work it is to find the appropriate words for the appropriate feelings, feels overwhelmed: ‘Good God! Am I capable of feeling as strongly as that? But I was absolutely unconscious! I hadn’t a phrase to meet it with! I was overcome! I was swept off my feet!’ (SS, p.145)

It is indeed crucial for Mansfield’s aesthetics that her characters’ feelings come as a surprise, as a ravishment, as emotions do move human beings. The more feelings are talked about explicitly and described, the less they become perceptible and ‘real’. The anti-toshery impetus is what gives rise, in Mansfield’s writing, to an aesthetics of the miniature. Real, lively feeling is at the core of her stories, but must be glimpsed at and so shines only intermittently, as does the miniature lamp in ‘The Doll’s House’, the only element moving and ‘alive’ in an otherwise too rigid, artificial work of art: ‘what Kezia liked more than anything, what she liked frightfully, was the lamp. [...] there was something inside that looked like oil that *moved* when you *shook* it, [...] the lamp was perfect. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say, “I live here”. *The lamp was real*’ (SS, p. 351). This aesthetics of miniature, when it comes to expressing the real feelings of her characters, I argue, is mainly visible in one of Mansfield’s stylistic specificities: her recurrent use of exclamation marks.

Exclamatives: a narrative technique of compensation

Some 249 exclamation marks can be found in two collections of Mansfield’s 29 short stories,^{xii} *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) and *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922). Exclamation marks are typical syntactical structures for the expression of feelings, and there is a well-studied correspondence between exclamative clauses and their emotive illocutionary force. But a more relevant datum in Mansfield’s expression of multiple selves is the fact that most (53%) of the 249 exclamative constructions are not written in direct speech *nor in free indirect speech, but in free indirect thought* [FIT] as figure 1 shows.



The abbreviations in the figure stand for:

- narration (N) (external focalisation)
- direct speech (DS) (situation of dialogue)
- direct thought (DT) (utterance to oneself, close to interior monologue)
- free indirect thought (FIT) (internal focalisation)

As Leech and Short explain,^{xiii} FIT makes the reader feel he/she gets a more vivid and immediate representation of the character's thoughts as they happen. As such, it seems a necessary narrative category in the study of modernist literature. In my corpus, occurrences in FIT might be spoken in some inner voice of the character's, in dream-like moments such as Linda Burnell experiences, or they might result from a temporary fusion of the external, third-person narrative voice and the internal voice, in which case it is unclear who is thinking, who is feeling. This undecidability is the literary translation both of Mansfield becoming her character and of her character experiencing intense feelings that alter one's perception of the self. It is what is sought on a diegetic, but also on an aesthetic level.

Exclamative structures allow for a momentary compensation for Mansfield's characters' emotive marginal states; they offer direct access to the character's *quale* (defined as the specific and ineffable quality of her or his perception of an extralinguistic event) and convey narrative empathy. Hammond has clarified the distinction between 'sympathy' and 'empathy' and defined the latter, a translation of the German *Einfühlung*, as 'feeling with' someone, and constituting 'a cognitive and affective structure of feeling, a way of bridging interpersonal distance',^{xiv} whereas 'sympathy' merely consists in acknowledging the other's emotions and, far from diminishing self-consciousness, increases it.^{xv} As such, empathy is an important strain of modernist literature.

