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**ASPECTS OF IMAGERY IN THE WORK OF
KATHERINE MANSFIELD**

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**ASPECTS OF IMAGERY IN THE WORK OF
KATHERINE MANSFIELD**

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ABSTRACT

The motivation to this study was my strong interest on recurring images which came up as I read “Bliss”, a short story by New Zealand author Katherine Mansfield. Such repeated images were the color silver, a shower of sparks, and a pear tree in bloom. From the reading, a number of questions came up. What would the images mean? Why would Mansfield choose such symbols and how do they contribute to the story? Are the symbols in the short story related to the author in an autobiographical sense? Such questions led to deeper research on the author’s life and work, which helped shed light on the subject. Surprisingly, a number of elements in the short story and in Mansfield’s life overlapped in a way that invited me into investigating some coincidences that became prominent and should be worth at least some discussion. This study aimed to explore and tentatively explain recurrent symbols in Mansfield’s “Bliss”, as well as if and how they relate to the author’s style. My intention was to describe how such elements appear in the short story, how they are used in the discursive setting, as well as some possible meanings. There was an exploratory reading of the images, based on the book *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, by Michael Ferber and on the literature on the subject. As for the data on Mansfield’s life, a research was carried out through the use of autobiographical material by the author. After extensive research on the subject, the initial questions have been answered, at least in part. The images related directly to the text, reinforcing the effect contrived by Mansfield. Moreover, it is possible to see the connections between the person and the author in Mansfield, due to the use of autobiographical information in her works – mostly in an allegorical fashion. However, being that Mansfield never went on record as to the creative process of “Bliss”, one can only appreciate the connections with its protagonist, Bertha.

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1 INTRODUCTION

My first contact with the work of Katherine Mansfield happened some years ago. I was studying Short Story Theory, and was tasked with presenting and commenting on a short story of my choice. As I did not want to tread on the path of the “top ten” authors, my decision was that my pick would have to be somewhat unconventional and novel to me. I remembered I had come across a short story once, with a title so peculiar that it had been translated into Portuguese under two different names: “Êxtase” and “Felicidade”. That story was “Bliss”, by Katherine Mansfield. When I read it, I noticed certain recurrent images, and was impressed by the way they presented themselves as somewhat interwoven. That intrigued me and stayed on my mind ever since. Later, when I joined in the *O Imaginário das Ilhas Britânicas* project with Professor Sandra Maggio, I decided to explore the text in a more consistent way and explore the imagery it contained. Such work led to a fruitful presentation at *V Jornada de Estudos sobre o Imaginário das Ilhas Britânicas* (2011) and prompted me to study more about the author. To my surprise, the more I learned about Mansfield’s life, the clearer it became to me that a number of elements present in her short stories overlapped with episodes and elements of her own life. I started to consider to what extent these appropriations of life into fiction were intended and rational, and to what extent they were inevitable. I went after some theory about authorship and learned that one should not mix up the different strata of reality: there is the world of reality and the fictional world; there is the person, the author, the narrator. And as a reader I should not take one for the other.

Even so, the more I read Katherine Mansfield the stronger the idea grew that the better a text becomes, the more exposed the person who writes it becomes too. When the time came for me to write my undergraduate monograph, I decided to investigate this puzzling area. Thus, this study aims to point out and experimentally shed light on some recurrent symbols in Mansfield’s “Bliss”, and dare some approximations involving the author and the person. It is not my intention to use the text so as to dig into the privacy of the person. My interest, on the contrary, lies in the importance of the symbols presented in “Bliss”, which may originate from circumstances in the life of a person, but end up contributing to the creation of a work of art. The conclusion I get is that, when we are dealing with art, and with symbols, the limits

between reality and fiction lose their importance and their significance. I mean to concentrate on the way some elements are presented and interact, how they are used in the discursive setting, as well as on their possible meaning. My reading of the images will be based on my own impressions and on the interpretations provided by Michael Ferber in his book *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*.

2 KATHERINE MANSFIELD, PERSON AND AUTHOR

Mansfield once said in a letter to her friend William Gerhardi: “I shall not be ‘fashionable’ long”. (O’SULLIVAN & SCOTT, 1996, p. 323) Little did she know, for she became well-renowned as a writer of short stories, poetry, letters, journals and reviews. In this starting section I will draw on some biographical facts because I believe that in Mansfield’s case, understanding the personality and the character of the person does help us understand the kind of fiction she creates. Born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp on October 14 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand, she was one of the six children in the family: Vera, Charlotte, Kathleen, Gwendoline, Jeanne, and Leslie – this last one a boy. Her mother, Annie Burnell Dyer, was a perfectionist, a housewife and her father, Harold Beauchamp, was a successful entrepreneur at W. M. Bannatyne and Company. He also became a member of the Wellington Harbour Board and the board of the Bank of New Zealand – which he chaired later. Her parents belonged to a generation who saw England as their country, even though they had been born in Australia. From 1895, Mansfield went to Karori School, where she received an award for an essay: “A Sea Voyage”, which was based on a trip she and her family had taken in New Zealand.

In May 1898 Mansfield and her older sisters moved to Wellington Girls’ High School. Not long after that, Mansfield’s first work, “Enna Blake”, was in a school publication, with a comment by its editor: “This story, written by one of the girls who have lately entered the school, shows promise of great merit” (JONES, 2010, p. 11).

One of Mansfield’s teachers thought she was somewhat unfriendly and excessively creative, to the point of being considered a borderline liar. Being slightly overweight and temperamental would be the picture of a teenager who “does not belong”. Notwithstanding, her writing tasks were done brilliantly, as were her cello lessons. At the time, she was an intimate friend of a native classmate, Maata Mahupuku.

In 1903, Mansfield went to London with her family and stayed there until 1906 with her sisters, Vera and Charlotte. They studied at Queen’s College, staying at a hostel nearby.

Everything was fresh and exciting: Mansfield got acquainted with literary works by many writers, specially by Oscar Wilde, whose work influenced her writing. During such lively period of her life, she had a close relationship with another “misfit” like herself, Ida Baker, later renamed “Leslie Moore' or 'LM'.

A number of Mansfield’s works were published in the Queen's College Magazine. While some of them dealt with universal children's themes, others took the direction of the common “teenage angst”, such as isolation and a certain fixation on death. “About Pat”, on her recollections of Karori School, highlighted the tone of her childhood occurrences that would later appear in her work. In December 1906, against her will, Mansfield returned to Wellington with her family. There, she resumed her social life, but with discontent: “the days full of perpetual Society functions – the hours full of clothes discussions – the waste of life.... The days, weeks, months, years of it all.” (JONES, 2010, p. 15). In her diaries, she recurrently expressed her desire to be back soon to the place where she thought she could be herself and write.

In a token of rebellion, Mansfield sought promiscuous relationships with both men and women, despite the rigidity of Wellington’s society of the day. At the time, she also reconnected with Maata Mahupuku, who had been her literary muse. Conversely, Mansfield was helped by her own father, who, by her mindset, was the very icon of a society she spurned. A Wellington journalist, friends with her father, arranged for the publication of some of her short stories in Australia. A curiosity: in October 1907, she told her editor that she would sign her work only as K. Mansfield or KM from then on.

Longing to return to London, Mansfield was helped by a cousin, who was a successful writer – Elizabeth von Arnim. Being a bestseller herself, Arnim convinced Mr. Beauchamp to let Mansfield go back to England. In July 1908 Mansfield left for London, where she led an erratic life at first, with little or no publication at all. She referred to those times as being characterized by “waste – destruction too”. Financially ill, for her allowance was insufficient for her lifestyle, Mansfield sold her cello and performed some small musical plays in London. Then, she got pregnant by her former boyfriend’s twin, Garnet. While she was pregnant, Mansfield fell in love with a singing teacher. They got engaged, which led to a marriage on 2 March 1909. Mansfield got married in black, having Ida Baker as the only witness to the event. For no apparent reason, she left her newly-wedded husband that very evening. Shocked by such events, Katherine’s mother set out for London, splitting apart her daughter and Baker.

She took Mansfield to Germany, put her in a spa, returned to New Zealand and removed her from her will.

Mansfield had a miscarriage during her six-month stay in Germany. There, she wrote using a recurrent type of narrator in her stories, published in 1910 and 1911 in the literary piece *The New Age*: a lonely young girl, unwary and gullible, uncertain as to a woman's part in society, a woman who has to accept everything while men can have their way as they please. The stories were compiled in 1911 under the title *In a German Pension*. By the time she started to receive certain appraisal for her work, Mansfield had been suffering from pleurisy, a complication from a persistent infection said to be derived from her promiscuous behavior.

