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The Development of Katherine Mansfield's First-Person Narratives

Elke D'hoker

In narrative terms, the transition from Victorian tale to modern short story in Anglophone literature has often been characterized as a movement from 'telling' to 'showing.' Anthony Alpers refers to this development as "getting rid of the narrator" (*The Life* 238), while Clare Hanson describes it as moving "from 'teller' to indirect free narration, and from 'tale' to 'text,'" as part of a larger shift from "'discourse' to 'image' in the art and literature of the period" (1). In the nineteenth-century tale, indeed, a first-person narrator—often a polished version of the author (Shaw 114–15)—guides the reader through the story, guaranteeing its authenticity and providing a certain moral framework. The hallmark of most nineteenth-century tales, this narrative mode is reminiscent of the tale's origins in communal, oral storytelling traditions. A desire to question narrative authority and remove the teller gradually from the tale characterizes the so-called modern short story, the origins of which—at least in Britain—are usually traced to the 1880s. Early experiments with this other narrative mode, in which focalization alternates with narration,¹ can be found in the proto-impressionist psychological sketches of George Egerton, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Ella D'Arcy, and Ernest Dowson (Korte 103–107; Malcolm and Malcolm 12–13). Yet only with the figural narration of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and—especially—Katherine Mansfield does the modern short story really come into its own. In such a story, the narrator virtually disappears behind

the characters' voice and inner consciousness, mostly rendered through free indirect discourse. In the absence of a narrator to guide, instruct, or communicate with the reader, the emphasis invariably shifts from plot and (moral) message to suggestion, symbolism, and mood. This modernist development in the shaping of the short story, in which Mansfield played a crucial role (Dunn 202, Van Gunsteren 108–115), became especially influential, to the extent that focalization, interior monologue, symbolism, epiphany, and slice-of-life are still among the defining features of the short story today.

Nevertheless, this general development should not make us forget that proto-modernist and modernist writers also adopted other narrative modes to turn the moralizing and plot-bound Victorian tale into a literary form suited to the modern age and its aesthetics. Indeed, several writers experimented with first-person narration, the reigning mode of the nineteenth-century tale: Rudyard Kipling introduced uncertainty and ellipsis in his otherwise traditional and plot-bound first-person narratives; Joseph Conrad undermined narrative authority by multiplying his narrators and narrative frames; and Virginia Woolf staged excessively hesitant and self-reflexive narrators in stories such as "An Unfinished Novel," "The Mark on the Wall," or "The Lady in the Looking-Glass." Mansfield's short fiction contains a surprising number of first-person narratives as well—surprising, because her short stories are, like those of Joyce, often cited as textbook examples of free indirect discourse and focalization. Moreover, in the span of her short career, Mansfield's first-person narratives undergo a considerable alteration: from satirical and autobiographical first-person narration to a subtle and highly flexible narrative form that perfectly realizes her poetics of impassioned objectivity and cultivation of an intensely felt impersonal style (Head 110; Coelsch-Foisner 98–99). Mansfield's short fiction thus shows that the short story's movement from telling to showing need not involve the extinction of the narrative 'I.'

The "Vignettes" and other prose poems that Mansfield wrote and, to some extent published, in 1907 are the first texts in which an 'I' appears. Yet because of their poetical quality (they are collected in Vincent O'Sullivan's edition of Mansfield's poetry) and relative absence of narrative development, their 'I' resembles more the 'I' of lyrical poetry than that of an actual first-person narrator. As in lyrical poetry, moreover, the speaker seems quite close to the actual author. Several small details suggest this

connection: "Vignette III" alludes to Mansfield's cello, and "Vere" in "Westminster Cathedral" and "Carlotta" in "Summer in Winter" refer to actual persons (86). In general, the "Vignettes" revolve around small anecdotes set recognizably either in London (the Mews and Westminster Cathedral) or in Wellington (the Botanical Gardens and the Thistle Hotel).

