

CHARACTERISTICS OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S STORIES

Aziza Rahimjonova

Lecturer of Namangan State University

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Abstract: This article analyzes the characteristics of Katherine Mansfield's most significant works "Bliss and other stories" (1920), "The Dove's Nest and other stories" (1923), "The Garden Party and other stories" (1922), "Something Childish and other stories" (1924) in the context of the English short story of the late XIX - early XX century.

Keywords: writer, writer's style, prose, comparative analysis, story.

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is one of the most outstanding English short story writers in the early 20th century, known as "Chekhov of England"¹. Greatly influenced by Anton Chekhov, her writing firmly fixed on the small details of human behavior. She created her best works in the early 1920s, and her book, *The Garden Party*, arrived at the peak of great achievement. Set in England, her short story, *Mr. and Mrs. Dove*, described a story about the man's last day in England and a series of things that happened to his visit to his beloved woman's home which presented the relationships between his mom and him, and his beloved woman and him. This paper mainly explores the feminist thoughts of the female characters. The paper concludes that the awakening awareness of women in this story was obviously from the perspectives of striking against the patriarchal system and Mansfield was actually a feminist pioneer who promoted the development of feminism in the whole world. She dares to break the stale in her creation and focus on depicting the inner world of the characters, which has obvious modernistic characteristics. Mansfield describes the obstacles of her peers in the struggle to break into the world, depicts the loneliness, disillusionment, fear and rebelliousness of women under the pressure of capitalist social life, expresses their deep thinking and silent sigh, and deliver their feelings of rebellion and resistance.

The story "Frau Brechenmacher at the wedding" recreates a terrible picture of the squalor of provincial life. In the character of the heroine, traits are outlined that are inherent in the heroes of Mansfield's later stories - inner dissatisfaction, combined with defenselessness, the desire to fence off vulgarity.

These traits are even more palpable in the story "Given," where attention is focused on the image of the self-satisfied egoist Andreas Bigner, admiring his imaginary sophistication. Here you can already clearly feel the trouble of an outwardly prosperous life.

During her collaboration with Middleton Murray's *Rhythm* (1911-1913), Mansfield became close to modernist writers.

Gradually, the writer's disgust for the decadent, painful perversity and mannerisms of style increases. By the beginning of the 1920s, this gap became quite conscious.

In the collection *Happiness and Other Stories* (1920), marking the onset of creative maturity, Mansfield increasingly overcomes decadent influences. Although the social origins of all hidden human dramas are poorly revealed, they are quite palpable in the best works. But the inner weakness, the brokenness of the characters is also clearly palpable.

¹ Hou Weirui. *The History of Modern English Novels* [M]. Shanghai: Foreign Language Education in Shanghai Press, 1996.

The element of social evaluation is reinforced in the story "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day". Here, the inability of the narcissistic vulgar hero to express his feelings is no longer perceived as a tragedy and not even a "disease of the century", but as a result of spiritual exhaustion, mental inferiority of an "intelligent" serf.

A passionate love for life and for a person is something essentially new that marked the onset of the creative maturity of the writer. The best, most honest and sensitive heroes of Mansfield are cheerful, they love nature, children, are natural and simple in their words and deeds, they are alien to falsehood, spiritual callousness, posturing.

It is no coincidence that Mansfield again and again turns to the children's theme. The bright world of childhood, the world of wholeness and immediate cheerfulness, opposes the complicated world of adults, full of conventions. With amazing skill, Mansfield reveals this world of children's games, fantasies, first griefs ("The Sun and the Moon").

The positive characters of the stories are people from the people. Their crippled destinies are clear evidence of the failure of the bourgeois world. They are capable of love, self-sacrifice ("Servant of their mistress"), full of desire to understand others, to feel like a part of human brotherhood ("Miss Brill").