In December 1911 Mansfield met Oxford student and journal editor John Middleton Murry. They were at first roommates and then lovers who stood by each other. 1912 and 1913 were important years for Mansfield as a writer. She published stories with New Zealand themes, but things were a bit rough for them as they moved around quite constantly and had financial problems, until they were completely bankrupt after a short period at the end of 1913 in Paris. Even though they admired each other, they had a tempestuous relationship. Mansfield demanded a kind of attention which Murry did not quite dispense to her very often. Meanwhile, Baker was there all the time for Mansfield, supporting and nurturing her. From that, we could say that both Murry and Baker had become indispensable to Mansfield for together they provided all the kinds of love she seemed to need.

Mansfield and Murry spent long periods apart from each other, but they exchanged letters on a regular basis. Mansfield wrote a myriad of letters to Murry and had notebooks full of whatever crossed her mind, which substantially helped improve her writing skills. By 1914, Mansfield and Murry had a close friendship with D. H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda.

Showing once more that she did not fit the image of the "regular woman" of the time, Mansfield had another affair – this time with a writer from France, Francis Carco, in February 1915. Although he knew Mansfield quite well, Lawrence was appalled. In the same year, Leslie Beauchamp, Mansfield's brother, visited her in London, on the occasion of his military training period. They had a nice time and considered going back to New Zealand but, to Mansfield's shock, he was killed later in October, in Flanders. Miserable, Mansfield decided to go to France and there she began to rewrite a previous work, *The Aloe*, in an attempt to reproduce the country she had "discovered" with her brother. Published by Virginia Woolf as

Prelude, in 1918, such memoir was later deemed as Mansfield's earliest literary work to achieve remarkable success.

In April 1916 Murry and Mansfield went back to England for a short period with D. H. Lawrence, in Cornwall. Happenings during their stay there dissatisfied Lawrence immensely, which would explain his future aversion to them. Moving back to London with Mansfield, Murry started working at the War Office. By 1917 they were connected with the Bloomsbury Group: the Woolfs, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and Bertrand Russell, among other prominent names – though Murry was considered the “odd one out” for his lower-middle class background.

Mansfield's peers thought she was remarkable. Virginia Woolf, on a drunken night, even confessed she was jealous of Mansfield – but Mansfield was never open or simple to her friends. Impenetrable and moody, she told Murry: “Don't lower your mask until you have another mask prepared beneath” (O'SULLIVAN & SCOTT, 1984, p. 287). She would be humorous one day and sullen the next. Notwithstanding, she would support other colleagues, for instance collaborating on the translation of Anton Chekhov's diaries and letters.

In December 1917 Mansfield was diagnosed with an inflammation in the lungs, or pleurisy. Even though she never believed her condition was serious, she went to Bandol, in Côte d'Azur, on medical suggestion for healthier air. There, she completed some of her most notable stories: “Bliss”, a satire on the intellectual jet set in London; “Sun and Moon”, based on her childhood in New Zealand; and “*Je ne parle pas Français*”, venturing through sexuality and social relations.

In February 1918, Mansfield had the first of the many bleedings in her lungs. She started a battle against the end, “How unbearable it would be to die – leave “scraps”, “bits”...nothing really finished” (MEYERS, 2002, p. 236). After a rough occasion when she and Ida Baker were trapped in Paris during the German bombing, Mansfield departed for London. On April 29, she finally divorced George Bowden, to officially become Murry's wife four days later. After her mother's death, they moved to Hampstead. Mournful, Mansfield had her depression aggravated by the addition of pressure at work: in the beginning of 1919, Murry became editor of the *Athenaeum* and Mansfield spent most of her time doing book reviews – which, conversely, helped her improve her writing skills.

Her lung condition progressed on to tuberculosis. Still, Mansfield refused to become an in-patient in a hospital. Contrary to recommendations, she moved to Italy with Ida Baker in

September 1919, in the beginning of the winter. Through letters, weary and sick, she went over her unhappiness with Murry. She had been disappointed at his submissive character and unwillingness to support her. Such events led her to write “The Man Without a Temperament” in the beginning of 1920. Feeling concerned about her own life, she traveled to the South of France in order to be with Connie Beauchamp, her cousin.

After a summer in England, Mansfield returned with Baker to Menton, between Monaco and the Italian Riviera. There she completed “Bliss”, in December, and in the same month *Bliss and Other Stories* was published. Mansfield moved once more in May 1921 to Switzerland, where she was joined by Murry, who had quit the Athenaeum in order to be with by her side. In 1922, distraught, Mansfield was undergoing painful radiation therapy in France. During this time there, she met James Joyce, and wrote “The Fly”, which reflects her disease, her disappointment with her father and her husband, and her aversion of the war.

In critical health, she went back to Switzerland, where she concluded her last story, “The Canary”, on a New Zealand setting again. In August 1922, she returned to London just for her last days with her father and friends. Despite her condition, Mansfield kept on working on a new project, a series of twelve linked stories that would become a new book – which never came to be.

Going through a transcendental phase, she then believed that curing her soul would cure her body. She decided she was to write stories that were of good nature, to give her life a new direction, towards righteousness. In October she entered Gurdjieff’s “Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man”, near Paris. Murry visited her on January 9, 1923. She died of a hemorrhage that very evening and was buried at Avon-Fontainebleau, at the age of thirty-five.

Katherine Mansfield left all her written works for her husband under the condition that he “leave all fair”. Murry selected her works and compiled *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield* in 1927, which was seen as a confrontation to her will. In 1939, he produced *The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield* with more selected materials, and in 1954 he published a *Complete Edition*. He published as well *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* in 1928, and *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry, 1913 - 1922* in 1951. Such works helped the growth of Mansfield's reputation after her demise.

Although she was influenced by other writers, Mansfield created a style of short fiction that was a novelty. For such, she is regarded as a seminal author in British modernism,

who aimed to distill the idiosyncrasies of life and to bring ordinary aspects of society to the fore so that they could be thoroughly comprehended. As a mirror of her own existence, Mansfield's art refuses the conventions of the standard narrative with a carefully crafted conclusion, using instead direct and indirect narrative and a quick transition of tenses for constant changes of perspective. Frequently, there is closure but no ultimate conclusion; order but no plot. Such unorthodox techniques represented then the renovation of the short-story form.

Mansfield's status as a writer is great worldwide. Still, in New Zealand she does not seem to have had such an impact. Despite being the sole literary figure in the country to be highly distinguished, because of her long years abroad, some have put in doubt her legacy for New Zealand literature. Mansfield was always loyal to her own country in every sense: "New Zealand is in my very bones" (CAFFIN, 1982, p. 1). There is proof in her notes that she tried to transmute her teenage experiences into fiction in early years there. In the other stories, memoirs of childhood events are dominant.

Undoubtedly, writing in Europe as a New Zealander gave her a different perspective from her peers in New Zealand and in England. She had the advantage of writing under the perspective of someone who knew both settings. Mansfield was very conscious of the autobiographical elements in her work and handled them skillfully. It is known that art transcends reality, and the facts or individuals from her memories were made to match the messages or images she wanted to express. One of her most appealing traits is that she relates her own identity in such a way that readers can identify with it. Mansfield's belief that literature derives from experience is clearly stated in a letter of 1922: "I think the only way to live as a writer is to draw upon one's real familiar life – to find the treasure in that... And the curious thing is that if we describe this which seems to us so intensely personal, other people take it to themselves and understand it as if it were their own." (O'SULLIVAN & SCOTT, 2008, p. 80).

3 THE MARKS OF NEW ZEALAND

As we have seen, in her writing, Mansfield does not follow the conventions of nineteenth century fiction by obeying the expected patterns. Her focus lies on the inner world instead of on external happenings, and great part of the narration is within the minds of her characters. Mansfield's status in literature has been secured by her technical skills, but she owes her popularity with her readers to the spirit and class of her writing. Her stories are an exceptional evocation of a world of yore, in which childhood memories, solitude, and the intricacies of relationships are recurring themes. Her prose is remarked for its frugality and concision, and she expresses it through a series of skillfully crafted impressions, boosted by apparently random imagery.

Mansfield left New Zealand in 1908, aged nineteen, and spent most of her adult life in England and France. Although she lived abroad for many years, her New Zealand background played a pivotal role in her creative growth and inspired many of her stories. The family roots of her parents were predominantly British – although there was a trace of Huguenot blood in her father's lineage – and both of them had been born in Australia. Mansfield frequently evoked her parents in her works. In two of her New Zealand stories, "Prelude" (1918) and "At the Bay" (1922), her father inspired the creation of the conceited Stanley Burnell, while her mother is represented as Linda Burnell, an uncaring and reserved mother. In "The Garden Party" (1922), Mansfield's portrayal of Mrs. Sheridan is more compassionate, but it still emphasizes the abyss in family relations between children and parents. The only person in the family who apparently understood Mansfield's difficult personality and to have replied to her need for love, was her grandmother, Margaret Mansfield Dyer. This could have been one of the reasons why Mansfield chose to write under her grandmother's name.

