

**THE USE OF SYMBOLS AND IMAGERIES AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS IN
KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S SHORT STORIES**

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Abstract

In general aspect, the most striking features in Katherine Mansfield's short stories style and technique can be found in her use of simplicity and colloquialness. The extensively detailed characters and environments contained in most of Katherine Mansfield's works. Mansfield succeeds to engage the reader through the rich suggestiveness of her surroundings. Through imagery and language, she establishes a focus on a 'slice of life' and draws the portrayal of everyday experience with rich descriptions in her examples.

Keywords : Katherine, Mansfield, Story.

**KATHERINE MANSFIELD'IN KISA ÖYKÜLERİNDE SEMBOL, İMGE KULLANIMI VE
YORUMLANMASI**

Özet

Genel anlamda Katherine Mansfield'in kısa öykülerinde üslup ve teknik açıdan göze çarpan en önemli hususlar yazarın kullandığı sadelik ve konuşma dilidir. Katherine Mansfield'in eserlerindeki karakterler detaylı ve kapsamlı yer tutmaktadırlar. Mansfield zengin imalar yoluyla okurun ilgisini çekmeyi başarır. Yaşamın bir kesiti üzerinde odaklanmayı imge ve dil yoluyla oluşturarak zengin tanımlamalarla günlük deneyimlerin bir betimlemesini çizer.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Katherine, Mansfield, Öykü.

Katherine Mansfield's stories are not all alike. Themes recur, but they vary in how they are presented. Some stories are schematic; they may serve as warnings or may make specific points. Other stories require more probing on the reader's part; they are full of hidden meanings as forceful as the thoughts expressed in the schematic stories, but which must be deciphered before the reader's attention is attracted. Since Mansfield wrote different kinds of stories, some feel that her experimentation kept her from developing a particular style; her style was achieved in her words, in her approach to varied themes and in her prevailing ambition—to create a perfect short story.

When we consider Katherine Mansfield's style in its general aspect we find that simplicity and colloquium are the most outstanding features. Obviously it is easy and effortless, but it is subtle

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and suggestive. The characteristic of it is its abundance of sensual impressions, which makes the stories vibrant. Take, for example, the description of the coming of evening in *Prelude*. "It was quite dark outside now and heavy dew was falling. When Linda shut the window the cold dew touched her finger lips. Far away a dog barked"¹.

Her stories resolve themselves naturally into a series of pictures within the visual nature of her works. For instance, in *Prelude* we get a picture, first, of Lottie and Kezia standing on the lawn, then we are introduced to the tea-table at the Samuel Joseph's. Next, we are shown Kezia at the dining-room window, etc. The features of this vision are the many instances of colourful aspects of Katherine Mansfield's stories.

Two of the most obvious examples of those visions are found in the story *Bliss*, in the description of Bertha's arranging of the fruit, "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",² and in the description of 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. ...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 it"³.

In her stylistic aspects, Mansfield pays close attention to detail. In its minuteness of description, her art reminds us of the art of the miniature painter. In a letter to Koteliansky of May 17, 1915, she gives the importance that she attached to detail by saying, "Do you too, feel an infinite delight and value in detail-not for the sake of detail but for the life in the life of it"⁴. Take, for instance, in *At the Bay*, Linda's description of the flower of the manuka tree,

"She looked up at the dark, close, dry leaves of the manuka, at the chinks of blue between, and now and again a tiny yellowish flower dropped on her. Pretty—yes, if you held one of these flowers on the palm of your hand and looked at it closely, it was an exquisite small thing. Each pale yellow petal shone as if each was the careful work of a loving hand. The tiny tongue in the centre gave it the shape of a bell. And when you turned it over the outside was a deep bronze colour"⁵.

A little later in the same story, the description of the reflection of the sun in the rock pools goes like this: "The sunlight seemed to spin like a silver coin dropped into each of the small rock

¹ Katherine MANSFIELD, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1981, s.38.

² Ibid., s.92-93.

³ Ibid., s.96.