Mansfield denounces those who indifferently pass by human grief. Indifference is felt in the ostentatious sympathy of a fashionable writer for the suffering ("The Life of Mother Parker"), in the inappropriate importunate charity of Mrs. Sheridan ("Picnic"), in the momentary whim of the spoiled Rosabell ("A Cup of Tea"). There is no place to cry out your grief to a lonely, destitute person - the heroine of the story "The Life of Mother Parker". This is the English version of Chekhov's story "Tosca", which Mansfield considered one of the world's masterpieces.

Falsehood, conventionality of everything that is generally accepted, and the need to hide all the best and true - this Chekhov theme is revealed with great psychological certainty in the story under the ironic title "The Ideal Family".

The structure of her stories has nothing to do with the traditional "plot-story" - a romantic adventure novel with a gripping intrigue. The writer depicts the internal, hidden dramas lurking behind the imaginary well-being of the traditional bourgeois life.

It is simply impossible to talk about the writer's artistic method without referring to Chekhov. She did not stop studying Chekhov throughout her life. Chekhov's writings helped her overcome decadent influences.

Mansfield understands the writer's objectivity in Chekhov's way - as a true reproduction of life, involving the selection of facts and their evaluation. The role of Mansfield's inner monologue is fundamentally different from its role in modernist literature. Mansfield's internal monologue does not serve to reveal hidden "complexes" or chaos of subjective associations, it reveals the dissatisfaction of heroes vainly striving for happiness or serves to expose the spiritual squalor of their successful antagonists. Descriptions "from the author" are always "in the tone" of the hero: vocabulary, intonation, the whole structure of speech change depending on the character of the hero; indirect speech imperceptibly passes into direct speech. The author does not interfere in the story. Events, people are depicted from the point of view of the hero who perceives them.

Chekhov's love for a person and pain for ruined lives, Chekhov's intolerance for vulgarity and the ability to see it behind the prosperous facade of respectability determine the composition

and style of Mansfield's stories. True, Mansfield does not depict the spiritual evolution of man, his changing attitude to life, as Chekhov did. "Man is created for happiness" - this Chekhovian thought is invisibly present in every story.

Chekhov's democratic art helped bring out the best aspects of Mansfield's talent. However, the world of Mansfield's heroes is infinitely poorer, more monotonous, less dynamic than Chekhov's. The characters feel it subtly, but hardly think about it. They are incapable of posing big socio-philosophical problems. Hence the intimacy of her stories, the predominance of the lyrical beginning over the problematic. In this sense, she is far from Chekhov.

Most of Mansfield's early stories were written in Bavaria in 1909 and later published in the collection "In a German Pension" ("In a German Pension", 1911). The collection includes 13 works («Germans at Meat», «The Baron», «The Sister of the Baroness», «Frau Fischer», «Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding», «At Lehmann s», «The Luft Bad», «A Birthday», «The Child-Who-Wasired», «The Advanced Lady», «The Modern Soul», «The Swing of the Pendulum», «A Blaze»).

Katherine Mansfield, as a writer, made her debut with a whole cycle of stories and this immediately fit into the European classical tradition of cyclization of small genres, begun by Boccaccio and Chaucer, continued closer to her time by Stevenson, Conrad, Conan Doyle, Hardy. As V.A. Sapogov, a cycle is "a group of works consciously united by the author according to genre, thematic, ideological principle or common characters." Of course, the set of these features may vary for different authors in different cycles. At the same time, the skill of the novice short story writer manifested itself in the fact that she thought out her first cycle of short prose from all sides - in terms of genre, composition, thematic, style. The stories of the collection "In a German Pension" are also combined with several motifs, sometimes of a satirical, sometimes of a lyrical nature. K. Mansfield simultaneously develops several themes - this is criticism of philistinism (in this case, German) in its various forms - from narrowly everyday to disguised as intellectuality; the theme of the confrontation between England and Germany on the eve of the First World War; drama of the fate of a small person.