Mansfield's view that she was a misfit in her own family initially came from her position as the third of four daughters, whose parents wanted a male heir. When her only brother, Leslie, was eventually born in 1894, the family was split into two parties. The two older sisters, Vera and Charlotte, who had been born in 1885 and 1887 respectively, formed a natural partnership. A fourth daughter, Gwendoline, died in 1891 at the age of three months, while Jeanne (who was four years younger than Mansfield), and Leslie were always seen as

“the babies”. Hence, Mansfield found herself stuck alone in the middle, with no partner to lean on. Being lonely since childhood seemed to have made her resort to rebellion as well as to cynicism as forms of self-preservation – marks which would be later reflected in her stories.

At that time, citizens from countries belonging to the Commonwealth could attend English schools, and Mansfield did that. While studying in London, she got acquainted with a wide range of authors. She read compulsively, and when she returned to Wellington she suggested to her peers a list of authors, which gives us a good idea of the scope of her interests: William Morris, Catule Mendès, George Meredith, Maurice Maeterlinck, John Ruskin, Rodenbach, Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, Gabriele D’Annunzio, George Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker, Sebastian Melmouh, Walt Whitman, Leo Tolstoy, Edward Carpenter, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the Brontës.

But even though she sought interaction with the local society, her notes at the time showed her discontent. After three years in the lively, intellectual London, she felt smothered by the routine of her family life and met only a handful of people in New Zealand who shared her literary values. She wanted to be a writer, and she spent countless hours in her room writing in her notebook and working on a semi-autobiographical novel – which she never concluded – called *Juliet*. Two other stories from the same period attest for the importance of New Zealand childhood memories in Mansfield’s later work. In “The Little Girl”, the character of Kezia, the child who carries the chief perception of “Prelude”, makes her debut as an autobiographical reference. In “New Dresses” Mansfield features her childhood feelings about injustice and spurning. A third story, “How Pearl Button was Kidnapped”, in which the point of view of a small child is portrayed, is of greater importance as the only depiction of New Zealand Maoris in Mansfield’s work.

Still referring to the influence of New Zealand on Mansfield’s works, we have “The Aloe”, also set in the familiar world of her childhood. The story is based on the character revisited by Mansfield, “Kezia”, at the age of four and a half, from her first home in Wellington to her family’s new house in the countryside. The peculiar key image is of an aloe tree – a recurrent image in her stories, by the way – which seems to govern the fate of the family and only flourishes every hundred years. The story goes through the consciousness of the characters. The personalities of the characters are not stated, but shown through accurate details of their physique and behavior – or even their voices. The focus of the story is not on

any particular event, but on the small details of relationships and of the lives of the characters – who are blatantly recognizable as the Beauchamp family.

Mansfield's works were repeatedly marked by her ties with her New Zealand. To reinforce that idea we have the stories "An Ideal Family" and "Marriage à la Mode", two of her best pieces, in which she falls back once again for inspiration to her New Zealand childhood. "Her First Ball" tells of the feelings of a young girl who meets a cynical, older man at her first ball, while "The Voyage" gives a perfect account of the sea voyage between the North and South islands of New Zealand.

In addition to all the personal aspects of life which became recurrent in her stories, Mansfield wrote two other New Zealand stories for the publication *Rhythm* called "Ole Underwood" and "Millie", which deals with the underworld and crime. "The Woman at the Store" is an exciting story of murder in the harsh neighborhoods of Wellington, in which Mansfield uses a naturalistic approach and mingles the threatening atmosphere of the places and the disturbing character of the woman. In "Ole Underwood", the main character is a homeless former sailor, who became deranged after being twenty years in prison for murdering his wife. "Millie" is a bleak story of a manhunt, in which the plot unravels through an interior monologue and external narration. All three stories show Mansfield dealing with naturalism and responding to the fad for "savagery", which found its artistic representation in the Fauve paintings of the Post Impressionists. Her involvement with savagery and naturalism, however, was something temporary – not different from her fascination with Oscar Wilde – and there are indications from other stories from this time that she was elaborating on a style of her own.

Mansfield's initial exposure to Impressionism in New Zealand and abroad echoed in the artistic quality of her work. Biased by that exposure, in her stories from 1907, specifically in the interiors of houses, Mansfield depicts portraits of families who were estranged. Often, she also reveals the duality of women and subverts traditional notions of the feminine world. In the illustrated story "Daphne" (1921), which she began working on in 1907, Mansfield demonstrated her knowledge of modern art and where her aesthetic preferences stood. Her male protagonist is a painter and the story unfolds in Port Willin, a fictional town based on Wellington. In her description of the place, Mansfield blends elements of the French landscapes of Cézanne and the town of her childhood, explicitly depicting the colonial in an Impressionist context:

It's a small town... planted at the edge of a fine deep harbour like a lake. Behind it, on either side, there are hills. The houses are built of light painted wood. They have iron roofs coloured red. And there are big dark plummy trees massed together, breaking up those light shapes, giving a depth - warmth - making a composition of it well worth looking at ... (Mansfield, 1981, p. 461)

Notwithstanding all the references to New Zealand in her work, Mansfield's relationship with her homeland was never uncomplicated – not unlike in her personal relationships. For a long period following her death she was rated as an English author associated with British literature. Very little did her work have in common with early New Zealand writing and, until the middle of the 20th century, with the exception of Arthur Sewell's *Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Essay* in 1936, she was not widely recognized in New Zealand. After Berkman's and Alpers' books, the appreciation of Katherine Mansfield changed for better, and the prominence of her work for the literary history of New Zealand came to the fore. Although she was considered an alien for many years, Mansfield is now acclaimed as one of the most important New Zealand writers of all time, whose creative power is inextricably connected to her country.

4 ON SYMBOLS

4.1 SYMBOLS IN LITERATURE

As mentioned before, Mansfield frequently resorted to images in order to convey ideas, adding to the recurrent subtlety of her craft. An image can be a metaphor and a symbol. A symbol is a word or object that stands for another word or object. The object or word can be visible or not. For example, an apple may suggest the idea of sin. An apple is tangible, but sin is not. The word derives from the Greek word *symbolom*. All language symbolizes one thing or another. When we read the Book of Genesis, in the Bible, for instance, we can identify a number of symbols. In the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when Eve eats the apple, the apple represents transgression, therefore sin. Another instance is the story of Cain and Abel. They could be considered symbolic representations of the antitheses of good and evil, humility and pride.

When we study literature, it is crucial to consider that a literary work may mean more than what can be literally read. Several images, or *signs*, in literature might have all sorts of associations for the reader and for the writer. Neither the writer nor the reader is always fully aware of such associations. Hence, when a writer has the intention of expressing certain meanings, whatever he or she expresses may be absorbed by the reader in an unexpected way. As for symbols, that idea somewhat concurs with Goethe's: "Symbolism transforms the experience into an idea and an idea into an image, so that the idea expressed through the image remains active and unattainable and, even though expressed in all languages, remains inexpressible" (GOETHE, 1809: 1112-1113, cited in Eco, 1994, p. 8).

According to a literary lexicon,

An image "is a word or phrase in a literary text that appeals directly to the reader's taste, touch, hearing, sight, or smell. An image is thus any vivid or picturesque phrase that evokes a particular sensation in the reader's mind. Example: Whitman's "vapor-pennants" and evocations of "golden brass" and

"silvery steel" in "To a Locomotive in Winter"; Bryant's "lone lakes" and "autumn blaze" in "To an American Painter...". ("Lexicon", 2013).

Werner Vordtriede, in his *Literature and Image* (1953), states that

The image makes the unimaginable idea demonstrable and imaginable through representation with the help of objects and situations. That does not limit the image to the imagery of poetry, but makes it an integral and inescapable part of all literature. The idea of a novel may often be expressed in one sentence, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, but its very body will illustrate this idea in a series of images, which is the plot, together with a series of symbols which explain and intensify the plot. (Vordtriede, 1953, p. 1)

Now, a question that may recur when it comes to interpreting imagery in literature is "What is the role of the reader as the *addressee* of the text?". From that question, another one comes to mind: "What should the reader do when confronted with recurrent images in a text?" It would seem that it is only natural that the reader process the message underlying such images according to his or her interpretation. But what about the images used? Wouldn't the reader be crossing the limits in reading them in a determined way? In the book *The Role of The Reader*, Umberto Eco posits that

To postulate the cooperation of the reader does not mean to pollute the structural analysis with extra-textual elements. The reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text. (Eco, 1984, p. 4)

To complement that thought, in the introduction of *The Limits of Interpretation*, Eco maintains that

If there is something to be interpreted, the interpretation must speak of something which must be found somewhere, and in some way respected. (Eco, 1994, p. 7)

That being said, we will move on to my reading of the images which are recurrent in Mansfield's "Bliss".