A recurring feature of these prose poems is the lonely 'I' meditating on the outside world—as seen through a window, from the top of Westminster Cathedral, or on a walk in the botanical gardens—with keen attention to sights, sounds, and feelings. A desire to overcome this spectator-position and become one with reality nonetheless grips the speaker, as the vignette "In the Botanical Gardens" shows: "An inexplicable, persistent feeling seizes me that I must become one with it all" (Mansfield 10). In "Vignette I," the speaker virtually *becomes* London, and in "Vignette III," (s)he writes: "I listen and think and dream until my life seems not *one* life, but a thousand million lives, and my soul is weighed down with the burden of past existence, with the vague, uneasy consciousness of future strivings" (7, emphasis original). This symbiosis of self and world is typically achieved through projection and personification so that the world becomes a mirror of the speaker's personal mood (Hankin 45). "Vignette III," for instance, reads "my rocking chair is full of patient resignation, my 'cello case is wrapt in profound thought'" (6). In "Silhouettes," the speaker's sensual languor is projected onto hills ("leonine"), bushes ("mov[ing] languidly"), the window blind ("some living thing," "mov[ing] languidly to and fro"), and three smoking little boys ("full of luxurious abandon") so as to create a single, sustained atmosphere (15). And in "Leves Amores," the speaker's sudden happiness metamorphoses the "revolting" curtains, "discoloured and faded" wallpaper, and "conventional" frieze quite literally into a feast of youth and gaiety:

Lo every bird upon the bulging frieze broke into song. Lo every rose upon the tattered paper budded and formed into blossom. Yes, even the green vine upon the bed curtains wreathed itself into strange chaplets and garlands, twined round us in a leafy embrace. (15)

In these and other transformations, the Aestheticist background of the "Vignettes" becomes apparent (Hanson and Gurr 27; Hankin 44). The

speaker/artist self-consciously transforms the world into art, remaking it into an artistic reality more vivid, perhaps even more real, than reality itself.

After 1907 Mansfield abandoned these prose poems, and the second appearance of the 'I' in her works is in a different mode altogether. A far more straightforward I-narrator appears in about half of the stories of *In a German Pension*. While critics have slighted this collection as a whole—censuring in particular the female narrator of the actual *Pension* stories for being “smug,” “cruel,” and “cynical” (Banks 65; Berkman 42)—that negative reception was no doubt in part due to an all too easy identification of narrator and author, as when Sylvia Berkman complains that the “author sits around and observes” and “intrudes with lavish comments” (41–42). A closer reading of these stories reveals that the narrator is not just a version of the author, as it is in the traditional tale or in Mansfield’s own “Vignettes.” On the contrary, the subtle yet considerable distance between narrator and implied author makes the narrator a far more interesting figure than the German guests whom she derides.²

The distance between implied author and narrator appears first of all through the double use of satire and irony. Besides the obvious derision of the German pension guests is the implicit derision of the narrator herself for sharing many of the same defects that she mocks in her fellow guests. Indeed, the narrator chastises them for their snobbery, their use of national stereotypes about the English, and their feelings of superiority, while clearly guilty of those faults herself. In one of the few articles about *In a German Pension*, Jane Marek makes a similar point about Mansfield’s critique of self-delusion, which she considers one of the collection’s central themes: if the narrator highlights “the disparities between superficial social roles and their underlying delusions,” ironically exposing the self-delusion of the German pension guests, she also exposes herself as equally lacking in self-knowledge, “unable to be honest with herself as well as with others” (208, 287). Her self-assurance and control thus mask an underlying anxiety, as does her squeamishness about matters of the body and sexuality. In “The Modern Soul,” for instance, the narrator resists both heterosexual and homosexual advances and refuses to sympathize with Sonia’s predicament. In short, Mansfield’s satirical portrayal of the women in these stories as those who “deny, distance themselves from, or misunderstand their sexuality” also implicates the narrator (288).