The genre specificity of the first stories of the English writer was manifested in the fact that she almost immediately mastered several varieties of short prose, which she demonstrated in all thirteen works of her collection. At the same time, the composition of the cycle is built in such a way that Mansfield goes from the "lower" varieties of short prose, from a satirical and humorous sketch story, somewhat reminiscent of Dickens's Sketches of Boz, to a combination of satirical motifs with lyric-dramatic ones ("Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding"). Then the denunciation of philistinism fades into the background, giving way to a tragic theme ("The Child-Who-Wasired"). And the last stories of the collection describe the life of Bohemia, with its ostentatious fun and freedom, which cover poverty, both material and spiritual. The stories "The Swing of the Pendulum", "A Blaze" are distinguished by a deeper lyricism of the narration, the author's sympathy for his characters.

Like most talented novelists of her and the previous era (Maupassant, Chekhov, Conrad, Galsworthy, etc.), Katherine Mansfield relied on the genre traditions of both the short story and the short story, freely combining the features of both types of short prose we have indicated above. For example, "The Baron" is a satirical and humorous sketch, a portrait of an aristocrat, and the finale of the story is built on an unexpected novelistic denouement, which

turns the whole story into an anecdote. The story "The Sister of the Baroness" is built on the same principle.

These transitions into different genre registers testify to the fact that Katherine Mansfield already in the early period of her work began to develop her own original artistic system. The main features of this system are: the ability to invest in a small volume (from 3 pages to 12) a serious social problem; create sharply expressive images with sparing artistic strokes: grotesque, dramatic, lyrical; using concise style techniques to achieve the impression of a special "musicality" of the text. Also, a very important artistic role in this system is played by the transfer of subtle psychological nuances of the behavior or mood of the characters, the recreation of their sometimes smallest spiritual movements, motives.

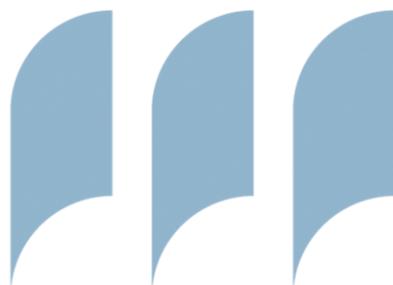
The first seven works of the collection-cycle are satirical sketches, sketches of the life of German inhabitants. Their rudeness, snobbery, gluttony are described - often in a grotesque manner. In these things, Mansfield was affected by her hostile attitude towards the townspeople. The heroes of these stories are drawn by narrow-minded fools, condescendingly and condescendingly looking at the traditions and customs of the English. The writer herself, as a narrator, demonstrates no less "indulgence" to the customs of the continent. And she presents it in such a way as to shock the "respectable" Germans. Here Mansfield failed to hide or suppress his irritated attitude towards the Germans, and the "bad" behavior of men is described more often and more derisively than the same behavior of women. We find examples of this in the stories "The Germans for Food", "The Baron", "Frau Fischer", "The Baroness's Sister". At the same time, in one of the stories, the voice of Mansfield herself breaks through when she puts the following words into the mouth of her heroine: "Nothing irritates a woman so terribly as being left alone, without a man" ("Frau Fisher"). This remark reflects the sad thoughts of the writer and brings a sharp lyrical note to the text, which is, in general, a satirical character.

The negative attitude towards the German inhabitants is socially justified by the writer's dislike of the British towards Germany in the years preceding the First World War. The theme of the national conflict in the stories of the collection is superimposed on the complex relationship between the sexes. And, undoubtedly, some of these stories already portend well-known works (for example, "Prelude"), where the theme of the relationship between a man and a woman is central. So, Mansfield reveals a fear of the physical domination of men, and often this feeling is associated with symbols of food. In the very first story of the Germans at Breakfast collection, the reader clearly feels the tension growing between the heroine and Mr. Rath, while the latter discusses the culinary tastes of the British and Germans. The story vividly illustrates the antagonism between the Germans and the British and it is not by chance that the collection opens. The very title of the story is symbolic - the theme of food, being one of the main ones, runs through the entire collection, varying in different ways, up to the last story "Flash of Passion" ("Blaze"), where the theme of eating is transformed into a symbolic motif of love as "self-devouring" a hero and a desire to kill.

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