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Images of Art: Katherine Mansfield's Use of Line, Color, and Composition in Her Short Stories

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IMAGES OF ART: KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S USE OF LINE, COLOR, AND
COMPOSITION IN HER SHORT STORIES

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Carol Barsky

December 1996

IMAGES OF ART: KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S USE OF LINE, COLOR, AND
COMPOSITION IN HER SHORT STORIES

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IMAGES OF ART: KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S USE OF LINE, COLOR, AND
COMPOSITION IN HER SHORT STORIES

Carol Barsky December 1996 55 Pages

Directed by: Karen Schneider, Joseph Millichap, and Katherine Green

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Katherine Mansfield's short stories include numerous visual images, many of which contribute significantly to the stories' moods and themes. Her visual imagery has been linked with literary devices such as symbolism and irony. This study, however, emphasizes three major principles of the visual arts apparent in her imagery—line, color, and composition—that also play important roles in imbuing a substantial number of her images with possible meaning. The prominence and skillful handling of these artistic techniques suggest that she purposely wove them into her works to produce psychological effects that induce moods or support themes. As a result, Mansfield successfully merged verbal and visual languages to promote a greater sensitivity to her characters' perceptions and feelings. Mansfield's ability to see and creatively imitate reality as painters do, her friendship with painters (particularly Dorothy Brett), and other documented evidence of a fascination with the visual arts point to an apparent dependence on artistic techniques and theories that add an essential dimension to many of her stories. The most compelling evidence, however, exists within the many visual images themselves.

Assuming the Role of Artist

Katherine Mansfield's short stories frequently rely on visual imagery that captures the beauty and power of nature, reveals the comic and tragic roles of humanity, and emphasizes the unique qualities of perceptions, fantasies, and dreams. However, her visual imagery often seems less dependent on conventional narrative techniques and traditions of fiction than it does on design and color theories and practices borrowed from the visual arts. Line, color, and composition play a prominent role in many of her visual images, and from these images arises a second language based on the psychological effects of visual perception. These effects, in turn, create or sustain moods or support themes. Although Mansfield's motive for relying on artistic details remains unknown, this analysis, along with biographical evidence presented in the conclusion, suggests that she attempted to merge verbal and visual languages as a means of expanding readers' interpretations as well as her own creativity.

The recurring moods in Mansfield's stories revealed through principles of line, color, and composition range from simple tension to anxiety, anger, longing, fear, jealousy, naiveté, and occasionally, on a more positive note, joy and awe. The salient themes in Mansfield's stories include isolation, loneliness, credulity, transition, and conflict between or polarization of parent and child/man and woman. Moods evoked by her use of artistic principles depend entirely on readers' emotional responsiveness to those principles; recognition of themes arising from the same principles requires an

association of artistic theories or practices with abstract concepts that provide key ideas. In other words, moods produced by line, color, or composition arise almost entirely from the emotional effects those elements produce, while themes supported by techniques or theories of the visual arts, although certainly dependent on pervading emotions, require analysis and association.

Some critics place Mansfield's fiction firmly in the modernist movement, but others see it as a departure from modernism. Andrew Gurr claims in "Katherine Mansfield's Experiments" that Mansfield "was poised . . . like all modernists, on the borders between image and discourse, between the timeless moment and the inescapable sequentiality of narrative" (42). Yet Mansfield actively sought to use image *as* a form of discourse rather than remain tenaciously "poised" between two methods of expression. Julia van Gunsteren rather single-mindedly states that modernists sought benefit "from intellectual hypothesis, not from subjective impressions" (26), but, on the contrary, Mansfield placed a higher value on a combination of perception and imagination. In fact, as van Gunsteren notes, Mansfield often upbraided her husband, John Middleton Murry, for his reliance on intellectualism and once stated that "this intellectual reasoning is never *the whole truth*. It's not *the artist's truth*—not *creative*. If man were an intellect it would do, but man *isn't*" (67). Mansfield evidently felt that creativity defined her approach to writing, and this belief possibly led her to unite two languages—verbal and visual—to produce connotations that may never be realized through verbal language alone. Mansfield wrote not only to gratify her own need to create and experiment but also, according to Atul Chandra Chatterjee, to empower the imagination of her readers:

A true artist, according to Katherine Mansfield, satisfies not only the reader's senses but also his imagination. There must be material in his work to call forth the powers of imagination. The ideal reader will not be put off with pictures alone—he will demand that someone should discover for him the deeper strangeness or mystery that underlies those pictures, so that his imagination is not allowed to go starving while his senses are feasted. (109)

The most important prerequisite for understanding this study of Mansfield's visual imagery, then, is imagination. Individual visual images that occur at a particular time and place should be thought of as parts of a single composition or painting, such as this example from "The Woman at the Store" (1912):

We were on the brow of the hill, and below us there was a whare roofed with corrugated iron. It stood in a garden, rather far back from the road—a big paddock opposite, and a creek and a clump of young willow trees. A thin line of blue smoke stood up straight from the chimney of the whare; and as I looked a woman came out, followed by a child and a sheep dog—the woman carrying what appeared to me a black stick. She made gestures at us. (125)

The narrator designs a picture of the scene in the valley below, assigning each object or character a relative place, position, or purpose that gives the scene a sense of cohesiveness. Suggested lines or colors used in metaphors or similes in images from other stories may be more difficult to imagine than the clearly stated details in this

example, but my readings will attempt to underscore the implied principles of the visual arts.

While Mansfield did not outline a theory for her incorporation of artistic techniques, her mastery of line, color, and composition strengthened as her writing matured. Her friendship with painters such as Dorothy Brett most likely exposed her to at least elementary knowledge of painting practices and theories and formed her appreciation of the emotional content latent in lines, arrangements, and colors. With the passage of time and continued use of principles borrowed from drawing and painting, Mansfield became more proficient in her visual techniques and demonstrated a greater understanding of the power of visual language.