⁴ J. Middleton MURRY, *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936, s. 147

⁵ Katherine MANSFIELD, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1981, s. 220-221.

pools. They danced, they quivered, and minute ripples laved the porous shores. Looking down, bending over, each pool was like a lake with pink and blue houses clustered on the shores"⁶. This fondness for details may be described as a peculiarity of the feminine writer, as may also be Katherine Mansfield's interest in and affection for the world of things, an interest which concludes in her habit of letting things come alive.

Certain individual features of Katherine Mansfield's literary style can be examined as such: Her attributive use of whole sentences and her use of compounds; adverbs to denote motions; the position in the sentence to emphasize individual words; certain favourite expressions; images; alliteration; rhythm and poetic thought. For instance, in *In a German Pension*, we find several examples of the attributive use of whole sentences, "She looked at me very solemnly, and yet with the slightest possible contempt— a 'fancy-not-recognising-that-at-the-first-glance' expression"⁷. For the use of compounds, *Bliss* sets a good example: "the-girl-before-her", "a little sitting-down kitten", "Nurse was helping Annie alter Mother's dress which was much-too-long-and-tight-under-the-arms" and in *The Daughters of the Late Colonel (The Garden Party)* "crying into her new, queer-smelling mourning handkerchief"⁸.

Verbs denoting motion are carried on, not by another verb, but by adverbs and adverbial expressions, e.g. "... 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"⁹. At times the verb denoting movement, is completely omitted, the movement being expressed by one sensual impression following upon another, for instance, in *Bliss* "On—on—past the finest villas in the town, magnificent palaces, palaces worth coming any distance to see, past the public gardens with the carved grottoes and statues and stone animals drinking at the fountain, into a poorer quarter"¹⁰.

We have many instances in Katherine Mansfield's stories of her changing the order of the words in order to emphasize certain aspects. In *The Doves' Nest*, "Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something"¹¹, the position of the adjective and the adverb in the beginning of the sentence underlines the note of darkness and dreariness.

When we focus on the expressions which occur most often in Katherine Mansfield's stories we find words like "goldy, darling, exquisite, little, tiny, perfect, eager, warm and etc.", adjectives denoting a certain quality, giving a certain emotional value to the noun. For example in *Bliss* "the goldy chairs"; in *The Garden Party* "darling little spots," "the tiny tongue" "a warm, eager voice" and "a warm little silver star"; in *The Dove's Nest* "an exquisite little enamel box," "perfect, perfect little house" and "her warm, youthful voice". The use of the word, "but", represents a peculiar feature of Katherine Mansfield's style and is an essential part of her mode of expression. It is used by her for

⁶ Ibid., s. 224.

⁷ Ibid., s. 687.

⁸ Ibid., s.269.

⁹ Ibid., s. 91.

¹⁰ Ibid., s.137.

¹¹ Ibid., s. 400.

various purposes a) to emphasize, "she knew what it was to be in love, but—in—love",¹² b) to give an emotional value to the context, "But now she had forgotten the cross lady"¹³ c) to express rapture, "But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this?"¹⁴ d) to indicate a whole train of thought, "But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still"¹⁵ e) to indicate a climax, "But at that moment the woman at the fire turned round. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible."¹⁶ Another favourite expression of Katherine Mansfield's is related to adverbial utterances like "on tiptoe", which she uses to denote expectation. "Did you ever know a cottage could stand on tip-toe. This one is doing it now",¹⁷ "Taller houses, pink and yellow, glided by, fast asleep behind their green eyelids, and guarded by the poplar trees that quivered in the blue air as if on tiptoe, listening"¹⁸.

Her use of images, alliteration, rhythm and poetic expressions is all features that characterizes Mansfield's overall works. For example, for her image; "We tore through the black-and-gold town like a pair of scissors tearing through brocade";¹⁹ for her alliteration; "Lil breathed loudly, almost snorted; our Else was still as a stone";²⁰ for her rhythm; "The tide was out, the beach was deserted; lazily flopped the warm sea";²¹ for her poetic thoughts; "She drew a long soft breath, as though the paper daffodils between them were almost too sweet to bear"²². The use of those stylistic features is combined with a rare poetic sensibility on the part of Katherine Mansfield. The result is that many passages of her stories come to have the effect of the lines of a lyric poet, e.g. "And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed",²³ "The rose-red glow had paled, bats were flying",²⁴ "The pinkish, bluish masses of flower lay like light among the spreading leaves"²⁵.