What specific linguistic markers in the exclamative structure, then, account for the temporary cognitive annihilation of self? Exclamative HOW and WHAT (WH-markers) probably come from interrogative HOW and WHAT, interrogative pronouns in Indo-European languages being 'so old that their root cannot be etymologized', as the linguist Haspelmath has noted.^{xvi} They are the same markers. It is usually said that WH-markers express, symbolically, some lack of information, some indeterminacy, a semantic meaning which is all the more foregrounded in our occurrences that the WH-markers are always fronted (no exclamative phrases being used a subject in our data). Huddleston and Pullum insist on the specificity of exclamative HOW and WHAT, that, unlike the interrogative HOW and WHAT, may modify any other degree modifier such as *remarkable*, *very*, and thus are adequate to 'express the speaker's strong emotional *reaction* or attitude to a situation'.^{xvii} WH-markers denote reactivity to one's environment, they record the speaker's response *towards*, *the effect* that something (some specific *quale*) has on them. According to the *OED*, to 'react', in its intransitive meaning, is 'to act in return *on* or *upon* a specified agent or influence; to produce a reciprocal or responsive effect'. Mansfield develops her description of experiencing many selves by mentioning different kinds of such *reactions*: 'True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many – well really that's what it looks like coming to – hundreds of selves. For what with complexes and suppressions, and *reactions and vibrations and reflections* – there are moments when I feel I'm nothing but the small clerk of some hotel'.^{xviii} Her self proves primarily reactive – shall we read 'complexes' as 'comprehending interconnected, plural parts' or rather as 'inhibitions, psychological and repressed instincts', as the adjacent use of suppressions might suggest? Nothing is certain but the absence of certainty: the successive nouns, the polysyndeton 'and', the repetition of interrogative WHICH and WHAT, all these elements signal movement and life – a living and moving self. The very difficulty of finding the right word, and the approximation, also emphasise an important feature of this specific *quale* (experiencing the self as other selves): the opening of the self to its close environment, an opening characterised in terms of movement and life but *not* intrinsically characterised. There is no stable identity inherent in the self when it is open *to*, when it reacts *to*.

Exclamatives do not describe the speaker's emotion, they convey it. It is an important distinction, also made by Celle and Lansari:

the description of surprise is associated with surprise lexemes and figurative language whereas the expression of surprise is linked to disfluency markers such as exclamations, interjections, etc. This gives

credence to a clear-cut division between markers describing surprise and those expressing surprise. Interestingly, it is also suggested that this dichotomy is sometimes insufficient to analyse the aforementioned pragmatic strategies: reenactment and the staging of surprise may well be better captured in terms of *expressivity*.^{xix}

Exclamatives are expressive utterances, and often occur, as our statistics about discourse modes show, in introspective and highly emotive moments. Ellipsis of subject and verb is possible in exclamative structures, as in Monica Tyrell's 'Oh, oh, how mournful, how mournful!' The character has been suffering from loneliness, indeterminate anxiety and her 'nerves' all morning and is desperately in need of company (and empathy), which she usually gets from George, her hairdresser. But it so happens that George, who has had to face real, tragic personal trauma on the same day, is not capable of addressing her needs as he usually does, and Monica is slowly overwhelmed by an acute feeling of melancholy, more perceptible in the context of the utterance: 'The brush fell on her hair. Oh, oh, how mournful, how mournful! It fell quick and light, it fell like leaves; and then it fell heavy, tugging like the tugging at her heart. 'That's enough,' she cried, shaking herself free'.^{xx} The comparison of the falling brush to the leaves, the recurrent use of the verb 'fall', the explicit and lexicalised mention of some pressure ('tugging') in her heart: all these elements delineate an enunciative situation of high emotive intensity for the character who is not able to identify it and merely cries 'that's enough' in direct speech. But free indirect thought has made room for a miniature lyrical expression in the repeated and elliptical exclamative structure. The ellipsis proves the overwhelming aspect of the cognitive *quale* experienced by Monica Tyrell, who cannot name what is it that is mournful (something inherent in her situation for sure: the movement of the brush? Her hairdresser's indifference? The tugging at her heart?). Some emotional constraint weighs on her, from which she needs to break free. The discreet, indirect lyricism is expressed in the exclamative, which could be interpreted as being written in external or internal viewpoint, but here, with the double interjective 'oh', rather mimics her inner lament. And this indirect lyricism provides some narrative release, a momentary liberation from the constraints usually preventing her from expressing what she needs.