The most important result of Mansfield's borrowing from the visual arts is the creation of a second language that promotes a different level of comprehension—and one that reveals greater emotional content than verbal language alone. By merging visual and verbal languages in her short stories, Mansfield stimulates readers' imaginations and evokes richer interpretations.

Lines, Motion, and Emotion

Katherine Mansfield employs a variety of lines in many of her visual images to create moods or support themes. She establishes some moods by using visually linear effects that usually correspond with traditional aesthetics of line applied by artists to express similar moods in paintings and drawings. She also associates some themes with linear artistry.

The correlation between Mansfield's use of lines and traditional principles of art is striking. As artist Charles Dunn explains, the aesthetics of line is based on standard associations: "horizontal=respose, calm"; "vertical=erect, dignified"; "oblique=dynamic, movement"; and "curve=biological, organic." Also, "broad, heavy lines" denote strength, and "narrow, light lines" indicate fragility (80). These basic lines and the resulting moods may take on intensified meanings when repeated within visual compositions—another principle that Mansfield adeptly employs in several visual images.

Mansfield occasionally expresses moods or themes through two kinds of lines that art historian and critic John Canaday defines as "general stance . . . [the] direction of a form" or its orientation, and "the bounding edges of forms" or outlines that delineate shapes (159). In drawing, painting, and sculpture, forms may feature linear aspects such as curvature or elongation, indicating a "stance" or "direction" that evokes emotions or directs viewers' attention. Artists may also choose to emphasize outlines in depicting shapes, which themselves may be suggestive of the aesthetics of line. These techniques

often require keen observation since the lines are portrayed as edges or represented by entire objects or figures and therefore are less obvious than separate, clearly drawn or defined lines. Nevertheless, Mansfield skillfully applies these techniques to visual images in which she desires to summon moods or underscore themes.

Mansfield's venture into the meaningful use of lines begins with "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (written in 1908 but published posthumously in 1924), one of her first mature stories, which introduces her exploration of curved lines in imagery. In this story one of the characters, Harry, seductively describes the perfect hat for the young lady he accompanies into the millinery store where Rosabel works. He states that it should be "a black hat with a feather that goes right round it and then round your neck and ties in a bow under your chin, and the ends tuck into your belt—a decent-sized feather" (5). Here Mansfield describes a line in the form of a feather that curves around a hat, then downward into a bow shape, and finally down once again to the waist and beyond. The curving, downward movement of the feather from the hat to below the belt presents a picture of sensuality and implies that Harry's interest in the young lady is purely erotic. This mood of desire reinforces itself when Harry asks Rosabel if she has ever been painted and tells her that she has "a damned pretty little figure" (6). Harry's arrogance and Rosabel's envy of the couple's obvious wealth (as evinced by her daydream about exchanging places with Harry's girlfriend) reveals the interconnected themes of female as sexual object and feminine credulity. The mood set by the simple image of a feather (which can be imagined as a line) curving from the head to the lower abdomen introduces the former theme. The feather points to a focal point, or area of importance, in this

image—the lower abdomen—and as it curves, it dynamically illustrates Dunn’s assertion of the biological nature of a curved line.

In one of Mansfield’s last stories, “At the Bay” (1922), a deserted beach at midday is likewise described in curvilinear terms. The implied curved lines of each object, movement, or creature suggest a rhythmic flow of life and establish a feeling of continuity while simultaneously hinting at life’s fragility. These themes follow the theory of the organic nature of curved lines: “hollow of the curved shells,” “pink convolvulus,” “minute ripples,” “pink thread-like trees,” “black feeler,” and “thread-like creature” (280-81). These descriptions of life or movement beautifully introduce a scene that focuses on Kezia’s questions about death and her grandmother’s insistence on truth. Their conversation and the themes center on the inescapable grasp of death (““Does everybody have to die?”” [283]) and the strong bonds of love (““You’re not to die.’ Kezia was very decided. . . . ‘Say never . . . say never . . . say never’. . . . And then she began, very softly and lightly, to tickle her grandma” [283]). Just as the curved lines of minute sea life, their motions, and their remains portray the continuum of life on a primal level, the conversation between Kezia and her grandmother expresses a mood of the continuity of love that reaches beyond death.

In some visual images, Mansfield attempts to create a feeling of movement within lines, especially curved lines, to evoke moods. In “Ole Underwood” (1913), for example, Mansfield uses curved lines to indicate movement, which introduces the old man’s rage—“The pine trees roared like waves in their topmost branches, their stems creaked like the timber of ships. . . . ‘Ah’k!’ shouted Ole Underwood, shaking his umbrella at the wind bearing down upon him, beating him, half strangling him with his black cape”

(135). Here Mansfield presents an image of the wind forcing the uppermost tree branches to bend almost horizontally, the old man waving his closed umbrella, and his cape blowing in the wind. If this image were a painting, the treetops would probably be formed from lines curving sharply in one direction, the umbrella would appear as a diagonal line, and the cape would consist of wavy lines nearly parallel to horizontal. The key to unity in this image, therefore, is the implied energy contained within these lines—especially the curved lines. Ole Underwood appears to be angry as the wind blows ferociously. Readers know this not only because Mansfield informs them through verbal language, but also because her words create a visual image that relies almost exclusively on curves (with the exception of one diagonal line) that are charged with the energy of uncontrollable movement arising from the forces of nature. The single diagonal line among the curved lines seems to separate human anger from the natural energy contained in the curved lines of the windblown objects, and this contrast may even be a foreshadowing of Ole Underwood’s resistance to his fate. The composition as a whole, therefore, reinforces the themes of rage, despair, and life out of control that unfolds in this story of an ex-convict who seeks revenge.

