

KATHERINE MANSFIELD: BREAKING THE ROMANCE PLOT

If women writers do not imagine women characters with even the autonomy that they have achieved, they cannot write in a genre that plots the continuous process by which the male artist progresses towards the transcendence necessary to create art (Caroline Heilbrun) quoted in Susan Gubar from 'The Birth of the Artist as Heroine: (Re)production, the *Kunstlerroman* Tradition, and the Fiction of Katherine Mansfield' (*Critical Responses to Katherine Mansfield*, ed Jan Pilditch, Greenwood, 1996)

Stories driven by corruption and joy: early – corrupt; later ones, joy. '**Prelude**' major statement and exploration of difference in between the two.

'Woman at the Store' – 1st of (early) NZ stories.

Girl child artist depicts what is forbidden out of revenge for the expression of the mother's desire. Woman driven mad at being shut up like a broody hen - the family revealed as a kind of prison. Frustration – and especially sexual frustration – underlies most of Mansfield's work as does confinement of diff kinds.

Characteristic interest in not plot but moments of transfiguration or change. Most significant parts of the stories seem to lie in the surroundings - images that reflect back the characters Space used differently to its division into domestic/public in 19th C writing. In Mansfield more a question of time – in '**Daughters of the late Colonel**' time is masculine control and the 2 daughters have been frozen in time. Vagueness of daughters – only guiding principle is the (Anglo-Indian) Colonel. Images constantly on the verge of becoming memory slipping into the past.

Woolf on Mansfield:

Katherine has been dead a week, & how far am I obeying her 'do not quite forget Katherine' which I read in one of her old letters? Am I already forgetting her? It is strange to trace the progress of one's feelings. Nelly said in her sensational way at breakfast on Friday 'Mrs Murry's dead! It says so in the paper! At that one feels – what? A sock of relief? – a rival the less? The confusion at feeling so little – then, gradually, blankness & disappointment; then a depression which I could not rouse myself from all that day. When I began to write, it seemed to me that there was no point in writing. Katherine wont read it. Katherine's my rival no longer. More generously I felt. But though I can do this better than she could, where is she, who could do what I can't. (quoted by Clare Hanson, 'Katherine Mansfield's Life as a Work of Art', in *The Fine Instrument: Essays on Katherine Mansfield*, ed Paulette Michel and Michel Dupuis, (Sidney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), p.68)

Draws on film techniques:

- Rapid transition of tenses and time levels, the future not simply anticipated but held in the present of the story. Rooted in film – KM acted in several movies.

- The brevity of cinema images attracted her and the technique of *montage* - a series of discrete and disparate episodes connected by relation not sequence.
- Insistence on flow – emphasises the transitoriness and isolation of every individual
- *The Aloe* readjusted after her brother's death in WW1 to become the 12-part '**Prelude**' – demonstrates the significance of editing – emphasis and elimination (film technique) Serves as a response to death
- Moments of beauty – revisiting a world entirely gone after the war. Moments of beauty – but what have they to do with now...

Mansfield on the War

It is never out of my mind and everything is poisoned by it, It's *here in* me the whole time, eating me away.'

Impact of illness? - Dying from 1920. Treated with X-rays: haemorrhage of lungs 1923.