The clerk, the watchman and the telephone box

As traces of intense cognitive reactivity, WH-markers often signal a breach in the speaker's command of the world. They record moments of immediate feeling, without reflexive mediation, without control, where no Cartesian ego might hold any substantial, continuous self. The *experience* of introspection leads to opposite results and statements about the self: rather than being seated next to one's fire chimney, looking at the window from above and understanding that moving hats stand for actual people (as Descartes does in his Meditation 2),^{xxi} Mansfield, as experiencer of self, accounts, in her very metaphors, for the lack of any superior, controlling instance, as the comparison of herself to a small clerk working in some hotel shows: 'I'm nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests'.^{xxii} The clerk metaphor is significant: Mansfield seems to feel like she does not *own* her self, but *works* in some hotel without a proprietor. Nobody *owns* this place, especially not her, and there is no control, no overlooking, transcendental instance of gathering different selves. Mansfield, as William James does in chapter ten of his *Principles of Psychology*, rejects any transcendentalist belief in a permanent stable self. The self, whatever it be, is not anything one might possess or acknowledge as one's *own*. Adjectival 'own' derives from the verb 'own', and, to go back to Laertes's recommendation to his son ('to thine own self be true') – it might be the whole nominal phrase 'thine own self', with its double explicit expression of propriety, in 'thine' and 'own', together with the use of the noun 'self', that provoked Mansfield's acute

reaction. Philosopher Jesse Prinz, yet another neo-Human experienter of the self, explains that '[t]here is no subjective ownership of the felt state',^{xxiii} because '[t]here may be no *experience* of ownership. There may be an experience on the basis of which we *infer ownership*'.^{xxiv}

Mansfield's rejection of any notion of propriety is nowhere better expressed than in her image of being a clerk handing the keys in 'some' hotel she does not possess and cannot even properly identify. Her 'self' is impossible to grasp linguistically, for, as a referent, it is elusive. It is the antithesis of a defined and specific referent. There is no pre-existing, foreknown entity such as the self. It is indeterminate, it has no frontiers. The noun 'self' itself does not match such indefinite contours. The referent of the self has no specific extension nor any discernable limits. If it has any reality, it is shapeless. Early twentieth-century Gestalt theory and laws do not apply. Nothing can be perceived as detaching itself from a background. No coherent form stands out. Linguistically, syntagmatically, 'self' must be treated as a mass noun rather than as a discrete one. *Some* self. Or, rather, in Mansfield's use of the term, it might be interpreted as working as a collective noun, some self encompassing many selves, whose plurality sometimes threaten the notion even of a group, but which might be seen as a receptacle for others (a hotel). The sense of vacancy of the self is more acute in the following passage of her notebooks, where she uses the word 'mind' as a synonym for 'self'; employing 'mind' must *feel* even more inappropriate, thus maybe the shift from indeterminate hotel to empty building:

I positively feel, in my hideous modern way, I can't get into touch with my mind. I am standing gasping in one of those disgusting telephone boxes and I can't get through. 'Sorry. There is no reply' tinkles out the little voice. 'Will you ring them again, exchange? A good long ring. There must be somebody there.' 'I can't get any answer.' Then I suppose there is nobody in the building – Not even an old fool of a watchman. No, it's dark and empty & quiet, above all – empty.^{xxv}

The metaphor used here to convey the lack of a transcendental overlooking entity is that of the absent 'watchman', deprecated in the head of nominal phrase 'old fool', watchman defined by the *OED* as 'a look-out posted to give warning of the approach of *danger*' (my italics). There is no superior, controlling regard anywhere and a sense of utter vacancy is rendered by the proliferation of negative markers, both in verbal phrases on the modal 'can' and as a determiner ('no reply') further enhancing the impossibility of reaching any potential self. Negation then floods the text, within the pronoun 'nobody', the negation being underlined through the use of adverbial 'even', and finally standing on its own: 'No', as the final and conclusive statement.