4.2 IMAGERY IN “BLISS”

In “Bliss”, there are recurrent references to a shower of sparks, the color silver, fruit, as well as to a certain blossoming pear tree. What is so special about such images in the text? The main character’s mentioning of the color silver suggests that it is associated to a feeling she cannot find the words to explain, a feeling of bliss. As to the fruits and the pear tree, they might as well be associated to a representation of a life force which will inevitably claim its expression. But how do those images function in “Bliss”? What are some of the underlying meanings in them?

One of the first recurrent images in the story is “a shower of sparks”, which can be associated with fire. Historically, fire is essential to human life and comes in various forms – the sun and stars, lightning, volcanoes, sparks, etc. To Heraclitus, its ever-changing shapes suggest that it is the fundamental substance of the world (FERBER, 2007, pg. 73). The meanings of fire are not only multiple but sometimes ambiguous: what warms can burn, what illuminates can awe and blind. Fires are found on earth, in heaven, in hell, and in purgatory; they bring life and death; they can kill by burning up or by burning out. In FERBER 2007 we read that “Here are only a few senses of the symbol: the fire of the Lord in the Bible, the fire of purgatory, the Promethean fire of culture or intellect, and the fire of passion (lust and anger)”. (FERBER, 2007, pg. 73). The fire that destroys Rochester’s house, and blinds Rochester himself, in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* is full of significant fire imagery; it is purgatorial, and cleanses the hero of his past sins.

The fire of love and jealousy is an important symbol in literature. We read in FERBER 2007: “Perhaps its earliest appearance is in a fragment by Sappho, in which she says “a subtle fire has crept beneath my flesh” at the sight of her beloved with a man. In Catullus’ imitation of this poem a “thin flame” penetrates his limbs. Horace also imitates it, in *Odes* 1.13, where he is “consumed by slow fires within.” At Venus’ command Cupid “inflames” Dido with love for Aeneas (*Aeneid* 1.660)”. (FERBER, 2007, pg. 74).

We learn from “Bliss” that Bertha is consumed by that “shower of sparks”, which thus could be interpreted as being a state of uncontrollable infatuation as well as a feeling that

could consume one's soul. She is so excited and lively that she cannot find the words to express her emotions. She mentions such "sparks" more than once. It could be the feeling of anticipation of some event to which she is looking forward. Or else, as she has the same feeling when a certain woman is near her, it would be reasonable to assume she's trying to portray the "fire" of passion. It is so intense that if, on the one hand it produces a warm feeling, on the other hand it could burn her out in case she gave in to her impulses - having in mind that there could be a suggestion of a socially stigmatized relationship between the two women back then.

As for another frequent image in the story, pearls are synonyms with beauty, rarity, and great value. There is a biblical passage where Christ admonishes us: "do not cast your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7.6), meaning that we should not give away anything valuable we have for the ones who are not worthy of it. Shakespeare states that the pearl is the "treasure of an oyster" (SHAKESPEARE, *AC* 1.5.44), suggesting that it is hidden, or is found among the lowest or ugly conditions. Inextricably connected to the image of the pearl is the color silver. According to FERBER 2007, "silver belongs to the classical gods" (FERBER, 2007, pg. 197), just like gold. Artemis (or Diana) had a silver bow, likely to associate her with the moon, of which she is regent. So "the moon, like to a silver bow / New bent in heaven," suggests the reign of Diana the huntress in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "Silver moon" and various more decorative phrases such as "faire Phoebe with her silver face" are recurrent in Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and many other poets. The color is also related to rivers and other forms of water, suggesting a continuous display of power. A beautiful voice or other sound is often "silver" (FERBER, 2007, pg. 197): hearing Juliet say his name, Romeo says "How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night".

Completing the silvery triangle is the moon, also mentioned in "Bliss". In the classical tradition, the moon is generally related to the feminine and, as women, it goes through phases. FERBER says that "The moon's ever-changing phases led to its association with mutability, metamorphosis, inconstancy, or fickleness." (FERBER, 2007, pg. 130): From its silvery light, alchemists associated the moon with silver, whereas gold belonged to the sun. (FERBER, 2007, pg. 131). Curiously, the moonlight was thought to cause madness or "lunacy"; lunatics have "moon-struck madness". (FERBER, 2007, pg. 131).

Turning to the story, we can see references to the color silver more than once. Although the word "silver" is not stated in the lines below, one could easily associate "that shower of little sparks" to a silvery picture – related to a feeling Bertha is not able to put

down in words: “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.” (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.117).

The second mentioning of the color in question is related to the image of Bertha’s exotic, intriguing friend, Miss Fulton: “Came another tiny moment, while they waited, laughing and talking, just a trifle too much at their ease, a trifle too unaware. And then Miss Fulton, all in silver, with a silver fillet binding her pale blonde hair, came in smiling, her head a little on one side.” (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.121).

Adding to the way Miss Fulton’s outlook is depicted by the narrator, we have her first name: Pearl. Here, Mansfield demonstrates how carefully crafted her text is by composing a fully integrated projection of the character – as it is commonly known that an oyster’s pearl has a shade of silver.

Another powerful image in “Bliss” is the pear tree. It is blossoming, beautiful and ready to yield fruit. In FERBER 2007 we have “Anything that can grow, “flourish,” bear “fruit,” and die might be likened to a tree: a person, a family, a nation, a cultural tradition. In the Bible a tree often stands for a person, usually to distinguish the godly from the ungodly. Thus in Psalm 1 the godly man “shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf shall not wither” (1.3; cf. Jer. 17.8).” (FERBER, 2007, pg. 219). The two most important trees in the Bible, of course, are “the tree of life” and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2.9). FERBER, 2007, pg. 220) The latter stands for tasting and knowing something and, once you know it, you lose your state of “purity”, that is, you become responsible for dealing with it. Back to FERBER 2007, we read that “In both Hebrew and classical tradition the fruit is associated with sexual love, which Adam and Eve discover, in some interpretations, after eating it.” (FERBER, 2007, pg. 12). On the next page of Ferber’s book, we have “Throwing an apple or similar tree-fruit at someone was a signal of readiness to be seduced (e.g. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 997; Virgil, *Eclogues* 3.64).” (FERBER, 2007, pg. 13).

Concerning fruit, this image appears in several myths all over the world. It is widely known as a symbol of abundance, associated with goddesses of the harvest. Sometimes, fruit represents pleasures, gluttony, and temptation – like in the tale of Adam and Eve. In “Bliss”, Bertha is very conscious about it:

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 bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: "I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table." And it had seemed quite sense at the time. (Mansfield, 1920, p.118)

In mythology, Priapus, the god of fertility and abundance, is often depicted along with a fruit basket. In "Bliss", Mansfield seems to have intentionally designed the scene above as a reinforcing element to the idea of the abundance and of the capacity of generating life that Bertha feels she has – which shouldn't be kept in a case, like a rare fiddle, according to Bertha's own words.

The third reference to a silvery color in "Bliss" brings together a certain pear tree and Miss Fulton: "And still, in the back of her mind, there was the pear tree. It would be silver now, in the light of poor dear Eddie's moon, silver as Miss Fulton, who sat there turning a tangerine in her slender fingers that were so pale a light seemed to come from them." (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.130). Here there is a symbiosis between the pear tree, which is in its fullest bloom, and Miss Fulton. Now, if we turn our attention to how Bertha sees herself, we have the following: "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." (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.117). It would be possible for one to read that she sees the pear tree as a reflection of herself, as both are radiant, at their best moment, ready to yield wonderful fruit. Thus, the fact that the pear tree and Miss Fulton are connected might suggest that Bertha herself and Miss Fulton share something special.