An outstanding aspect in Katherine Mansfield's technique is her use of symbolism. She uses images of birds, trees, the insects in detail. Two doves, in *Mr and Mrs Dove (The Garden Party)*, one always in front of the other running forward with a little laughing cry; the other always following faithfully, bowing and bowing, symbolize relationship and courtship between Reginald (Reggie) and Anne.

"To and fro, to and fro over the fine red sand on the floor of the dove house, walked the two doves. One was always in front of the other. One ran forward, uttering a little cry, and the other followed, solemnly bowing

¹² Ibid., s.412.

¹³ Ibid., s..391.

¹⁴ Ibid., s.249.

¹⁵ Ibid., s. 105.

¹⁶ Ibid., s.260.

¹⁷ Ibid., s.616.

¹⁸ Ibid., s.182.

¹⁹ Ibid., s.300.

²⁰ Ibid., s.390.

²¹ Ibid., s.224.

²² Ibid., s.168.

²³ Ibid., s.257.

²⁴ Ibid., s.315.

²⁵ Ibid., s.370.

and bowing. You see,” explained Anne, “the one in front, she’s Mrs. Dove. She looks at Mr. Dove and gives that little laugh and runs forward, and he follows her, bowing and bowing. And that makes her laugh again. Away she runs after, and after ... comes poor Mr. Dove, bowing and bowing... and that’s their whole life²⁶.

In *The Escape* tree serves as the central symbol. “It was an immense tree with a round, tick silver stem and a great arc of copper leaves that gave back the light and yet were sombre”²⁷. As the man looks into it, freed for the time from his wife’s nagging, it seems to overspread the sky, motionless in the quivering heat, with from somewhere within the sound of a woman’s voice singing. The voice disturbs the peace and silence; he struggles against the sudden oppression he feels. Then the voice ceases and he is again enfolded in peace. Here, the man’s escape is through mystical identification with the complete, harmonious pattern of life represented by the tree, which the delusive charm of woman shatters.

In *Prelude* Linda notices the aloe on her first morning at the new house, the “cruel leaves,” the thick stem plunging into the earth. “The curving leaves seemed to be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it”²⁸.

When Kezia asks if the tree ever bears flowers, Linda smiles, half shutting her eyes, and answers: “Once every hundred years”²⁹. For the aloe is Linda herself, set about with sharp thorns, firmly rooted in her determination to preserve herself apart, inaccessible in external appearance, not with the possibility of bearing once every hundred years the flower of selfless love.

Toward the end of the story Linda walks in the garden with her mother. They stand before the aloe, which in the bright moonlight seems like a ship with oars lifted riding the grassy waves. Linda imagines that the ship draws nearer, that she is caught up and carried away, beyond the gardens and fields, leaving house and family behind. As she walks on with her mother, she notices again the long sharp thorns edging the aloe leaves. “Nobody would dare to come near the ship or to follow after”³⁰ she thinks.

The symbol of insect life in her stories draws another remarkable point. Describing his incarceration as an office worker to Linda, Jonathan Trout, in *The Garden Party*, pictures himself as an insect that has flown into a room and dashes itself against walls and windows in an effort to get free:

“Why don't I fly out again? There's the window or the door or whatever it was I came in by. It's not hopelessly shut—is it? Why don't I find it and be off? ... "I'm exactly like that insect again. For some reason"—Jonathan

²⁶ Ibid., s.291.

²⁷ Ibid., s. 201.

²⁸ Ibid., s.35.

²⁹ Ibid., s.35.

³⁰ Ibid., s.53.

paused between the words—"it's not allowed, it's forbidden, it's against the insect law, to stop banging and flopping and crawling up the pane even for an instant"³¹.