Mansfield provides another example of connecting movement and meaning with curved lines in “Spring Pictures” (1919). In this story she presents a passage which basically relies on sound imagery until the final sentence when she introduces visual imagery that consists of the “wavy” or curved lines of a curtain blowing in a breeze:

For a long time the music goes on and the proud voice thunders. Then somebody calls down the stairs and the showman, still with his grand air,

disappears. The voices cease. The piano, the violin and the flute dribble into quiet. Only the lace curtain gives a wavy sign of life from the first floor. (199)

Following the established pattern of sound imagery, the silent visual image of linear movement creates a mood of longing for sounds of human activity that also supports the theme of loneliness that recurs throughout this story.

Occasionally, Mansfield associates line with mood and theme by focusing on readily apparent as well as subtly revealed straight horizontal or vertical lines. Horizontal and vertical lines in characters' expressions provide the best examples of Mansfield's clear-cut use of straight lines. Revealing a character's mood in her early story "New Dresses" (1912), for instance, Mansfield uses a vertical line: Anne's "mouth drooped—a sharp line showed from nose to chin" (27). The "sharp line," an exaggerated and almost comical portrayal of the "droop," adds little to the already-established marital tensions in Anne and Henry's home. More successfully, in one of Mansfield's later, unfinished stories, "The Dove's Nest" (1923), she suggests visually "two lines" of Mr. Prodger's mouth as he expresses firm-but-polite doubt to his British hostess, Mrs. Fawcett:

"And the doctor recommended I should come here for the sunshine before I started for home."

"The sun is so very lovely here," agreed Mother, enthusiastically.

"Well, I don't think we get too much of it," said Mr. Prodger, dubiously, and two lines showed at his lips. "I seem to have been sitting around in my hotel more days than I care to count." (625)

Mr. Prodger, with his American ways, presents an enigma to Mrs. Fawcett but also injects a note of excitement into her home. Since this story is one of Mansfield's unfinished works, the major theme or themes remain undeveloped. Mansfield's characterization of Mr. Prodger, however, may be summed up in the visual image of a man who presses his lips together, forming two horizontal lines with his lips or two vertical lines at the corners of his mouth—both images imparting a feeling of unruffled masculine certainty if Dunn's aesthetic of line is loosely applied. The two short parallel lines reveal as much information about Mr. Prodger's personality as is contained in all the dialogue and narration of this short story. This image reveals a mood of self-assurance that gradually weakens the resolve of a group of women who strive to maintain devotion to the deceased male head of the household. Moreover, Mansfield contrasts that mood of masculine confidence with the women's increasingly fluttery excitement "at the idea of having a man to lunch" (628).

The less apparent yet also significant use of straight lines represented by the stance of objects appears most frequently in Mansfield's nature imagery. These straight lines become perceptible and demonstrate their importance when illuminated by sunlight or contrasted against moonlight. This use of light to define the relatively straight stance of objects frequently supports prominent moods or themes. Although Sylvia Berkman does not take note of it, stance is an important aspect of the details she associates with Mansfield's use of light to reveal moods or themes:

Miss Mansfield always relates details of setting to the emotional mood of her stories, not only through the choice of season in which events occur . . . but also less directly through a pervasive 'natural' imagery which most

often draws its parallel from some aspect of weather or light. In general these images play a functional role in the depiction of scene unobtrusively heightening the central mood and theme of a story. They do not commonly appear as an overt symbol. (188-89)

In “Prelude” (1918), for instance, a source of light emphasizes the vertical or horizontal stance or orientation of objects, which suggests moods or underscores themes. In this story, characters’ perceptions of plants and other natural forms usually disclose feelings of joy, as Francine Tolron observes: “In ‘Prelude’ nature is shown as simple, carnal, domestic, as a source of joy and beneficial effects . . .” (166). Nevertheless, the straight lines contained in some of the nature imagery in “Prelude” may simultaneously contribute to moods of loneliness or even fear. Tolron admits that Mansfield instills nature with “both positive and negative” forces that “are meant to express the protagonists’ psyche, their transient moods or states of being, their response to life or to a particularly vital moment” (166). For example, the remaining comfort Kezia finds in her old home that has just been emptied of its possessions (in order to move to another house) rests in the “[l]ong pencil rays of sunlight . . . and the wavy shadow of a bush outside” that “danced on the gold lines” caused by Venetian blinds (222). The sense of familiarity that the horizontal lines of light and accompanying shadows provide Kezia seems to console her in a time of physical and emotional upheaval. The lines of sunlight and shadow mesmerize her, prolonging the feeling of comfort as they “flutter again” and come closer to her feet (222). Their movement also reveals the ephemeral nature of the moment, paradoxically diminishing the mood of solace. This scene in “Prelude” introduces a mood of loneliness and theme of the search for consolation that emerges

through the contrast between the calming effect of horizontal lines and their known transience.

One of the best-known nature images in “Prelude” is the aloe plant. Mansfield’s first description of this plant illustrates its broad, vertical stance, which results in a feeling of power and awe. Kezia “stood and stared” at the plant in full daylight from which “out of the middle there sprang up a tall stout stem” (240). Kezia’s mother, Linda, also recognizes the plant’s vertical stability, but contrasting curved lines introduce a mood of fear and sustain the theme of loneliness: “High above them, as though becalmed in the air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it might have had claws instead of roots. The curving leaves seemed to be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it” (240). The straight vertical line of the main aloe stem standing out against the light sky generates a feeling of strength and endurance, but the curved lines of the leaves at the base of the plant clash with that vertical stability. These curved lines seem to induce fear because of their ability to hide “something” that Linda cannot identify.