The highly ambivalent position of the narrator as at once a source and an object of irony is to some extent mirrored in the ambivalent alternation of 'I' and 'we' in the stories. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas has commented that this feature in "The Luft Bad" reads as evidence of the narrator's "alternating submission and resistance" to the ideology of the feminine that dominates the female *Kur*-guests, yet a similar mixture of first-person singular and plural occurs in other first-person stories in the collection (505). In "The Baron" and "The Sister of the Baroness," for instance, the narrator overtly mocks the Germans' excessive reverence for the aristocracy. At the same time, she willingly colludes with the group feeling emerging through the animated discussions of these 'outsiders,' such as the baron or the sister of the baroness: "we raised a triumphant cry" (690); "Still we were together, and still the solitary little figure . . . haunted me" (690); "We positively scintillated. . . . we gorged on scandals of High Birth generously buttered" (694). When an ironic twist at the end of each story exposes this worship as entirely unfounded, the narrator distances herself again, retreating into her role as superior satirist with the respective remarks: "*Sic transit gloria Germani mundi*" and "*Tableau Grandissimo!*" (691, 696). This alternation between 'I' and 'we' shows the narrator's uneasy oscillation between a sense of superiority and the desire to belong, further exemplifying the anxieties and the feelings of inferiority underlying the narrator's apparent aloofness and control.

According to Marek, such sentiments point directly to Mansfield's own anxieties when writing these stories: her pregnancy and the subsequent stillbirth of the child, her insecurities as a foreigner in England, and her ambivalence about her lesbian inclinations. I would argue, however, that the satire and irony directed against the narrator in the first-person narratives of *In a German Pension* is sufficient evidence of a gap between narrator and implied author, one that ensures that the narrator cannot be interpreted as merely a simple spokesperson or conduit for Mansfield's personal feelings and experiences. On the contrary, the double ironic structure of these texts exposes the self-delusion, anxieties, and hypocrisy of the narrator as considerably distanced from the author.

In the years following the publication of this collection, Mansfield wrote a number of first-person stories, all of which she closely modeled on autobiographical experiences and which thus obscure the border between fact and fiction (Marsh-Russell 44). Mansfield based "Journey to Bruges"

and “A Truthful Adventure” on her “impulsive trip to Bruges and Geneva”; “The Woman at the Store” on “what [she] had seen during a camping trip through the interior of the North Island of New Zealand”; “Pension Séguin,” “Violet,” and “Bains Turcs” on other trips to Geneva; and finally “An Indiscreet Journey” on a war-time visit to Carco at the French front (Alpers, *The Life* 549, 551). “The Woman at the Store,” which is focused entirely on the unaccommodating surroundings and cruel lives of the inhabitants, stands somewhat apart from the other stories because of its harsh realism and the relative unobtrusiveness of its female narrator, whom Alpers deems “unconvincing” (*The Stories*, 551).

The Bruges and Geneva stories, on the other hand, are reminiscent of the first-person narratives of *In a German Pension*. The circumstances of travel highlight intercultural differences and national stereotypes, and much of the comic effect derives from the narrator’s exaggerated account of the colorful people whom she meets and the hilarious situations in which she finds herself. Yet these travel sketches differ from the pension stories in that Mansfield reduces the distance between the implied author—the autobiographical ‘I’—and the narrator. This proximity is partly due to small verifiable details, such as the narrator being addressed as “Katherine” in “A Truthful Story” or the real existence of the Pension Séguin in the story of that name, but more importantly, to the absence of the double ironic structure. Certainly, there is irony, even mild satire, but neither is directed against the narrator or exposes the narrator’s own self-delusions and anxieties. Instead, the narrator shows herself aware of her own peculiarities and failures through self-irony. In the three “Epilogues,” for instance, the narrator gently mocks her desire to flee from noise and human company into a “little white room . . . on a white bed,” and eventually comes to question her own aloofness and refusal to engage emotionally with other people (578). Witness the end of “Violet”: “And in the long pause I heard again the little fountain, half sly, half laughing—at me, I thought, not at Violet” (590). That self-awareness inevitably diminishes the gap between narrator and implied author so prominent in *In a German Pension*.

This autobiographical dimension might make one wonder whether these travel narratives reverse the apparent evolution in Mansfield’s work towards greater impersonality. Indeed, some characteristics more resemble those of the traditional than the modernist tale: the narrator comically in-

flates characters and experiences to make a point while the autobiographical travel context guarantees authenticity. Unlike traditional tales, however, these stories emphasize the narrator's inner consciousness: personal thoughts, daydreams, and memories punctuate astute descriptions and funny dialogues. In "Violet," for instance, the narrator indulges in lengthy fantasies about Katherine Tynan and an "adorable little creature named Yvette," and in "Bains Turcs," she dreams of explorers, circuses, and childhood (584, 591). Moreover, if at the end of the traditional tale the reader is supposed to have learned something, at the end of these "epilogues" the narrator primarily is the one who has come to a better understanding of life. The emphasis on interiority and mood in the "Vignettes" combined with the narrative dimension of the Bavarian stories thus do point to a new evolution in Mansfield's use of the first person.