In *Prelude* the cribbage game is symbolic of Beryl's flirtation with Stanley. In *Bliss* the flowering pear-tree is the outward visible symbol of the inward emotional state of Bertha's plan of dressing, which accords with the colour scheme of the tree. "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,..."³². In *The Wind Blows*, the wind is symbolic of the spirit of unrest in the mind of Matilda. "Suddenly-dreadfully-she wakes up. What has happened? Something dreadful has happened. No-nothing has happened. It is only the wind shaking the house, rattling the windows, banging a piece of iron on the roof and making her bed tremble"³³. In *Psychology (Bliss)*, the fluttering fire is symbolic of the love that, under the cover of an intellectual friendship, is smouldering in the hearts of the couple. "...and came over to the fire and held out his hands to the quick, leaping fire. Just for a moment both of them stood silent in that leaping light"³⁴. In *The Man without a Temperament* the imperfect state of health of the young wife is symbolized by an image. "Far away lightning flutters-flutters like a wing -flutters like a broken bird that tries to fly and sinks again and again struggles"³⁵. And, in *The Escape*, the state of tranquillity for which the man is longing is symbolized by a tree. "It was then that he saw the tree, that he was conscious of its presence just inside a garden gate. ...As he looked at the tree he felt his breathing die away and he became part of the silence. It seemed to grow, it seemed to expand in the quivering heat until the great carved leaves hid the sky, and yet it was motionless"³⁶.

In *The Garden Party*, too, we find numerous examples of Mansfield's use of symbolism and imageries. In *At the Bay* Linda, who is watching Jonathan, suddenly sees his character revealed in a symbolic image. "He looked very tall on the darkening grass and the thought crossed her mind, 'He is like a weed'³⁷. At the end of the same story, the passing of a cloud over the moon symbolizes Beryl's waking out of a dream. "A cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still"³⁸.

In *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, the sun is symbolic of what life might have been to two sisters, Constantia and Josephine, "the sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and the photographs. ...Why did the photographs of dead people

³¹ Ibid., s.238.

³² Ibid., s.97.

³³ Ibid., s.106.

³⁴ Ibid., s.111.

³⁵ Ibid., s.142.

³⁶ Ibid., s.201.

³⁷ Ibid., s.239.

³⁸ Ibid., s.245.

always fade so? Wondered Josephine³⁹ and in the end of the story the cloud that obscures the sun signifies their spiritual death. In her letter to William Gerhardt on June 23, 1921 Mansfield alludes to spiritual death;

“There was a moment when I first had ‘the idea’ when I saw the two sisters as amusing; but the moment I looked deeper (let me be quite frank) I bowed down to the beauty that was hidden in their lives and to discover that was all my desire... All I was meant, of course, to lead up to that last paragraph, when my two flowerless ones turned with that timid gesture, to the sun. ..And after that, it seemed to me, they died as surely as Father was dead⁴⁰ .

In *Miss Brill*, the note of "chill" in the midst of the gay music of the band is symbolic of the note on which the story ends. “And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill-a something, what was it?-not sadness-no, not sadness-a something that made you want to sing. ...and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. ...And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches-they would come in with a kind of accompaniment-something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful-moving... And Miss Brill’s eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company⁴¹ .

Again in the fragment, *The Doves’ Nest*, we find some of the most lucid examples of the author's use of symbolism. The arranging of the flower vase, for instance, is symbolic of the character of the individual members of the family. “On the heavy, polished table stood an oval glass dish decorated with little gilt swags. This dish, which was it was Marie’s duty to keep filled with fresh flowers, fascinated her. The sight of it gave her a *frission*. It reminded her always, as it lay solitary on the dark expanse, of a little tomb⁴². (Alıntı kitapta aynen geçiyor) Mr. Prodger's figure being "nice and substantial can be found in the phrase "What about bringing out that big chair with the nice, substantial legs for Mr. Prodger? Men are so fond of nice, substantial..."⁴³. Katherine Mansfield's use of symbolism is detectable, also, in the names she chose for her stories. The titles of stories, like *Poison*, *Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day*, *Mr. and Mrs. Dove*, and *The Doves' Nest* are symbolic.