The mood changes in a later section of “Prelude” where the aloe is portrayed in dark silhouette against bright moonlight. The aloe reminds Linda of a ship that could carry her away from harm, and she tells her mother, ““I like that aloe. I like it more than anything here”” (257). The fear she felt upon first viewing it now recedes, and she experiences a new appreciation for the plant. Thus Linda’s first encounter with the aloe commences a period of “self-understanding,” according to C. A. Hankin. ““Prelude’ progresses towards an exposure of what is psychologically hidden, towards the crystallisation, by means of catalytic symbol, of the characters’ only partly understood

anxieties” (19). Critics’ opinions on the nature of these anxieties associated with the aloe vary widely. Hankin suggests that the “aloe-as-ship represents the womb itself” and reveals Linda’s desire to reclaim the “safety and nothingness of that world” (22), while Mary Burgan indicates that the aloe “provides the backdrop for the representation of the failure of this mother/daughter scenario,” thus underscoring Kezia and Linda’s tenuous relationship (109). In either case, the visual image is signally important. The conflicting moods that arise from Kezia and Linda’s different viewpoints and Linda’s own change of heart about the aloe and the secret meaning it holds for her originate in the sharply contrasting vertical outline of the shadowy aloe tree against the bright moonlight.

Mansfield also exposes discordant moods that arise from an outline of an erect plant in “Bliss” (1918). Both Bertha Young and Pearl Fulton observe a pear tree in the moonlight, but details are minimal—it is a “slender, flowering tree” (347). The outline of the pear tree against the bright night sky, with its ability “to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air” as it appears to touch the moon (347), contributes to Bertha’s happiness and sustains the mood of ecstasy. Although critics sometimes differ on the meaning of the tree and the moon in “Bliss,” they frequently associate the tree with Bertha or masculinity, and the moon with Pearl or femininity, and occasionally assume that the scene alludes to an unrealized lesbian relationship. Nevertheless, van Gunsteren asserts that “[t]he famous ‘pear tree’ in ‘Bliss’ is best interpreted in the light of its associations within the story itself and cannot be endowed with any Symbolist significance” (22). The slender vertical form itself, because it is highlighted against a backdrop of bright moonlight and because of its ability “almost to touch the rim of the . . . moon” (347) with its erect stance, excites Bertha’s imagination, which she internalizes as a feeling of bliss.

This ecstatic mood, however, must be read ironically, for it follows Mansfield's elaboration of Bertha's psychological confusion about her role as mother. The disparity of emotions is more complex than those revealed in "Prelude." The first intimation of Bertha's confusion about motherhood surfaces when she questions her reliance on Nanny to care for her baby ("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?" [339]). The feeling returns while she feeds her baby and realizes that "her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn't know how to express it—what to do with it" (340). Bertha's confusion about her marriage appears abruptly, however, and occurs after viewing the pear tree with Miss Fulton during the party: "For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband" (348). Bertha's confusion becomes even more apparent when readers discover that "[i]t had worried her dreadfully at first to find that she was so cold [toward her husband], but after a time it had not seemed to matter" (348). Bliss, therefore, is represented as the dominant mood associated with nature imagery in this story, but Mansfield intertwines it with Bertha's confusion as revealed by her feelings about her baby and husband. The conflicting moods of bliss and confusion support the frequently repeated theme in Mansfield's works that Berkman describes as "loneliness and frustration . . . the falseness, ostentation, and sterility of modern sophisticated life" (196).

Mansfield demonstrates even greater skill in her artistry when she suggests the aesthetics of lines through simile and metaphor in several of her short stories. She portrays the figure of the woman in "The Woman at the Store" metaphorically as "nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore" (126), giving the woman a physical appearance of leanness or hardness, hinting at the harshness of her personality, and

establishing a mood of hopelessness of life on the small farm—all of which support the theme of isolation and, as Anne Holden Ronning points out, “its effect on the individual” (128).

In another instance, lines suggested through simile work closely with other implied and visually recognizable lines in an image to evoke feelings of both conflict and accord. For example, in the first section of “Prelude,” Kezia discovers a nominal comfort in Mrs. Samuel Josephs, whose body is represented by curved lines that are “like a huge warm black silk tea cosy” as she puts “her arm around weeping Lottie” (221). Kezia and Lottie sense their mother’s distorted priorities and feel abandoned as their family prepares to move to a new home. “There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. . . . Hold-alls, bags and boxes were piled upon the floor. ‘These are absolute necessities that I will not let out of my sight for one instant,’ said Linda Burnell” (219). Mrs. Josephs attempts to ease the two girls’ disconcerting experience by offering to care for them until evening when they can ride with the “storeman” to their new home (220). Mansfield then adds two visually and easily recognizable lines to Mrs. Joseph’s image to support the mood previously established by the simile. Kezia notices “two long pink corset laces hanging out” of Mrs. Joseph’s dress (221). The limp lines of the corset laces also lend a softness to Mrs. Joseph’s appearance and suggest that her nature is relaxed and empathetic. Mrs. Josephs is a woman who acts as relaxed as her loosed corset laces and as warm as a tea cosy. This portrayal contrasts sharply with Linda Burnell’s insensitivity toward her two younger daughters and the rigid postures implied by the lines of Linda “prostrated” body and Isabel’s “turned up” nose as their buggy pulls away from Kezia, Lottie, and Mrs. Josephs (220). These images convey the sadness and

confusion Kezia and Lottie must feel as their own mother and older sister gladly abandon them to the care of neighbor Mrs. Josephs for the remainder of the day. The emotions, in turn, underscore a theme in “Prelude” and recurrent in many of Mansfield’s stories of the inescapable trauma of change or transition.