Mansfield would likely have been sympathetic to Prinz's view that

there is no phenomenal I. If I wait for myself to appear in experience, I will never arrive. I might believe that I exist as a subject through inference and philosophical speculation, but I have never been acquainted with myself. I see indirect signs or, more strikingly, recognize my own agency at just those moments when agency is lost. The search for the self, like the wait for Godot, is a pointless exercise.^{xxvi}

In each of these extracts about her 'self' or 'mind', Mansfield resorts to ontological metaphors^{xxvii} in order to embody the supposed self, even to the point of caricature: hotel, building and the telephone box metaphors provide walls and stability to preconceived notions of the self – the better to destabilise this conception, to erase it. Mansfield builds the walls of the self the better to destroy them. Her violent resistance to any egotistical, personal vision of the self shows explicitly in the adjective 'disgusting' and implicitly, in her metaphors, all enacting an excessive rigidity perhaps conveying a slight sense of claustrophobia: 'people today are simply cursed by what I call the *personal*', she writes in a 1920 letter to Murry's younger brother.^{xxviii}

What the vacant building metaphor reveals is also a feeling of comfort arising from the sense of vacancy. There needs to be no watchman because there is no danger. Indeed, what

Mansfield describes is an almost happy welcoming of ‘wilful guests’ in her empty hotel hall. Her mind, her self is a vacant hall. The contrast between the syntagmatic and metaphorical expression of the self and that of the guest is quite meaningful: markers of indeterminacy (‘some’ hotel) and minimal physical involvement (‘handing’ the keys) contrast with the derived adjective ‘wilful’ and the noun ‘guests’: *they* have been invited, and they *will* come. Movement, possibly festivity, is on their side. They are as determined (by their will, by their existence that the definite article ‘the’ presents as being anaphorically pre-established) as the self is undetermined. The self remains silent, professional and welcoming: as such, it may encounter other selves. And make them feel at home. In order to feel empathy, one must be able to provide such room in one’s mind.

Empathy and the self/ves: ‘one is the spectacle’

According to philosopher Kristjan Kristjansson, [t]he self essentially comprises – and even is originally produced by – emotion.^{xxix} Our core emotional dispositions are self-constituting, some are also self-comparative in that they involve the self as a necessary reference point. If this emotionally grounded definition of the self is true, then one’s most frequent emotions must in turn shape one’s perception of self. A frequent emotion experienced and reported by Mansfield is her excitement at practising her work – an excitement typically linked to a specific feeling, that of becoming others, feeling *with* others. Romantic poet John Keats, with whom Mansfield identified,^{xxx} vehemently explains, in a 1818 letter to his friend Richard Woodhouse, that poets are *unpoetical* since they have, by essence, no self, no stable identity, *because* of that very faculty – becoming other. Poets, he says, are ‘chameleons’:

As to the poetical Character itself [...] it is not itself – *it has no self* – It is everything and nothing – It has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated – It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity – he is continually in for and filling some other body. The Sun – the Moon – the Sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet has none, no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures.^{xxxi}

What Mansfield describes in her hotel metaphor is exactly this: a feeling of being *occupied, visited* by other ‘guests’, whose installation requires (room) vacancy. As she insists upon in her private writings, one does not just sit and watch the spectacle (when one is a writer):

What a QUEER business writing is. I don’t know. I dont believe other people are ever as foolishly excited as I am while im working. How could they be? Writers would have to live in trees. I’ve *been* this man *been* this woman. Ive stood for hours on the Auckland Wharf. Ive been out in the stream waiting to be berthed. Ive been a seagull hovering at the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn’t as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, God knows. But one IS the spectacle for the time.^{xxxii}

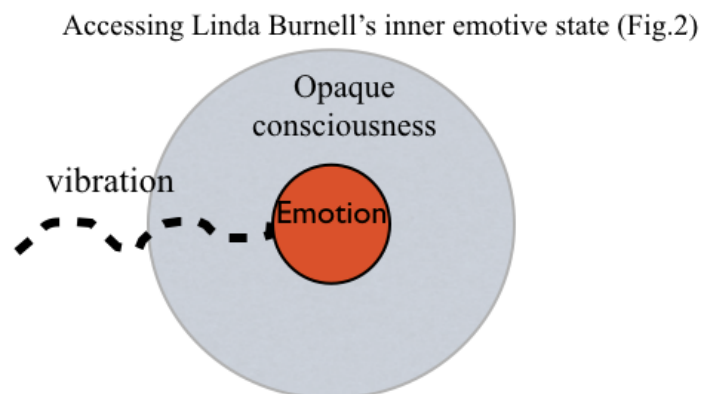
Again, we note two opposite potential positions towards the ‘spectacle’; sitting and watching or *being* the spectacle. Immobility, observation and analytical distance on the one hand, reactive implication and cognitive transmutation on the other. The former is ‘thrilling enough’, but the latter is even more exciting, as it implies a fusion of the self and the other. As Chris Mourant has shown, such moments are essential in Mansfield’s and Woolf’s works.^{xxxiii} Mansfield describes them as ‘blazing moments’ constituting ‘central points of significance’^{xxxiv} as they provide meaning to the