Another interesting development can be found in "An Indiscreet Journey," the last story of the group of travel stories that gives an account of the narrator's wartime visit to her French lover stationed in a village on the French front. Obviously, a quite distinct atmosphere results from the different motives for and circumstances of the journey in this story, for even though some situations and experiences are funny or absurd, the scenes are generally portrayed as tragic rather than comic. An even more interesting difference from the earlier travel stories that resides in the form of the story is evident when comparing its opening lines—"She is like St. Anne. Yes, the concierge is the image of St. Anne, with that black cloth over her head, the wisps of grey hair hanging, and the tiny smoking lamp in her hand"—with those of "Pension Séguin":

The servant who opened the door was twin sister to that efficient and hideous creature bearing a soup tureen into the *First French Picture*. Her round red face shone like freshly washed china. She had a pair of immense bare arms to match, and a quantity of mottled hair arranged in a sort of bow. (617, 577)

Both passages liken a servant to an artistic model, yet the first passage directly represents thought, resulting in a more compelling visual image than that of the second passage with its distanced description. Moreover, while Mansfield consistently writes her other travel stories in the past tense, the typical mode of the retrospective first-person narrative, she al-

ternates the descriptive past tense with present-tense representations of the narrator's thoughts and feelings in "An Indiscreet Journey." The interior monologue effects greater immediacy in conveying to the reader the tension and terror of the journey: "Boiffard—Boiffard—I must remember the name. Supposing the Commissaire Militaire should ask me who the relations were. I was going to and I muddled the name—Oh, how fatal! Buffard—no, Boiffard" (621). At the same time, however, Mansfield's skilful mixture of narrative modes—description, dialogue, and interior monologue—shows greater literary polish and a more expert orchestration of mood and effect, so much so as to re-enact the strangely unreal horror of life in that frontline village. This consummate artistic skill paradoxically widens the gap between autobiographical experience and short story, between implied author and narrator. Unlike the *Pension* stories, in which a double ironic structure creates distance, this story generates that distance from a pronounced literary construction, a more self-conscious transformation of experience into art.

The dramatic pieces that Mansfield published in the *New Age* in 1917 diverge from the preceding stories in featuring experimentations in monologue and dialogue, as well as narrators with identities no longer resembling that of the author.³ In "Late at Night," the speaker is a lonely, ageing spinster; in "Two Tuppenny Ones, Please," she is a snobbish, upper-middle-class woman; and in "The Black Cap," she is a bored housewife who tries eloping with her lover. Although dramatic monologues or dialogues rather than actual narrations—witness the italicized stage directions that accompany each text—they shed an interesting light on Mansfield's development of first-person technique. On the one hand, they experiment in voice and in the way in which voice embodies character or betrays personality, succeeding very well in characterizing speakers through little mannerisms or verbal tics. As Alpers similarly argues, they "were part of a conscious exercise in self-instruction" through which Mansfield intended to "sharpen her sense of the placing of her voice" (*The Stories* xxiii). On the other hand, the emphasis on voice in itself does not distinguish these monologues and dialogues from stories written in the figural mode with free indirect discourse, a technique that Mansfield was perfecting around the same time which also relies heavily on the voice of characters. More than innovations in voice, therefore, these pieces seem to experiment in distance or objectivity. After the satirical mode of *In a German Pension*,

Mansfield may well have been attempting another strategy of distancing, another way of getting rid of the authorial narrator and clearing the 'I' of any residual traces of the author. Hanson has argued indeed that the "experiments of Hemingway, Mansfield and, later, Samuel Beckett, with dialogue and monologue . . . take us one stage further, removing even the sense of authorial intervention implied by the use of the third-person pronoun and anterior tense" (77). Even though Mansfield's dramatic pieces are not wholly successful, they point the way to subsequent I-narratives free of the artificiality that mars these earlier experiments.