Back to the image of the pear tree, the narrator describes it in rich detailing:

The windows of the drawing-room opened on to a balcony overlooking the garden. At the far end, against the wall, there was a tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky. Bertha couldn't help feeling, even from this distance, that it had not a single bud or a faded petal. Down below, in the garden beds, the red and yellow tulips, heavy with flowers, seemed to lean upon the dusk. (Mansfield, 1920, p.122)

From the description above, we can draw that the pear tree is at its best, just like Bertha. We can also see that the narrator makes explicit the relation Bertha-pear tree: "I'm too happy - too happy!" she murmured. And she seemed to see on her eyelids the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms as a symbol of her own life." (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.123). In most societies, flowers are connected with women. "Their beauty, their beauty's brevity, their vulnerability to males who wish to pluck them - these features and others have made flowers, in many cultures, symbolic of maidens, at least to the males who have set those cultures' terms. The most obvious evidence is girls' names. Daisy, Heather, Iris, Lily, Rose, and Violet remain common in English today". (FERBER, 2007, pg. 75). Again in FERBER 2007, we have that "The Romantics sometimes looked on flowers as nature's speech, or as speakers themselves, with silent messages intelligible only to those initiated in nature's mysteries." (FERBER, 2007, pg. 77). Also, more obviously, flowering is the stage right before the plant bears fruit.

From that point, it would be only natural if we considered Bertha a woman who is full of love and life, willing to deliver "fruit". She knows she is still young and has a lot to offer. It is important to highlight that she does not state she feels incomplete or dissatisfied; rather, she has this surge of infatuation and that is all we have. Back to the story, it is known that Bertha and Pearl shared this mutual understanding:

And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed - almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon. How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this "Bliss"ful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands? (Mansfield, 1920, p.131)

All things considered, we could say that the presence of such elements in the story enhances the effect of the images. For example, we have Pearl Fulton, wearing a silver dress, contemplating a pear tree with silver-colored flowers under a full moon, accompanied by Bertha, who is feeling a shower of sparks – which in turn could be silvery as well. Such interwoven elements could represent a setting where we have two women, experiencing a phase in their feminine, mutable world, looking beautiful and feeling a powerful emotion. Taking a step further, we might have the impression that the two ladies have this relationship

that goes beyond simple friendship – perhaps suggesting an attraction between them. But that is for the reader to decide. It is not plainly stated there, in “Bliss”.

Eventually, what do we get when we blend those elements? A woman, in her fullest bloom, ready to yield the product of a feeling she has no words to describe. She just knows she is able – and one might expect that she will – do something about it as she projects a continuation of her state: "Oh, what is going to happen now?" she cried. But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still.” (MANSFIELD, 1920, p.136).

Having covered the images and their relation to the story itself, now we will turn our focus onto to what extent such images relate to the autobiographical connection involving the person of Katherine Mansfield and her fictional derivation, the character Bertha. Katherine Mansfield wrote Bliss in 1918. She was 30 then, just like the main character in the short story. We have read that Mansfield’s writings are closely based on her personal experiences. It has been evidenced that Katherine Mansfield put much of her personal life into her writing since her childhood. From an early stage in her life, she would write down her impressions on trips, relationships, and on the society of which she was part. Despite all the setbacks which caused her suffering psychologically and physically, she was an enthusiast who embarked on a never-ending quest trying to find her own place.

Having that in mind, if we compare some aspects of Mansfield’s personal life and Bertha’s, her protagonist in “Bliss”, it would seem that there are details that could somehow suggest that Mansfield mirrored herself on Bertha through some parts in the short story. We will consider this approximation through the use of images depicted in the story. The intention in so doing is not to gossip about the life of the author, but to point what impressive set of psychological imagery can be produced when a strong internal drive causes an author to dig into the chaotic depths of her own self.

The first aspect that might come to support that evidence is that the story is set in an elegant neighborhood in London and the main character is receiving some well-off friends who belong to an intellectual circle. They are witty, interesting, cult, and carefree. Bertha leads a comfortable life and she has everything a traditional woman would want in a traditional society: a baby, a husband, a nice house, and financial support. Nevertheless, when she has this feeling of bliss which she cannot explain, she somehow senses that there is still more to be discovered; the question being, is she really satisfied? The story tells us that she does seem to be looking for further answers.

In comparison, this was in great part a perfect depiction of the life Mansfield had by 1917. She and her husband attended frequent parties where prominent names in British literature were present. In a way, she was living the high life. One of the differences is the absence of a baby in her life - she had even had a miscarriage when her mother took her to Germany after her wicked behavior when she was living in London in 1909. Another similarity is that Mansfield wrote "Bliss" when she was thirty. Bertha, in "Bliss", is the same age as the author. Although the author was suffering from a serious lung condition and the character was full of life, both Mansfield and Bertha looked forward to being productive: Bertha compared herself to a flowering pear tree, ready to yield its fruit. She thought she had so much to live and give. Similarly, Mansfield – despite her illness – displayed such an enormous drive towards her work until the end. Knowing that Mansfield had always been so controversial, it may be argued that she could have made Bertha her own alter ego, as her antithetical image – yet with the same will to live. The silvery shower of sparks might have been the symbol of that fire within which drove both women.

Then, there is Pearl Fulton. In the story, we have this exotic figure, dazzling, with her beauty e femininity highlighted by the color silver. Even her name related to the color in question, as pearls do have shades of silky silver. She is a new, exciting friend who Bertha certainly admired. Actually, Bertha was seduced by her charms. The passage where both women are alone, with a view to the moonlit, blooming pear tree, is highly suggestive in the sense that it would serve as the ultimate backdrop to two people who are attracted to each other. The images are all together here: the moon, Pearl Fulton, the shower of sparks, the flowers of the pear tree – all silver, feminine and beautiful. The moon, as we saw in this study, is related to the passing of phases and instability. Nonetheless, nothing extraordinary really takes place and we are left only with impressions and assumptions.

As for Mansfield, she had always felt as if she did not belong anywhere, having promiscuous behavior towards both men and women – never following the social standards of her time and place. She underwent many different phases and had an erratic behavior (like the moon itself). She had gotten involved with this also exotic Maori girl (Maata Mahupuku), who had been her inspiring muse back in New Zealand, on two different occasions. The taste for the different, for the unknown, for the counter-establishment had always fascinated Mansfield, who also had an intimate relationship with Ida Baker. For that reason, it is feasible that Miss Fulton might have been an attempt to somehow impersonate Mahupuku.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a nutshell, we considered some aspects of the life of a person, Katherine Mansfield, who had a busy but troubled life, burdened by fits of constantly depression and being chronically sick. Lonely as a kid and estranged by her mother, she had to find a way to get by in a society whose rules she spurned. Perhaps, as a form of self-defense mechanism, she grew up with a confrontational nature. Her swinging mood and unpredictable behavior reflected on all aspects of her life: she led a promiscuous life, having relationships with both men and women as she pleased. Moreover, she hardly ever stayed in one place for long and was financially ill. Such instability could be translated into a quest for Utopia, which she autobiographically impressed in most of her works.

The effect of the above mentioned conditions extended to a permanently feeling of not belonging anywhere; and to the necessity of communicating with other people through the alternative route of writing. Writing as a means of healing and writing as a means of making contact with others may be the circumstances that propitiated the rise of this great author. The fictional female characters created by Mansfield are always experimenting with the forbidden or the unknown, have difficulties in posing as traditional women, and therefore subvert the social rules of their time.

In the short story approached in this study, “Bliss”, there are many recurrent images/symbols. We have examined some of them, with the intention of understanding the writing procedure followed by Mansfield. The first image analyzed, the shower of sparks, relates to the image of fire. According to Ferber (2007), fire is essential to human life and can come in different forms, one of them being sparks. The meanings of fire as a symbol are not only multifaceted but also ambivalent at times: the heat can provide warmth but it can also destroy; it can promote life and death and it is also the symbol for passion. In “Bliss”, Bertha is blazed by a shower of sparks, which can be interpreted as a state of intense infatuation to which she cannot find the words to define.

Next, the image of the color silver, reflected on the very name of Pearl Fulton, on the shower of sparks, on the moon, and on the pear tree flowers, was interpreted as a reference to the feminine, the graciousness of a woman’s nature – as well as a flowing power, like water, as an object of great value. The Greek pictured Artemis as the goddess of the moon, holding a

silver bow. In addition, the moon, in its silvery color, relates to women in that just like these, it goes through phases, which denotes metamorphosis and unpredictability. In “Bliss”, Bertha is a woman who has it all and yet feels that she somehow yearns for something. Perhaps that could be associated with the uncertainty about her own feelings – or else she senses that she will (or expects to) go through changes.