world (and to the narrative). Woolf coins the now famous phrase ‘moments of being’.^{xxxv} Both modernist writers seem to experience the same opening of the self, allowing fusion with otherness. And the paradox underlined by both is that in such moments of decentered, altruistic moments, some sense of the self might be felt. As Mansfield puts it, it is a ‘moment which, after all, we live for, the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal’.^{xxxvi} Woolf also emphasises the paradoxical feeling of becoming a ‘container’ and at the same time experiencing a sense of superior *reality*: ‘Those moments – in the nursery, on the road to the beach – can still be more real than the present moment. [...] I am hardly aware of myself, but only the sensation. I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy, of the feeling of rapture.’^{xxxvii} ‘Ecstasy’, from Greek, literally means ‘put out of place’, *ék* out + *ιστάνα* to place, and is defined by the *OED* (1.) as ‘The state of being “beside oneself”’. For both Mansfield and Woolf, being *beside* oneself offers moments of intense being. Their work as writers, meaning their practice of observing and writing that was so constitutive of their identities, provided them with a systematic experience of empathy. Both writers, in Mourant’s terms, shared the ‘belief that literature should connect the subject and the object, the self and the other, the part and the whole’.^{xxxviii}

Not only must Mansfield have been naturally empathic, but empathy was needed for her work as a writer focusing on emotions. Experiencing empathy was her working tool. Thus a core emotion is turned into a cognitively structural specificity, so sentiment is transmuted into aesthetics. The transposition of such personal/professional experience into narrative strategies is, as we have seen, particularly visible in the shifts of the narrative voice.

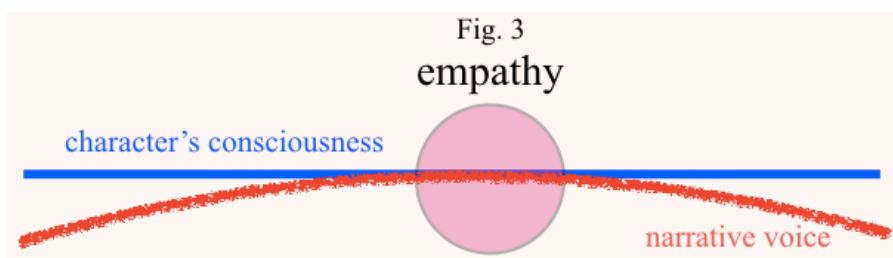
Becoming her characters: a shifting narrative voice

Empathy circulates in Mansfield’s writing. Even in her most kaleidoscopic narratives as the Burnell stories where viewpoints keep changing, empathy offers some ‘blazing’ moment when the most elusive or opaque characters commune with both the narrative voice and the reader. Linda Burnell, in ‘Prelude’, is mainly characterised from external or her children’s viewpoint; as such, she strikes the reader as a hard, cold, anti-maternal figure, whose polar opposite figure, warm and nurturing, is Mrs Samuel Joseph. Linda’s mind is mainly inaccessible to the reader, her actions and her reactions are difficult to decipher: her consciousness seems opaque. But minimally lyrical moments of free indirect thought are given in exclamatives such as ‘How absurd they looked!’ Or ‘How loud the birds are!’ Such moments constitute compensating cognitive intrusion for externally indecipherable characters, as figure 2 illustrates.