Mansfield's next first-person narrative, "Je ne parle pas français" (1918), stands in a class of its own amongst her other first-person narratives, both chronologically and formally. Important to note in this respect is that it refers back to several of the earlier I-narratives. Like the dramatic pieces, it features a narrator distinct from the author—in nationality, gender, and character—yet unlike those works, it features all of the self-consciousness, retrospective analysis, and metafictionality of an actual narrative. Its alternation of present and past tense, of scenic description and actual storytelling, is also reminiscent of "An Indiscreet Journey," although in this story the alternation does not serve to achieve greater immediacy. On the contrary, the highly self-conscious narrator strongly mediates both scenes and retrospective narration. Moreover, this story has no trace of interior monologue, which would offer direct glimpses of the narrator's thoughts. Everything Raoul Duquette writes is studied, deliberate, sometimes rehearsed—as with the image of the Virgin—and always with a particular effect in mind (Mansfield 63). While this distance, which infuses all aspects of Duquette's narration, is on the one hand part of his characterization, it is on the other hand the result of Mansfield's exploitation of the possibilities of retrospectivity and rhetorical self-consciousness, which traditionally distinguish first-person narration from figural narration.

Distance also characterizes the relationship between implied author and narrator in this story, just as it does in the stories from *In a German Pension*. Indeed, irony directed against the narrator further compounds the superficial differences between narrator and author. Like the narrator of the *Pension* stories, Duquette unwittingly reveals his anxieties and moral flaws in and through his narration. Even though he strives to be in full control over his narrative and the self-image that he creates by means of it,

the reader is highly unlikely to come to the same conclusions as the narrator about the “first-rate” intensity of his feelings, his literary qualifications, or his general popularity. Sydney Janet Kaplan has argued, for instance, that Mansfield’s “most brutal dissection of his narcissism comes through in her repeated contrasting of Duquette’s self-admiration with his lack of recognition of his moral failure” (185). Through Duquette’s narrative, moreover, Mansfield also mocks the self-absorption and sterile detachment of the artist who is “ruthlessly feeding his own experiences into his art” (Hanson and Gurr 68).

Because these moral flaws—and especially Duquette’s failure to sympathize or connect with other people—are much more pronounced than those of the narrator of the Bavarian stories, one could call Duquette the first truly unreliable narrator in Mansfield’s fiction. His story certainly sports the typical duality of narrative unreliability, the sense of two stories operating at the same time: the narrator’s view of the fictional world and the alternate view that the text suggests and the reader can grasp (Nünning 58). Yet Duquette’s unreliability is not as straightforward as that in nineteenth-century gothic or sensational fiction. After all, Duquette is a self-conscious narrator with certain—albeit limited—awareness of his own flaws and posturing. As Hanson and Andrew Gurr note, “We should therefore be ready to condemn Duquette both as man and as artist, if it were not for his edgy awareness of the inadequacy of his feelings, and his recurrent excursions into sentiment and nostalgia” (70). In “*Je ne parle pas français*,” in other words, Mansfield cleverly exploits the possibilities of first-person narration and narrative unreliability for the representation of an extremely complex psychology.

Finally, among the first-person narratives that Mansfield wrote—and sometimes left unfinished—in the last two years of her life, two types of stories can be distinguished. The first group carries on from “*Je ne parle pas français*” and features a self-conscious artist-narrator; for example, “Daphne,” “A Married Man’s Story,” and “Poison.” The second group returns to the 1917 experiments in monologue and dialogue. The narrators of the former—all men—write down their stories and at the same time reflect on the process of writing. They congratulate themselves on their literary dexterity, and comment on the act of writing and the relationship between language and truth, as in “A Married Man’s Story”:

But wait! That bit about the wolves won't do. Curious! Before I wrote it down, while it was still in my head, I was delighted with it. It seemed to express, add more, to suggest, just what I wanted to say. But written, I can smell the falseness immediately . . . Why is it so difficult to write simply—and not simply only but *sotto voce*, if you know what I mean? That is how I long to write. No fine effects—no bravura. But just the plain truth, as only a liar can tell it. (428)