One remarkable aspect of Katherine Mansfield's use of symbolism is her habit of characterizing her persons by a symbolic gesture. In *Prelude* (Bliss), the impatience of Beryl is denoted by her gesture of biting her lip. “Her mouth was rather large. Too large? No, not really. Her under lip protruded a little; she had a way of sucking it in that somebody else had told her was awfully fascinating⁴⁴. This gesture is again used by the author to characterize several of her young women,

³⁹ Ibid., s. 282.

⁴⁰ J. Middleton MURRY, *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936, s.389.

⁴¹ Katherine MANSFIELD, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1981, s.334-335.

⁴² Ibid., s. 445.

⁴³ Ibid., s.449.

⁴⁴ Ibid., s. 58.

in *Bliss* and *The Dove's Nest*. In *Je ne parle pas Français*, Mouse's gesture of stroking her muff denotes embarrassment. In *Pictures* the pluck of Miss Moss is symbolized by two gestures, that of looking into the mirror "...and seeing herself in the glass she gave a vague smile and shook her head. 'Well, old girl,' she murmured, 'you're up against it this time, and no mistake.' But the person in the glass made an ugly face at her"⁴⁵ and that of powdering her nose. "And then she sat down on one of the benches to powder her nose. But the person in the pocket mirror made a hideous face at her, and that was too much for Miss Moss; she had a good cry. It cheered her wonderfully"⁴⁶.

In *The Man without a Temperament* the restlessness of Robert is revealed by his habit of turning his ring. "He stood at the hall door turning the ring, turning the heavy signet ring upon his little finger while his glance travelled coolly...-but he did not whistle -only turned the ring -turned the ring on his pink, freshly washed hands"⁴⁷. In *The Young Girl* the girl's attitude of detachment and disdainfulness is characterized by her gesture of "twiddling her foot." In *The Lady's Maid*, the lady's resignation is symbolized by her putting her hand on her heart and lifting up her eyes. In *The Doves' Nest*, three main characters are depicted by their gestures: Mr. Prodger by that of crossing his arms; the embarrassment of Milly is symbolized by her tracing a "filet lace flower with her finger", or by her biting her lip, and the resignation of Mother by her gesture of folding her hands, or by her putting her hand on her breast.³⁷

The trades and professions are characterized by symbolic gestures. In *Revelations*, the hairdresser is characterized by the gesture of waving his brush," in *The Garden Party* the workman is characterized by the gesture of shifting his tool-bag, and in *The Daughters of the Late Colonel* the clergyman is characterized by the gesture of drawing his kid gloves through his lingers.⁴⁰

In general Mansfield employs fewer symbols so that they form an intrinsic element of a story and carry their symbolic and thematic significance at the same time. The little lamp in "The Doll's House" plays its part as a concrete little lamp. "...and there's a teeny little lamp, all made of yellow glass, with a white globe that stands on the dining-room table. You couldn't tell it from a real one. The lamp's best of all"⁴⁸. In *The Fly* the central symbolism is confusing. Obviously the boss stands for a superior controlling power-God, destiny or fate-which in capricious and impersonal cruelty tortures the little creature struggling under his hand until it lies in death. At the same time the boss is presented as the one who has himself received the blows of this superior power through the death of his only son in the war. Thus the functional role which the boss plays in the story does not fuse with the symbolic role, a division which probably accounts for the various unsatisfactory interpretations of the symbolism in this story.

⁴⁵ Ibid., s. 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid., s.127.

⁴⁷ Ibid., s. 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid., s.387.

Conclusion:

Considered as a whole, Katherine Mansfield weighed every word and expression carefully to ensure that the right impression was produced.—Besides the nicety of expression, the above example crystallizes another peculiarity of Katherine Mansfield's style, namely her fondness for concrete images, her banishment of all abstract statements.

The power of Katherine Mansfield's short stories resides partly in symbols. For her, as for a poet, these have a strong emotional connotation, which she communicates. Often, the symbols are the core of the narrative and the story seems to grow up around them. In her use of symbolism, in her aliveness to sensual impressions, as well as in several stylistic respects, Katherine Mansfield shows a marked affinity to the poets. The sum total of these facts suggests that the unique position Katherine Mansfield occupies among short-story writers is, in part, at least, to be sought in the fact that her stories, in point of form and structure, stand halfway between drama and poetry.

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