Also, there is the reference to fruits. One of the earliest references to fruit in literature comes from the Bible, where the fruit of the tree of wisdom (usually depicted as an apple) is also the symbol for temptation. It also carries a sexual connotation, yet associated with the experience of tasting and knowing something only to become responsible for one’s own acts. Fruits are widely recognized as a symbol for abundance, associated with the goddesses of the harvest. Priapus, the god of fertility and abundance, is often portrayed along with a fruit basket. In “Bliss”, Mansfield seems to have willingly projected the scene where Bertha felt like arranging some fruit on a table, enriching the idea that later reappears in the pear tree scenes, a tree which will produce plenty of fruit. As Bertha sees herself as the very pear tree in full bloom, she knows she is ready to bear fruit abundantly.

Closely related to fruit, there comes the image of the pear tree. It is flowering, gorgeous and ready to produce fruit. It takes us back to the image of the color silver, like Miss Fulton. Bertha thinks that the tree is a reflection of herself; she is at her best moment, glowing, and ready to produce. In fact, Bertha thinks of the blossoms in the pear tree as a symbol of her own life. The reading of the symbol “tree” by Ferber brings that “anything that can grow, ‘flourish,’ bear ‘fruit,’ and die, might be compared to a tree: a person, a family, a nation, a cultural tradition”. (FERBER, 2007, p. 219). Biblical references present two different possibilities for the image of a tree: a good tree will bear good fruit, and a bad tree will bear bad fruit; secondly, the famous tree in the Garden of Eden. Let us let us assume a possible association of the pear tree in “Bliss” with “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in the Bible. Bringing forth the suggestion that Bertha and Miss Fulton are “pear trees”, we can also assume they are bearers of the “forbidden fruit”. Hence, once any of them took initiative and tried the “fruit”, they would be confronted with the consequences, that is, they would have to face any developments from their acts, all in a very stern society.

In relation to the connections involving the character, the author and the person, and as to the assumption as to whether Mansfield projected herself on Bertha, it is necessary to understand about the social context in which Mansfield was inserted. Katherine Mansfield

wrote “Bliss” in 1918. Just like Bertha, she was thirty years old. We have learned that Mansfield’s works have autobiographical traces as much of her written production have reference to her personal life, from childhood through her adult life. Afflicted by physical and psychological disorders, she moved and changed relationships almost frantically, perhaps in an attempt to settle in life.

Comparing certain aspects of Mansfield’s and Bertha’s paths, it has been evidenced that there are similarities between them. The images recurring in “Bliss” seem to enhance such similarities. The first aspect that seemingly supports such assertions is that “Bliss” is set in a neighborhood comparable to Mansfield’s. The characters in the story mimic Mansfield’s acquaintances from the British literary jet set. Not unlike Bertha, the author has a lively, upscale lifestyle. In the story, Bertha has a feeling of bliss which she cannot explain and she tries to find an answer to it. By the end of the story, she feels uncertain yet positive about the future. Mansfield, also, seems to have spent all her life trying to find an answer to her yearnings. Mansfield had succumbed to pleurisy – which eventually led to tuberculosis, but kept on producing her literary pieces. She thought that she had done very little. Antithetically, perhaps as a positive mirror to Mansfield, Bertha was at her best moment, flourishing, like a beautiful pear tree. It would not be unfeasible to assume that, given Mansfield’s ironic vein, Bertha could be seen as Mansfield’s “standard-woman” version. The shower of sparks in the text might have been the symbol of a fire within them, their intense life force.

Mansfield had always felt like a misfit, having numerous affairs with both men and women – going against social standards of her time. Like the moon has its phases, Mansfield moved and changed partners constantly. With a taste for the exotic, she had a close relationship with a Maori girl whom she had known since school and was her inspiring muse in New Zealand. She also had an intimate relationship with her lifelong friend Ida Baker. In “Bliss”, we have Pearl Fulton, an exotic, charming figure, enhanced by the color silver. Mansfield was careful in choosing such a name, for pearls resemble silver balls. Such recurrent reference to the color in question helps highlight the feeling of the feminine and the beautiful. Because of that, it is possible that Pearl Fulton might have been an attempt to follow Mahupuku.

Coming to a conclusion, I feel that the examination of some of the symbolism presented in “Bliss”, with the help of Ferber and other sources used in this study, has helped us to answer our questions, at least in part. As for the first question, “What would the images mean?”, I went over the possibilities which seemed to fit the images in the story. In the

second question, “Why would Mansfield choose such symbols and how they contribute to the story?”, I have learned that Mansfield was very diligent in her work, with no superfluous wordiness whatsoever. The choice of the symbols in the story was not random as all the images related to the context in which they were inserted and matched their description in the literature. In fact, the use of such images added to the tone and effect conveyed in “Bliss”. Turning to the core question, “Are the symbols in the short story related to the author in an autobiographical sense?”, it is likely that Mansfield portrayed at least some personal references in the story. Further reading on Mansfield’s work and life revealed that she often took notes on her impressions of everyday life, using those notes to contribute to her formal production on a number of occasions – reinforcing the theory that she used autobiographical data in her works. However, it must be observed that what is said about Mansfield here applies to all authors. People write about the things they know and feel, and plunge into themes that relate to their personal quests in life. Good and bad authors do that. So, the conclusion I get from this confrontation of facts involving the person and the author is that the ultimate worth of this contrast is that it helps us investigate the methodology and the techniques used by Mansfield, a great author, so as to operate her magic.

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ANNEX

“BLISS”

By Katherine Mansfield

ALTHOUGH Bertha Young was thirty she still had moments like this when she wanted to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps on and off the pavement, to bowl a hoop, to throw something up in the air and catch it again, or to stand still and laugh at—nothing—at nothing, simply.

What can you do if you are thirty and, turning the corner of your own street, you are overcome, suddenly by a feeling of bliss—absolute bliss!—as though you'd suddenly swallowed a bright piece of that late afternoon sun and it burned in your bosom, sending out a little shower of sparks into every particle, into every finger and toe? . . .

Oh, is there no way you can express it without being "drunk and disorderly" ? How idiotic civilisation is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?

"No, that about the fiddle is not quite what I mean," she thought, running up the steps and feeling in her bag for the key - she'd forgotten it, as usual - and rattling the letter-box. "It's not what I mean, because - Thank you, Mary" - she went into the hall. "Is nurse back?"

"Yes, M'm."

"And has the fruit come?"

"Yes, M'm. Everything's come."

"Bring the fruit up to the dining-room, will you? I'll arrange it before I go upstairs."

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.

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.

"Shall I turn on the light, M'm?"

"No, thank you. I can see quite well."

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 bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: "I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table." And it had seemed quite sense at the time.

When she had finished with them and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect - and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful. . . . She began to laugh.

"No, no. I'm getting hysterical." And she seized her bag and coat and ran upstairs to the nursery.

Nurse sat at a low table giving Little B her supper after her bath. The baby had on a white flannel gown and a blue woolen jacket, and her dark, fine hair was brushed up into a funny little peak. She looked up when she saw her mother and began to jump.

"Now, my lovey, eat it up like a good girl," said nurse, setting her lips in a way that Bertha knew, and that meant she had come into the nursery at another wrong moment.

"Has she been good, Nanny?"

"She's been a little sweet all the afternoon," whispered Nanny. "We went to the park and I sat down on a chair and took her out of the pram and a big dog came along and put its head on my knee and she clutched its ear, tugged it. Oh, you should have seen her."

Bertha wanted to ask if it wasn't rather dangerous to let her clutch at a strange dog's ear. But she did not dare to. She stood watching them, her hands by her side, like the poor little girl in front of the rich girl with the doll.

The baby looked up at her again, stared, and then smiled so charmingly that Bertha couldn't help crying:

"Oh, Nanny, do let me finish giving her her supper while you put the bath things away.

"Well, M'm, she oughtn't to be changed hands while she's eating," said Nanny, still whispering. "It unsettles her; it's very likely to upset her."

How absurd it was. Why have a baby if it has to be kept—not in a case like a rare, rare fiddle—but in another woman's arms?

"Oh, I must!" said she.

Very offended, Nanny handed her over.

"Now, don't excite her after her supper. You know you do, M'm. And I have such a time with her after!"

Thank heaven! Nanny went out of the room with the bath towels.

"Now I've got you to myself, my little precious," said Bertha, as the baby leaned against her.

She ate delightfully, holding up her lips for the spoon and then waving her hands. Sometimes she wouldn't let the spoon go; and sometimes, just as Bertha had filled it, she waved it away to the four winds.

When the soup was finished Bertha turned round to the fire. "You're nice -you're very nice!" said she, kissing her warm baby. "I'm fond of you. I like you."

And indeed, she loved Little B so much - her neck as she bent forward, her exquisite toes as they shone transparent in the firelight - that all her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn't know how to express it -what to do with it.