Mansfield occasionally presents linear patterns or properties that are brought to life through characters’ actions or perceptions. In another example from “Prelude,” for instance, Mansfield portrays Kezia in a mood of boredom and wistfulness that begins when she wanders away from Isabel, “who longed to find some light and menial duty that Kezia might perform and so be roped in under her government” (233). Kezia enters the house and begins tracing a line “with one finger” around “a poppy on the wallpaper with a leaf and a stem and a fat bursting bud” (234), which underscores her mood and continues the theme of loneliness in “Prelude.” More importantly, tracing a line awakens her imagination, which momentarily entertains her and eases the pain. Mansfield brings the poppy pattern to life for readers through Kezia’s action and fantasy. The simple act of tracing a line transforms the wallpaper pattern into “sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud” (234) and quickly develops into other linear patterns, whether real or imagined:

How often she had seen the tassel fringe of her quilt change into a funny procession of dancers with priests attending. . . . For there were some tassels that did not dance at all but walked stately, bent forward as if praying or chanting. How often the medicine bottles had turned into a row of little men with brown top-hats on. . . . (234)

Mansfield instills in these various linear patterns—whether “traced” with a finger, revealed in a real-world object, or developed in an imaginary world—a mood of comfort and amusement. In this scene, linear patterns temporarily relieve the pain of loneliness for little Kezia but also reveal the chronic state of loneliness Kezia experiences since the narrator informs readers twice “how often” Kezia imagines these patterns.

Sometimes the linear patterns seem to be nothing more than insignificant designs, such as the “procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts” of Mrs. Norman Knight’s coat that Bertha considers amusing in “Bliss” (342). This simple but strange linear design underscores the prevailing mood of perversity among Bertha’s guests and the emptiness of their lives, however, and it seems to foreshadow Bertha’s discovery of her naiveté about love. The line of monkeys also visually emphasizes the kinds of satire Chatterjee finds in Mansfield’s fiction, targeting “intelligentsia and pseudo-artists” whom she blames for “their stupidity, vulgarity, levity and shallowness” (340). One of Mansfield’s most effective visual portrayals of this type of character resides in the comical parade of monkey figures along the edges of Mrs. Knight’s coat—figures that are certainly emblematic of ridiculous behavior.

In another seemingly insignificant image, Mansfield reveals a line’s fragility through a character’s gaze and endows the line with emotional significance, subtly introducing the psychological differences between men and women through the thin, sharp edge of a knife in this vignette from “Prelude.” Before carving a duck at the dinner table, Linda Burnell’s husband, Stanley, runs “his eye along the edge of the carving knife. . . . He hated seeing a woman carve; they were always too slow and they never seemed to care what the meat looked like afterwards” (254). The “edge” of the knife may be

represented pictorially as a simple fine line, of course, but the act of defining the line through Stanley's perception suggests the eagerness and manly pride Stanley feels as he is about to perform the task. Once again a theme of the polarity between men and women surfaces. In this case, however, the process of defining a sharp edge through a gaze leads to Stanley's assertion that women are unable to handle a knife, establishing a mood of tension and anticipation. Tension appears once again, albeit in a different manner, when after dinner Linda looks at the aloe, admires its "long sharp thorns" (257), and subsequently realizes that her feelings for Stanley are "sharp and defined" (258). The sometimes problematic nature of male-female relationships is once again confirmed by Linda's new awareness. By building upon a simple property of lines to create tension or anticipation, Mansfield reveals theme.

Finally, Mansfield borrows a principle from the visual arts that causes viewers' minds to "provide the missing parts"—a technique that Dunn labels as "closure" (104). Only parts of the line are actually visible or, in Mansfield's case, presented through visual imagery; nevertheless, the complete line is recognized by the viewer (or reader). Closure simply draws attention to the implied line or linear figure—a technique employed by advertisers when they place dotted lines around coupons (Dunn 104). Mansfield attempts closure in "The Voyage" (1921) to achieve a specific mood. The darkness of night hides many of the contours and details of the boat that Fenella and her grandmother board, yet "Lying beside the dark wharf, all strung, all beaded with round golden lights, the Picton boat looked as if she was more ready to sail among stars than out into the cold sea" (526). Against the blackness of a starry night, readers are drawn to the visually linear and psychological connections between the lights and the stars in the background—the boat is

recognizable as a vehicle of transport, but it also seems as if it were part of the vast world of stars (perhaps a better world) and acts as an agent of hope for little Fenella who is starting a new life with her grandparents. Closure focuses readers' attention on the twinkling lights of the boat and sky and creates a hopeful mood in the face of tragedy. Closure also allows Mansfield to once again introduce the themes of transition and the uncertainty of life.

All of these examples provide evidence of Katherine Mansfield's application of techniques and principles of line borrowed from the visual arts. As she gained experience in writing fiction, she relied on increasingly complex linear theories and patterns that offered a meaningful second language. Whether she intentionally applied these fundamentals may never be known, but her works definitely reflect an interest in the visual and psychological power of lines.

Mansfield's Many Moods of Color

Katherine Mansfield's keen awareness of color's ability to influence mood is another major indicator of her aptitude for blending the visual arts with fiction.

Demonstrating a growing mastery of the principles and techniques of color as well as line and overall composition as she gained experience as a writer, Mansfield's reliance on color—with emphasis placed on value (degree of lightness or darkness) and intensity (degree of brightness or dullness) along with various color schemes—at times supersedes her use of other literary devices to establish or underscore moods. Like lines, color often produces moods and supports themes to provide another avenue for readers to discover Mansfield's meanings. Since color theories can be highly technical treatises, and since Mansfield's knowledge of drawing and painting remains an enigma, only basic principles of how color generates moods will be applied to this study. This chapter will focus on Mansfield's reliance on the psychology of color.

In "The Tiredness of Rosabel," three neutral colors—black, white, and silver—are predominately featured and play significant roles in evoking moods and supporting themes. Mansfield's reliance on black and white seems appropriate if this early work is also seen as one of her first ventures into merging the visual arts with fiction. Just as many students learn to draw with pencil or pen on white paper and to create shapes from variations of black lines on white background before they experiment with color, Mansfield, too, created black and white imagery before relying heavily on color. In the

process, she seemed to discover the dichotomy of emotions and attitudes that may be expressed in these two diverse neutrals. In her early stories, including “The Tiredness of Rosabel,” she conventionally assigns a negative connotation to black and a positive connotation to white, which, as artist Betty Edwards reminds us in Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, represent (among other things) depression and innocence respectively (217).