Nothing is justified in any analytical, explicit, lexicalised way, but the reader briefly feels with the character. It is just, in the case of Linda Burnell, a fleeting sensation that the world around might be

felt as aggressive, loud, intrusive, or meaningless. Thereby, another interpretation of the character is opened up, as a possibility (only suggested): far from being heartless, Linda Burnell could well, on the contrary, be too *heartful* and in need of constant critical shields, such as humour and distance, to bear difficult situations (moving out at the beginning of ‘Prelude’, or not loving her husband as she should, not feeling as she knows she should). Another example among so many can be found in ‘Bliss’. Bertha Young, young and vibrant, is overwhelmed by bliss, and cannot, for fear of being ridiculed, or perceived as unorthodox or infantile, cry it out: the narrative voice then resorts to free indirect exclamative ‘How idiotic civilisation is’, whereby the narrative voice, implicitly siding with her character, condemns the rigid and self-satisfied, egotistic so-called civilisation that chokes one’s self inside a box; Mansfield continues with a generic ‘you’ still allowing fusion with the reader and concludes her social and existential protest on a musical metaphor, ‘Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?’ (SS, p.174). Instruments are meant to express emotions, and music might provide us with a unique experience of what emotions really *feel* like.



Claustrophobia looms perhaps when one restrains one’s deep emotions, as when one tries to reach oneself in a ‘disgusting telephone box’.

Conclusion: Music and the Self

Mansfield’s deconstruction of the self and her search for the circulation of emotions might be better apprehended when focusing on her relation to (and narrative use of) music. Music was indeed essential for Mansfield the cellist, and her minute work on rhythm in her stories is exemplified in this often-quoted passage of her 17 January 1921 letter to Richard Murry: ‘After I’d written it I read it aloud – numbers of times – just as one would play over a musical composition – trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill – until it fitted her’.^{xxxix} The role and use of music in Mansfield’s work is crucial and may help us understand the artistic annihilation of the self. ‘Miss Brill’ offers a sublime and musical illustration of this cognitive phenomenon. Miss Brill might be the loneliest character in the whole crowd of Mansfieldian isolated and emotionally overwhelmed characters. Yet, as she is listening to the band in the public garden, and though she remains seated on the bench, she becomes *part* of the chorus, she participates in life. Lexical and grammatical markers of communion (‘company’, the ‘whole’, ‘accompaniment’, ‘together’, ‘join in’, ‘she too’, ‘we’) proliferate as her soul rises in musical *ecstasy*. She, a mock-tragic avatar of Mansfield, *is* the spectacle. Exclamatives flood the narrative, emotions overrun: ‘how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all!’ (SS, p. 228).

Even though the show comes to a brutal end with the return to the third-person narrative and the intrusion of the prosaic and compassionate teenagers, it has existed. Some spiritual event has occurred, and its reality cannot be denied. Art is necessary, Mansfield might be suggesting, even as it is an illusion. What is more, mankind needs it to fight its egotistic impulses. It has been shown in neuroscience, thanks to Magnetic Resonance Imagery machines, that music has a specific

cognitive effect on the mind. As Burke and Troscianko explain, music indeed deactivates the frontal cortex, which is responsible for all conscious thoughts, memory, reflection.^{xi} Prinz calls the superior frontal gyrus (the upper part of frontal cortex) the ‘neural seat of the self’.^{xli} Deactivation of the frontal cortex, therefore, may create an erasure of the sense of self. The more intense the musical sensations are when we listen to music, the greater are the deactivation and blurring of neural representation of the self. The reason why music ‘softens *mores*’, as Montesquieu put it, might have been found. Music, as art, helps us go beyond our selves. What Miss Brill thus experiences on her lonely bench might be what Mansfield values the most, what saves us from our egotistic and claustrophobic lives: the aesthetic gesture of removing oneself from oneself, the capacity to reach a more poetic, transcendent and minute moment of otherness.

Notes

ⁱ *Notebooks 2*, p. 204.

ⁱⁱ Clare Hanson, ‘Katherine Mansfield and Vitalist Psychology’ in *Katherine Mansfield and Psychology*, ed. by Clare Hanson, Gerri Kimber and Todd Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 24.

ⁱⁱⁱ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols (Cosimo Classics: New York, 2007), Vol. 1, p. 294.