"You're wanted on the telephone," said Nanny, coming back in triumph and seizing *her* Little B.

Down she flew. It was Harry.

"Oh, is that you, Ber? Look here. I'll be late. I'll take a taxi and come along as quickly as I can, but get dinner put back ten minutes - will you? All right?"

"Yes, perfectly. Oh, Harry!"

"Yes?"

What had she to say? She'd nothing to say. She only wanted to get in touch with him for a moment. She couldn't absurdly cry: "Hasn't it been a divine day!"

"What is it?" rapped out the little voice.

"Nothing. *Entendu*," said Bertha, and hung up the receiver, thinking how much more than idiotic civilisation was.

They had people coming to dinner. The Norman Knights - a very sound couple - he was about to start a theatre, and she was awfully keen on interior decoration, a young man, Eddie Warren, who had just published a little book of poems and whom everybody was asking to dine, and a "find" of Bertha's called Pearl Fulton. What Miss Fulton did, Bertha didn't know. They had met at the club and Bertha had fallen in love with her, as she always did fall in love with beautiful women who had something strange about them.

The provoking thing was that, though they had been about together and met a number of times and really talked, Bertha couldn't make her out. Up to a certain point Miss Fulton was rarely, wonderfully frank, but the certain point was there, and beyond that she would not go.

Was there anything beyond it? Harry said "No." Voted her dullish, and "cold like all blonde women, with a touch, perhaps, of anaemia of the brain." But Bertha wouldn't agree with him; not yet, at any rate.

"No, the way she has of sitting with her head a little on one side, and smiling, has something behind it, Harry, and I must find out what that something is."

"Most likely it's a good stomach," answered Harry.

He made a point of catching Bertha's heels with replies of that kind . . . "liver frozen, my dear girl," or "pure flatulence," or "kidney disease," . . . and so on. For some strange reason Bertha liked this, and almost admired it in him very much.

She went into the drawing-room and lighted the fire; then, picking up the cushions, one by one, that Mary had disposed so carefully, she threw them back on to the chairs and the couches. That made all the difference; the room came alive at once. As she was about to throw the last one she surprised herself by suddenly hugging it to her, passionately, passionately. But it did not put out the fire in her bosom. Oh, on the contrary!

The windows of the drawing-room opened on to a balcony overlooking the garden. At the far end, against the wall, there was a tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky. Bertha couldn't help feeling, even from this distance, that it had not a single bud or a faded petal. Down below, in the garden beds, the red and yellow tulips, heavy with flowers, seemed to lean upon the dusk. A grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, trailed after. The sight of them, so intent and so quick, gave Bertha a curious shiver.

"What creepy things cats are!" she stammered, and she turned away from the window and began walking up and down. . . .

How strong the jonquils smelled in the warm room. Too strong? Oh, no. And yet, as though overcome, she flung down on a couch and pressed her hands to her eyes.

"I'm too happy - too happy!" she murmured.

And she seemed to see on her eyelids the lovely pear tree with its wide open blossoms as a symbol of her own life.

Really - really - she had everything. She was young. Harry and she were as much in love as ever, and they got on together splendidly and were really good pals. She had an adorable baby. They didn't have to worry about money. They had this absolutely satisfactory house and garden. And friends - modern, thrilling friends, writers and painters and poets or people keen on social questions - just the kind of friends they wanted. And then there were books, and there was music, and she had found a wonderful little dressmaker, and they were going abroad in the summer, and their new cook made the most superb omelettes. . . .

"I'm absurd. Absurd!" She sat up; but she felt quite dizzy, quite drunk. It must have been the spring.

Yes, it was the spring. Now she was so tired she could not drag herself upstairs to dress.

A white dress, a string of jade beads, green shoes and stockings. It wasn't intentional. She had thought of this scheme hours before she stood at the drawing-room window.

Her petals rustled softly into the hall, and she kissed Mrs. Norman Knight, who was taking off the most amusing orange coat with a procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts.

". . . Why! Why! Why is the middle-class so stodgy - so utterly without a sense of humour! My dear, it's only by a fluke that I am here at all - Norman being the protective fluke. For my

darling monkeys so upset the train that it rose to a man and simply ate me with its eyes. Didn't laugh - wasn't amused - that I should have loved. No, just stared - and bored me through and through."

"But the cream of it was," said Norman, pressing a large tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle into his eye, "you don't mind me telling this, Face, do you?" (In their home and among their friends they called each other Face and Mug.) "The cream of it was when she, being full fed, turned to the woman beside her and said: 'Haven't you ever seen a monkey before?'"

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Norman Knight joined in the laughter. "Wasn't that too absolutely creamy?"

And a funnier thing still was that now her coat was off she did look like a very intelligent monkey - who had even made that yellow silk dress out of scraped banana skins. And her amber ear-rings: they were like little dangling nuts.

"This is a sad, sad fall!" said Mug, pausing in front of Little B's perambulator. "When the perambulator comes into the hall - " and he waved the rest of the quotation away.

The bell rang. It was lean, pale Eddie Warren (as usual) in a state of acute distress.

"It *is* the right house, *isn't* it?" he pleaded.

"Oh, I think so - I hope so," said Bertha brightly.

"I have had such a *dreadful* experience with a taxi-man; he was *most* sinister. I couldn't get him to stop. The *more* I knocked and called the *faster* he went. And *in* the moonlight this *bizarre* figure with the *flattened* head *crouching* over the *lit-tle* wheel . . . "

He shuddered, taking off an immense white silk scarf. Bertha noticed that his socks were white, too - most charming.

"But how dreadful!" she cried.

"Yes, it really was," said Eddie, following her into the drawing-room. "I saw myself *driving* through Eternity in a *timeless* taxi."

He knew the Norman Knights. In fact, he was going to write a play for N.K. when the theatre scheme came off.

"Well, Warren, how's the play?" said Norman Knight, dropping his monocle and giving his eye a moment in which to rise to the surface before it was screwed down again.

And Mrs. Norman Knight: "Oh, Mr. Warren, what happy socks?"

"I *am* so glad you like them," said he, staring at his feet. "They seem to have got so *much* whiter since the moon rose." And he turned his lean sorrowful young face to Bertha. "There *is* a moon, you know."

She wanted to cry: "I am sure there is—often—often!"

He really was a most attractive person. But so was Face, crouched before the fire in her banana skins, and so was Mug, smoking a cigarette and saying as he flicked the ash: "Why doth the bridegroom tarry?"

"There he is, now."

Bang went the front door open and shut. Harry shouted: "Hullo, you people. Down in five minutes." And they heard him swarm up the stairs. Bertha couldn't help smiling; she knew how he loved doing things at high pressure. What, after all, did an extra five minutes matter? But he would pretend to himself that they mattered beyond measure. And then he would make a great point of coming into the drawing-room, extravagantly cool and collected.

Harry had such a zest for life. Oh, how she appreciated it in him. And his passion for fighting—for seeking in everything that came up against him another test of his power and of his courage—that, too, she understood. Even when it made him just occasionally, to other people, who didn't know him well, a little ridiculous perhaps... For there were moments when he rushed into battle where no battle was... She talked and laughed and positively forgot until he had come in (just as she had imagined) that Pearl Fulton had not turned up.

"I wonder if Miss Fulton has forgotten?"

"I expect so," said Harry. "Is she on the 'phone?"

"Ah! There's a taxi, now." And Bertha smiled with that little air of proprietorship that she always assumed while her women finds were new and mysterious. "She lives in taxis."

"She'll run to fat if she does," said Harry coolly, ringing the bell for dinner. "Frightful danger for blonde women."

"Harry - don't!" warned Bertha, laughing up at him.

Came another tiny moment, while they waited, laughing and talking, just a trifle too much at their ease, a trifle too unaware. And then Miss Fulton, all in silver, with a silver fillet binding her pale blonde hair, came in smiling, her head a little on one side.

"Am I late?"

"No, not at all," said Bertha. "Come along." And she took her arm and they moved into the dining-room.

What was there in the touch of that cool arm that could fan - fan - start blazing - blazing - the fire of bliss that Bertha did not know what to do with?

Miss Fulton did not look at her; but then she seldom did look at people directly. Her heavy eyelids lay upon her eyes and the strange half-smile came and went upon her lips as though she lived by listening rather than seeing. But Bertha knew, suddenly, as if the longest, most intimate look had passed between them - as if they had said to each other: "You too?" - that Pearl Fulton, stirring the beautiful red soup in the grey plate, was feeling just what she was feeling.

And the others? Face and Mug, Eddie and Harry, their spoons rising and falling -dabbing their lips with their napkins, crumbling bread, fiddling with the forks and glasses and talking.