The reality of Rosabel’s life is revealed within the first two sentences of the story with a description of her meager supper and the meal she “would have sacrificed her soul” to eat (3); black images reinforce the despair she feels. “Black, greasy mud” (3) soaks the bottom of her skirt as she trudges to the bus stop. In the darkness of her room she daydreams about Harry, the young man who purchases a black hat with a “black velvet rose” from Rosabel (5). The reality of Rosabel’s world of hard work and low pay emerges from the blackness surrounding her. Each black object or substance, whether real or imagined, along with the darkness of her room provides a subconscious reinforcement of the growing depression she experiences. Her only escape is a fantasy world of white (and light). This early story depicts the harshness of reality and the escape offered by fantasy through the contrast of black and white imagery. Noting that Harry’s girlfriend has “white skin” (5), the store clerk dreams that everything connected to the young woman exudes the innocence, purity, and beauty suggested by white objects. From the moment Rosabel imagines that she and the young woman exchange “places” (6), Rosabel fancies herself in a world of innocent white that produces incredible happiness and security. Her imaginary bedroom is “white and pink,” she wears “white suede gloves” (6), and she changes into a white dress that exposes her “lovely white

shoulders” (7). White, initially the important color in Rosabel’s fantasy, is replaced by the color silver: “dull silver vases” fill the imaginary bedroom (6), and her ensemble consists of “white tulle over silver, silver shoes, silver scarf, and a little silver fan” (7). As Edwards explains, intense colors “that shine and glitter” provide an emotional response that arises from a ““primitive”” part of the brain (205), implying that raw emotions are generated by metallic-like colors . Mansfield’s repetitive use of silver certainly promotes this instinctive emotional response by intensifying the mood established by white. Silver reinforces Rosabel’s naiveté as she immerses herself in the details of her fantasy. This fantasy world seems a perfect world to Rosabel, but she does not realize that overindulgence in fantasy can create a susceptibility to victimization. Rosabel falls asleep with the belief that wealth produces ideal happiness “because her heritage was that tragic optimism, which is all too often the only inheritance of youth” (8).

Black-and-white-induced moods rarely attain the same sense of importance in Mansfield’s other stories. Black and white soon give way to her interest in primary and secondary colors, or hues, which begins to subtly emerge in “The Tiredness of Rosabel.” Primary colors are defined as the three basic hues—red, yellow, and blue—from which all other colors are created. Secondary colors—orange, green, and violet—are the results of combining two primary hues. In “How Pearl Button was Kidnapped” (1912), Mansfield uses the three primary colors and one secondary color—red, yellow, blue, green—as descriptive adjectives. Through these colors she creates vivid pictures of characters and setting resembling the paintings of Paul Gauguin (some of which she had

seen in a 1910 exhibition in London, according to Sarah Sandley [72]). These colors, however, seem to be chosen simply for their decorative effects.

“New Dresses” (1912) begins Mansfield’s ardent exploration of the psychological effects of individual colors other than black and white and their association with moods and themes. “New Dresses” opens with the revelation that Anne favors her daughter Rose over daughter Helen: “I really shall have to see Dr. Malcolm about her [Helen’s] stuttering, if only to give her a good fright”; “Rose is perfect with the child—but Helen . . .” (26); “it seemed so useless to be tiring herself out with fine sewing for Helen” (27). While Anne sews green dresses with green “sashes” for both daughters (25), she complains about Helen’s irresponsibility and praises Rose, thereby setting up a conflict and creating a mood of tension. The green dresses evoke the negative emotion jealousy (Edwards 217), which is Helen’s reaction to her mother’s favoritism.

Anne places Helen in a no-win situation by constantly comparing Helen to Rose, and as many children would do in a similar situation, Helen reacts with defiance. She grows increasingly agitated about the green dress as she talks to Doctor Malcolm. After Helen accidentally tears her dress and hides it, Doctor Malcolm finds the dress by chance and promotes Helen’s irresponsibility by having the dress repaired and asking Helen’s grandmother to lie for Helen (36). Mansfield’s choice of green for the dresses underscores the moods of tension and jealousy that eventually lead to anger and aggravate Helen’s irresponsible behavior. Tension and jealousy, therefore, reinforce the theme of conflict within mother-daughter relationships—a theme that recurs in other Mansfield stories.

In “Ole Underwood,” which, coincidentally, was dedicated to painter Anne Estelle Rice, Mansfield depends heavily on the psychological effects of the primary hues red and yellow against a background of neutral gray. Red is the predominant color in this story, and Mansfield uses it in visual imagery not only to symbolize the anger that Ole Underwood feels but also to evoke similar feelings in readers. As graphic artist Marta Thoma points out, “Red is perhaps the most dominant and dynamic of colors. . . . In its action upon the human organism, red tends to disturb the equilibrium of the body. It will raise blood pressure and pulse rate” (62). Mansfield begins the story with a visual description of Ole Underwood carrying a “black umbrella in one hand” and “in the other a red and white spotted handkerchief knotted into a lump” (134). Immediately she establishes a sense of mystery about this man through the red and white handkerchief. Is the red and white a woven design in the cloth, or is it caused by red stains on a white cloth? Why is it knotted into a lump? The handkerchief remains a mystery even at the end of the story when he holds “high in his hand the red and white handkerchief” (138). Nevertheless, the initial purpose appears to be to focus readers’ attention on this particular object by using the color red to create a mood of uncertainty and, thus, anxiety. Subsequently, a “prison with high red walls” appears in the distance. Ole Underwood then encounters a woman who shakes “a red soapy fist” at him as he passes by (135), he angrily crushes “red pinks” while at a bar (136), and he sees a man in “[h]is ship” sleeping on a “red pillow” (138). As visual imagery containing red progresses, so do Ole Underwood’s anger and violent acts, and readers’ anxiety consequently rises.