^{iv} David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739-40 <<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hume/david/h92t/B1.4.6.html>>, [accessed 10 October 2018]

^v Ronald W. Langacker, *Concept, Image, and Symbol: The Cognitive Basis of Grammar* (Berlin / New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), p. 1.

^{vi} Julie Neveux, *John Donne: Le sentiment dans la langue* (Paris: Ed. Rue d’Ulm, 2013), Chapter 2, pp. 55–76.

^{vii} See Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (London: Vintage, 2012), in particular the description of emotions, pp. 110–11.

^{viii} A term used by Mansfield to lament her own sentimental confusion (and lack of clear happiness with anyone): ‘It has all been mush and mushiness’, *Notebooks 2*, p. 143.

^{ix} *Notebooks 2*, p. 169.

^x *Notebooks 2*, p. 93.

^{xi} Katherine Mansfield, *Selected Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ‘Life of Ma Parker’, pp. 255–6. My italics. All further references to Mansfield’s stories are to this edition and references are placed parenthetically in the text.

^{xii} This represents about a third of her entire production.

^{xiii} Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 2nd ed. (London: Pearson Education, 2007), p. 276.

^{xiv} Marie Megan Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 5.

- ^{xv} Hammond relies on the work of the psychologist Robert L. Katz, *Empathy: Nature and Uses* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).
- ^{xvi} Martin Haspelmath, *Indefinite Pronouns*. Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.176.
- ^{xvii} Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 922 (my italics).
- ^{xviii} *Notebooks 2*, p. 204.
- ^{xix} Agnès Celle and Laure Lansari, eds., *Expressing and Describing Surprise* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), p. 4.
- ^{xx} Katherine Mansfield, *Bliss and Other Stories* (London: Constable, 1923) p. 269.
- ^{xxi} René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy in Focus*, ed. by Stanley Tweyman (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), my italics:
 For we say that we see the same wax if it is present, and not that we simply judge that it is the same from its having the same colour and figure. From this I should conclude that I knew the wax by means of vision and not simply by the intuition of the mind; unless by chance I remember that, when looking *from a window* and saying I see men who pass in the street, I really do not see them, but infer that what I see is men, just as I say that I see wax. And yet what do I see from the window but *hats and coats which may cover automatic machines*? Yet I judge these to be men. And similarly solely by the faculty of judgement which rests in my mind, I comprehend that which I believed I saw with my eyes.
- ^{xxii} *Notebooks 2*, p. 204.
- ^{xxiii} Jesse Prinz, ‘Waiting for the self’ in *Consciousness and the Self: New Essays*, ed. by Jee Loo Liu and John Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 134.
- ^{xxiv} Prinz, pp. 140–1, original emphasis.
- ^{xxv} *Notebooks 2*, p. 134.
- ^{xxvi} Prinz, p. 148.
- ^{xxvii} In the terminology of TCM, Theory of Conceptual Metaphor, ontological metaphors attribute concrete attributes to abstract entities, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1980], 2003), Chapter 6, pp. 25–32.
- ^{xxviii} *Letters 3*, p. 196.
- ^{xxix} Kristjan Kristjánsson, *The Self and its Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 223.
- ^{xxx} See Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Circulating Genius: John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 86.
- ^{xxxi} John Keats, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2009), p. 500, my italics.

xxxii *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield: A Selection*, ed. by C. K. Stead (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 199, Mansfield's emphasis.

xxxiii Chris Mourant, 'Modernist Emotions: The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf', in *Katherine Mansfield and the Bloomsbury Group*, ed. by Todd Martin (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pp. 161–81.

xxxiv Clare Hanson, ed., *The Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 89.

xxxv 'Every day includes much more non-being than being [...] These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. [...] A great deal of every day is not lived consciously'. Jeanne Schulkind, ed., *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being – Unpublished Autobiographical Writing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 70.

xxxvi *Notebooks 2*, p. 204.

xxxvii *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being*, pp. 66–7.

xxxviii Mourant, p. 169.

xxxix Hanson, ed., p. 113.

xl Michael Burke and Emily T. Troscianko, eds., *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues Between Literature and Cognition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 70.

xli Prinz, p. 130.