"I met her at the Alpha show -the weirdest little person. She'd not only cut off her hair, but she seemed to have taken a dreadfully good snip off her legs and arms and her neck and her poor little nose as well."

"Isn't she very *liée* with Michael Oat?"

"The man who wrote *Love in False Teeth*?"

"He wants to write a play for me. One act. One man. Decides to commit suicide. Gives all the reasons why he should and why he shouldn't. And just as he has made up his mind either to do it or not to do it - curtain. Not half a bad idea."

"What's he going to call it - 'Stomach Trouble'?"

"I *think* I've come across the *same* idea in a little French review, *quite* unknown in England."

No, they didn't share it. They were dears - dears - and she loved having them there, at her table, and giving them delicious food and wine. In fact, she longed to tell them how delightful they were, and what a decorative group they made, how they seemed to set one another off and how they reminded her of a play by Tchekov!

Harry was enjoying his dinner. It was part of his -well, not his nature, exactly, and certainly not his pose - his - something or other - to talk about food and to glory in his "shameless passion for the white flash of the lobster" and "the green of pistachio ices - green and cold like the eyelids of Egyptian dancers."

When he looked up at her and said: "Bertha, this is a very admirable *soufflée!* " she almost could have wept with child-like pleasure.

Oh, why did she feel so tender towards the whole world tonight? Everything was good - was right. All that happened seemed to fill again her brimming cup of bliss.

And still, in the back of her mind, there was the pear tree. It would be silver now, in the light of poor dear Eddie's moon, silver as Miss Fulton, who sat there turning a tangerine in her slender fingers that were so pale a light seemed to come from them.

What she simply couldn't make out - what was miraculous - was how she should have guessed Miss Fulton's mood so exactly and so instantly. For she never doubted for a moment that she was right, and yet what had she to go on? Less than nothing.

"I believe this does happen very, very rarely between women. Never between men," thought Bertha. "But while I am making the coffee in the drawing-room perhaps she will 'give a sign' "

What she meant by that she did not know, and what would happen after that she could not imagine.

While she thought like this she saw herself talking and laughing. She had to talk because of her desire to laugh.

"I must laugh or die."

But when she noticed Face's funny little habit of tucking something down the front of her bodice - as if she kept a tiny, secret hoard of nuts there, too—Bertha had to dig her nails into her hands - so as not to laugh too much.

It was over at last. And: "Come and see my new coffee machine," said Bertha.

"We only have a new coffee machine once a fortnight," said Harry. Face took her arm this time; Miss Fulton bent her head and followed after.

The fire had died down in the drawing-room to a red, flickering "nest of baby phoenixes," said Face.

"Don't turn up the light for a moment. It is so lovely." And down she crouched by the fire again. She was always cold . . . "without her little red flannel jacket, of course," thought Bertha.

At that moment Miss Fulton "gave the sign."

"Have you a garden?" said the cool, sleepy voice.

This was so exquisite on her part that all Bertha could do was to obey. She crossed the room, pulled the curtains apart, and opened those long windows.

"There!" she breathed.

And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed - almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.

How long did they stand there? Both, as it were, caught in that circle of unearthly light, understanding each other perfectly, creatures of another world, and wondering what they were to do in this one with all this blissful treasure that burned in their bosoms and dropped, in silver flowers, from their hair and hands?

For ever - for a moment? And did Miss Fulton murmur: "Yes. Just *that*." Or did Bertha dream it?

Then the light was snapped on and Face made the coffee and Harry said: "My dear Mrs. Knight, don't ask me about my baby. I never see her. I shan't feel the slightest interest in her until she has a lover," and Mug took his eye out of the conservatory for a moment and then put it under glass again and Eddie Warren drank his coffee and set down the cup with a face of anguish as though he had drunk and seen the spider.

"What I want to do is to give the young men a show. I believe London is simply teeming with first-chop, unwritten plays. What I want to say to 'em is: 'Here's the theatre. Fire ahead.'"

"You know, my dear, I am going to decorate a room for the Jacob Nathans. Oh, I am so tempted to do a fried-fish scheme, with the backs of the chairs shaped like frying-pans and lovely chip potatoes embroidered all over the curtains."

"The trouble with our young writing men is that they are still too romantic. You can't put out to sea without being seasick and wanting a basin. Well, why won't they have the courage of those basins?"

"A *dreadful* poem about a *girl* who was *violated* by a beggar *without* a nose in a little wood. . . ."

Miss Fulton sank into the lowest, deepest chair and Harry handed round the cigarettes.

From the way he stood in front of her shaking the silver box and saying abruptly: "Egyptian? Turkish? Virginian? They're all mixed up," Bertha realised that she not only bored him; he really disliked her. And she decided from the way Miss Fulton said: "No, thank you, I won't smoke," that she felt it, too, and was hurt.

"Oh, Harry, don't dislike her. You are quite wrong about her. She's wonderful, wonderful. And, besides, how can you feel so differently about someone who means so much to me. I shall try to tell you when we are in bed tonight what has been happening. What she and I have shared."

At those last words something strange and almost terrifying darted into Bertha's mind. And this something blind and smiling whispered to her: "Soon these people will go. The house will be quiet - quiet. The lights will be out. And you and he will be alone together in the dark room - the warm bed. . . ."

She jumped up from her chair and ran over to the piano.

"What a pity someone does not play!" she cried. "What a pity somebody does not play."

For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband. Oh, she'd loved him - she'd been in love with him, of course, in every other way, but just not in that way. And equally, of course, she'd understood that he was different. They'd discussed it so often. It had worried her dreadfully at first to find that she was so cold, but after a time it had not seemed to matter. They were so frank with each other - such good pals. That was the best of being modern.

But now - ardently! ardently! The word ached in her ardent body! Was this what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to? But then, then - "My dear," said Mrs. Norman Knight, "you know our shame. We are the victims of time and train. We live in Hampstead. It's been so nice."

"I'll come with you into the hall," said Bertha. "I loved having you. But you must not miss the last train. That's so awful, isn't it?"

"Have a whisky, Knight, before you go?" called Harry.

"No, thanks, old chap."

Bertha squeezed his hand for that as she shook it.

"Good night, good-bye," she cried from the top step, feeling that this self of hers was taking leave of them for ever.

When she got back into the drawing-room the others were on the move.

" . . . Then you can come part of the way in my taxi."

"I shall be *so* thankful *not* to have to face *another* drive *alone* after my *dreadful* experience."

"You can get a taxi at the rank just at the end of the street. You won't have to walk more than a few yards."

"That's a comfort. I'll go and put on my coat."

Miss Fulton moved towards the hall and Bertha was following when Harry almost pushed past.

"Let me help you."

Bertha knew that he was repenting his rudeness—she let him go. What a boy he was in some ways - so impulsive - so - simple.

And Eddie and she were left by the fire.

"I *wonder* if you have seen Bilks' *new* poem called *Table d'Hôte*," said Eddie softly. "It's *so* wonderful. In the last Anthology. Have you got a copy? I'd *so* like to *show* it to you. It begins with an *incredibly* beautiful line: 'Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?'"

"Yes," said Bertha. And she moved noiselessly to a table opposite the drawing-room door and Eddie glided noiselessly after her. She picked up the little book and gave it to him; they had not made a sound.

While he looked it up she turned her head towards the hall. And she saw . . . Harry with Miss Fulton's coat in his arms and Miss Fulton with her back turned to him and her head bent. He tossed the coat away, put his hands on her shoulders and turned her violently to him. His lips said: "I adore you," and Miss Fulton laid her moonbeam fingers on his cheeks and smiled her sleepy smile. Harry's nostrils quivered; his lips curled back in a hideous grin while he whispered: "Tomorrow," and with her eyelids Miss Fulton said: "Yes."

"Here it is," said Eddie. "'Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?' It's *so deeply* true, don't you feel? Tomato soup is *so dreadfully* eternal."

"If you prefer," said Harry's voice, very loud, from the hall, "I can phone you a cab to come to the door."

"Oh, no. It's not necessary," said Miss Fulton, and she came up to Bertha and gave her the slender fingers to hold.

"Good-bye. Thank you so much."

"Good-bye," said Bertha.

Miss Fulton held her hand a moment longer.

"Your lovely pear tree!" she murmured.

And then she was gone, with Eddie following, like the black cat following the grey cat.

"I'll shut up shop," said Harry, extravagantly cool and collected.

"Your lovely pear tree - pear tree - pear tree!"

Bertha simply ran over to the long windows.

"Oh, what is going to happen now?" she cried.

But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still.

Source:

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