Yellow also plays an important role in “Ole Underwood.” Although Thoma claims that yellow is a “cheerful” hue (63), Edwards reminds us that yellow also connotes

“treason” (217). In this story, however, yellow may be more closely associated with cowardice that manifests itself as cruelty, for it is cruelty which Ole Underwood both practices and endures. Initially he vents his anger by frightening innocent “yellow hens” (135). Later, after being chased out of a pub, he looks in a window:

Chinamen [were] sitting in little groups on old barrels playing cards. . . .
 He looked and looked, pressing his face against the glass and sniggering.
 They sat still with their long pigtails bound round their heads and their
 faces yellow as lemons. . . . The Chinamen didn't mind Ole Underwood.
 When they saw him they nodded. He went to the door of a shop and
 cautiously opened it. In rushed the wind with him, scattering the cards.
 ‘Ya-Ya! Ya-Ya!’ screamed the Chinamen, and Ole Underwood rushed
 off. . . . He thought he heard one of the Chinks after him, and he slipped
 into a timberyard. There he lay panting. (137)

In this case the “Chinamen” express anger, which Ole Underwood fears and flees. Ole Underwood then notices “a heap of yellow shavings” from which a friendly cat emerges (137). His final act of cruelty, killing the cat by swinging it “by its tail” and throwing “it out to the sewer opening” (138), reaffirms Ole Underwood’s role as a victimizer whose anger and cowardice reflect his inability to control his emotions. These moods of anger and fear, which are augmented by the red and yellow objects or features, isolate Ole Underwood from society, resulting in loneliness and frustration.

Mansfield ventured further into the world of color by gradually cultivating a sense of how red (or pink) and green color schemes evoke moods, but she used the combination sparingly while her confidence grew. These two colors are considered complementary

colors—hues or their variations that are opposite each other on the color wheel, such as red and green, blue and orange, and purple and yellow (Dunn 91). Thoma explains that complementary color schemes are appealing because they reveal “an interesting tension” but provide the greatest appeal when “one color is a high intensity and its complementary is subdued” (64). Mansfield generally indicates high intensity when she chooses red over pink in her red-green complementary color schemes though she seldom describes specific intensities or shades of green in the early stories.

In some cases she relies on readers’ recognition of a common visual image to suggest the probable intensity and appeal of the colors. Such imagery occurs in “The Tiredness of Rosabel” when the narrator describes Harry’s girlfriend as “a girl with beautiful red hair and a white skin and eyes the color of that green ribbon shot with gold they had got from Paris last week” (5). Readers are not told the exact shade or intensity of red or green that Mansfield has in mind, but since she labels the young woman’s hair as “beautiful,” since her green eyes are mixed with golden highlights, and since Rosabel obviously envies the young woman, readers most likely associate the red and green with attractively balanced intensities of red hair and green eyes they have seen in real people. The description captures a portrait of a stunning young woman and creates a mood of excitement or, to borrow Thoma’s phrase, “an interesting tension” (64) that increases Rosabel’s envy. In “New Dresses,” Mansfield describes another common visual image to suggest two intensities that vie for attention. Anne informs Doctor Malcolm that green “‘really *is* Roses’s colour. . . . Her complexion is so much more vivid than Helen’s,” but Doctor Malcolm provides a comical illustration when he realizes that Rose “looked like a tomato in a lettuce salad” (31). In this example Mansfield reveals Doctor Malcolm’s

underlying aversion to Rose through the use of two high-intensity complementary colors. The combination of red and green that allows readers to create an image of an attractive young woman in “The Tiredness of Rosabel” turns unappealing in “New Dresses” because of the implication of two high-intensity colors competing for attention. The resulting tension not only demonstrates Doctor Malcolm’s feelings about Rose but also contributes to the conflict between Anne and her daughter Helen since he now acts as Anne’s adversary in her favoritism of Rose.

In “The Luft Bad” (1910), Mansfield contributes to a mood of tension through her use of complementary colors as the first-person narrator describes “the ridiculous dignity in holding over yourself” an apparently high-intensity red and green umbrella while “dressed in nothing larger than a handkerchief” (79). As the story progresses, the narrator’s dislike of other women in the pension becomes evident. She is a self-conscious foreigner who ultimately seeks a precarious self-imposed isolation behind her umbrella. The first allusion to a mood of tension, however, arises from the narrator’s description of a red-and-green umbrella she labels as a “thing” that actually provides no “dignity,” privacy, or consolation whatsoever—a predicament that also introduces the theme of vulnerability.

Mansfield’s portrayal of the woman in “The Woman at the Store” uses color complements to induce moods, though the technique is somewhat different. One character, Jim, first describes her as “a woman . . . with blue eyes and yellow hair” (125). Dunn believes that the “visual complements” blue and yellow (and red and blue-green as well as green and purple) are “true to . . . vision” and therefore more pleasing to painters (and viewers) than technically correct complements such as blue and orange (90).

Mansfield apparently recognized that readers would generally find blue eyes and yellow hair an appealing combination. Not until the narrator “smiled at the thought of how Jim pulled Jo’s leg about her” and describes her yellow hair as “ugly” and her body as “sticks and wires” (126) do readers realize that Mansfield has deceived them. She allows visual complements to characterize the woman as attractive or at least fairly pleasant in appearance, providing a note of cheer or hope in an otherwise bleak setting, but the adjective “ugly” and the linear descriptions of the woman’s body emphatically reassert the mood of loneliness initially imparted by the colors of the landscape (as described in the next paragraph). Once again mood points to the themes of isolation and desperation.