This passage is also meta-poetic in voicing some of Mansfield's own artistic concerns, such as the fine line between truthfulness and artificiality (Hanson and Gurr 108). Indeed, through the self-conscious narratives of these artist-narrators, Mansfield dramatizes her own poetics and development as an artist. Several critics have noted, for instance, that Duquette represents the ideal of the self-absorbed, aloof, and egotistical artist that Mansfield had come to reject (Kaplan 175). The similarities between the narrative 'I' of this story and the lyrical 'I' of the "Vignettes" likewise make the link to Mansfield's own, earlier artistic practice formally obvious. In large passages from "A Married Man's Story," the narrator verbalizes his thoughts in the first-person present tense, and an important feature of his narrative is the transformation of reality through metaphor, personification, and projection. Compare for instance this passage from Mansfield's "A Married Man's Story" with the first lines of "Vignette III":

I like to think of that cold drenched window behind the blind, and beyond, the dark bushes in the garden, their broad leaves bright with rain, and beyond the fence, the gleaming road with the two hoarse little gutters singing against each other, and the wavering reflections of the lamps, like fishes' tails. While I am here, I am there, lifting my face to the dim sky, and it seems to me it must be raining all over the world—that the whole earth is drenched, is sounding with a soft, quick patter or hard, steady drumming, or gurgling and something that is like sobbing and laughing mingled together. (*Collected Stories* 423)

Oh! This monotonous, terrible rain. The dull, steady, hopeless sound of it. I have drawn the curtains across the window to shut out the weeping face of the world—the trees swaying softly in their grief and dropping silver tears upon the brown earth, the nar-

row, sodden, mean, draggled wooden houses, colourless save for the dull, coarse red of the roof, and the long line of gray hills, impassable, spectral-like. So I have drawn the curtains across my window, and the light is intensely fascinating. (*The Poems* 6)

If the speaker of the “Vignettes” transforms the external world into art, the narrator of “A Married Man’s Story” notably extends his artist’s gaze to people. He first transforms his wife into “an immense *Mother and Child*,” then imagines her as a “*broken-hearted woman*” standing forlorn in the kitchen, and finally pictures her, “lying in her cold bed, staring into the dark, with those trustful, bewildered eyes? Her eyes are like the eyes of a cow that is being driven along a road” (423, 429, emphasis original). Although the degree to which these pictures result from projection and imagination is difficult to determine (since we have only the narrator’s account on which to rely), it is clear that the narrator quite easily reads, frames, and “places” his wife without trying to determine what she really feels. Like Duquette, he puts people—including himself—on a stage, thus preventing real feelings for them.

Yet even more than Duquette, this narrator seems aware of his detachment and self-absorption. He wonders whether his forms of aestheticization are not “just the signs, the traces of my feelings? . . . Not the feeling itself” and reflects on his cruel behavior towards his wife with “Oh; that was base of me!” (423, 429). More than any other artist-narrator, he seems to realize that he lacks human sympathy in forever compelling himself to keep his wife, his child, and himself at a distance. This self-consciousness makes him slightly more reliable than Duquette and the narrator of “Daphne,” whose stories unwittingly betray their narcissism and their parasitic relation to the world around them.

The second group of these last first-person narratives returns to the 1917 experiments in monologue and dialogue. “The Lady’s Maid” still contains traces of dialogue: the maid’s interlocutor is identified as “Madam” and the maid seems to reply to some of this guest’s responses that have been omitted. In “A Bad Idea” and “The Canary,” however, the “you” has become much more general and vague, therefore inviting readers to take up the position of interlocutor or narratee and literally drawing them into the story. Unlike the stories in the first group, these first-person stories create the impression of being spoken rather than written and the I-

narrators are free of any self-consciousness about literary methods or rhetorical effects. Nonetheless, they are clearly overt narrators, who reveal their own character in the process of telling their tales. One could even call them naïve narrators given their imperfect grasp of their own situation or feelings. This type of narrative unreliability does not increase the ironic distance between narrator and implied author, or between narrator and reader, but instead engages the readers' sympathy for the narrator. Following James Phelan's "Bonding Unreliability, Estranging Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*," one could call this unreliability bonding rather than estranging: the reader not only feels for the narrator, but also responds to the loneliness and isolation, the strongest feelings in all three stories. This group of stories may, therefore, be said to dramatize some of Mansfield's own preoccupations as well, yet they do so without irony, satire, or parody. Instead, the strategy of bonding unreliability, the call to the reader, and the greater commonality of themes all contribute to their honesty and appeal. Hanson and Gurr rightly speak of a "triumph" in the final paragraph of "The Canary": "Here the author paradoxically *expresses* her sense of the isolation of human beings in a formal context which almost literally *forces* communication between reader and writer" (134, emphasis original). This triumph is also over the solipsism in the artist-narrator's stories of the same period, where self-possession precludes genuine communication, whether between narrator and reader or between narrator and other characters.

Dominic Head has characterized the development of Mansfield's writing as the "cultivation of an impersonal style" (138). While her stories in general have often been discussed from this perspective, with the free indirect discourse of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" or "Miss Brill" as classic examples, less often remarked is how her first-person narratives chart a similar movement in this direction. In these stories, Mansfield gradually moves away from a direct expression of the author's self, whether as the lyrical 'I' of the "Vignettes" or as the autobiographical 'I' of the travel stories. The double irony and satire of the *Pension* stories show the first attempt at distancing, as the satirical and cynical narrator becomes the object of irony herself. The experiments in monologues and dialogues provide a second attempt in clearing the narrative 'I' of any traces of the authorial 'I.' In the complex narrative of "Je ne parle pas français," Mansfield's first-person narration has its initial triumph: an innovative

way of dramatizing personal preoccupations about art, but also about love, gender, and sexuality, through the unreliable narrative of Raoul Duquette. The same holds true for “A Married Man’s Story” and, to a lesser extent, for “Daphne” and “Poison.” With “The Canary” and the stories leading up to it, however, Mansfield’s first-person narratives reach a second high-point. Here the convincing narrative of an elderly spinster is so infused with strongly felt emotions that it becomes a moving expression of ordinary human feelings.

In these last first-person narratives—“The Canary” and “A Married Man’s Story”—Mansfield realizes an intensely felt objectivity in a narrative mode that is different from, but certainly not inferior to, the figural mode of her best-known stories. In writing from her own experience but without any intrusion of the authorial self, she achieves a peculiar form of impassioned impersonality, which she refers to in her journals as the “moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal” (204). Kaplan has identified Mansfield’s poetic ideal in this respect as a “*transformed* subjectivity” that retains emotional honesty but leaves the purely personal behind (188, emphasis original). In the best of her first-person narratives, in short, Mansfield manages to transform the self into the other—to ‘become’ the other—and in doing so address the universal.

Finally, a consideration of Mansfield’s first-person narratives modifies the view that the general development of the modern short story consists of “getting rid of the narrator.” In her I-narratives, the transition is not simply from teller to tale or text. Instead, the traditional first-person narrator becomes a character in his or her own right, quite distinct from the author. The narrator literally becomes the story he or she tells. In thus enlarging the possibilities of first-person narratives, Mansfield prepares the way for further developments in the short story. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a revival of the first-person narrative voice in British fiction: from Samuel Beckett’s dehumanized voices to Edna O’Brien’s confessional voices and from Ian McEwan’s deranged narrators to Kazuo Ishiguro’s questioning narrators. Mansfield’s extraordinarily varied first-person narratives ultimately constitute an important though somewhat neglected step in the evolution of the modern short story.

Notes

1. The term focalization “denotes the perspectival restriction and orientation of narrative information relative to somebody’s (usually, a character’s) perception, imagination, knowledge or point of view,” and refers in particular to third-person narration with restricted omniscience and events viewed from the perspective of a character (Herman 172). Franz Stanzel has called this narrative situation “figural narration.”
2. I use the term implied author in accordance with James Phelan’s recent definition of it as a “streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text” (*Living* 45).
3. T. O. Beachcroft and Joanne Trautmann respectively argue that Theocritus’s “idylls” and Colette’s “dialogues for one voice” influence these pieces (13–14, 70).

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