Clearly, something changed for Mansfield in the New Zealand story “The Woman at the Store” which reveals a liberal use of color. Her New Zealand stories seem to awaken her memory for details and design and are differentiated from her relatively colorless European stories by the zest for life and intense curiosity about human behavior they depict. The psychological and decorative effects of color and the importance of light in illustrating values and intensities of color in the New Zealand stories reveals maturation in Mansfield’s writing and greater evidence of her attempt to combine writing with the visual arts. In “The Woman at the Store,” for instance, setting depends upon carefully selected colors . The story opens with a description of the landscape and atmosphere, which is permeated with “white pumice dust” and a “slate colour” of the sky (124). The only bright note in the drab landscape is a scattering of “purple orchids” (124). The slate sky, most likely a bluish-gray, offers a bleak mood not only because of the drab color itself but also because, as Thoma points out, it covers too large an area (63)—in this case, the entire background. Bleakness is obviously the mood Mansfield

desires in this somewhat naturalistic story about a woman and her daughter who eke out a living in a harsh environment. Nevertheless, Mansfield understands that the visual composition requires objects in the foreground to bring a feeling of visual depth and realism to the image. The purple orchids meet this requirement due to purple's intensity, which, according to Bernard Dunstan in Composing Your Paintings, allows it to advance in a painting (or visual image) (36).

Purple against slate also represents another artistic technique called "counterchange." Dunstan describes counterchange as "referring one colour against another . . . a small shape of one colour within a bigger mass of another can draw our eyes as definitely as a small area of light does when surrounded by dark" (35). The purple orchids stand out in this visual image against an otherwise desolate environment, increasing the feeling of loneliness through their stark contrast against the massive background color and their limited number. Mansfield's intentions can only be surmised, of course, but her application of these color theories and techniques permits readers to experience a specific mood in the opening scene that adumbrates the themes of loneliness and despair. Mansfield also uses counterchange in "Ole Underwood." She creates a gray landscape with one touch of red to highlight the prison as a means of introducing Ole Underwood's past and reinforcing the angry mood: "Away below, the sea heaving against the stone walls, and the little town just out of its reach close packed together, the better to face the grey water. And up on the other side of the hill the prison with high red walls. Over all bulged the grey sky with black web-like clouds streaming" (135).

By the time Mansfield wrote "The Little Governess" (1915), she began to demonstrate a greater interest in color value. In this story she describes the young girl's

hair in metaphorical terms of brown, yellow, orange, and golden objects and substances to suggest the blonde highlights in her hair—“hair that made one think of tangerines and marigolds, of apricots and tortoise-shell cats and champagne!” (206). Colors of this kind emphasize her “soft beauty” and her vulnerability in the train compartment filled with men (206). Through contrast of values (strong orange or reddish-orange, bright orange or yellow, light orange-yellow, brown, light or moderate yellow, and pale orange-yellow), Mansfield suggests the girl’s increasing anxiety about the young men in the compartment and her developing relationship with the self-serving old man who desires her companionship. These moods of excitement, tension, and anxiety support the themes of feminine, youthful credulity and vulnerability.

The New Zealand stories “Prelude” and “At the Bay” demonstrate Mansfield’s increasing reliance on visual imagery to induce moods and reveal themes. They also represent some of her finest achievements in the application of color theories and techniques and are particularly worthy of careful analysis. For instance, Mansfield skillfully employs one kind of color scheme to evoke changing emotions in the first section of “Prelude.” While Kezia walks through the empty house, she notices the “dining-room window had a square of coloured glass at each corner. One was blue and one was yellow” (222). Mansfield describes Kezia’s two separate perceptions—first through blue glass and then through yellow glass—in terms of one purely monochromatic color scheme and then another:

Kezia bent down to have one more look at a blue lawn with blue arum lilies growing at the gate, and then at a yellow lawn with yellow lilies and a yellow fence. As she looked a little Chinese Lottie came out on to the

lawn and began to dust the tables and chairs with a corner of her pinafore.

Was that really Lottie? Kezia was not quite sure until she had looked through the ordinary window. (222)

The predominant colors chosen for monochromatic color schemes establish specific moods in paintings or drawings (Thoma 63) through the hues' psychological effects on viewers, and Mansfield seems to recognize the value of this technique in creating visual imagery that reveals Kezia's moods. Actually, Mansfield attempts to represent the range of feelings Kezia experiences at this traumatic time in her life by contrasting Kezia's colored or distorted perceptions with clear or realistic ones. Readers already know that Kezia and Lottie feel abandoned by their mother, and the earlier linear portrayals of Mrs. Josephs, Linda Burnell, and Isabel disclose the little girls' sadness and confusion. By relying on monochromatic color schemes, however, Mansfield more clearly defines the theme of the trauma of change or transition. Kezia finds first the blue and then the yellow images (inducing restful and cheerful moods [Thoma 62-63]) familiar and therefore comforting as confirmed by her desire "to have one more look," but the moods quickly dissipate when she notices the "little Chinese Lottie" (222). Suddenly Kezia must look "through the ordinary window" to restore reality, a process that reintroduces pain and confusion as she continues her tour of the empty house. The monochromatic fantasy worlds provide a momentary diversion and change in moods, but reality intrudes and once again reminds Kezia of the pain that accompanies transition.

In both "Prelude" and "At the Bay," Mansfield also manipulates color values to create moods, approximating a system painters use. As Dunn explains, the values seen in nature are too numerous to copy or even discern. He suggests, from an artist's point of

view, that visual images simply become more understandable, or realistic, through concentration on three values of a single color: “light, dark, and midtone” (92).

Mansfield additionally demonstrates that in fiction the three-value system allows a deeper awareness of characters’ changing perceptions and moods through its appeal to readers’ nonverbal, intuitive thinking. Each value of a single color portrays characters’ fleeting perceptions and changing emotions. Notice the eventual emphasis on three values as represented by the red flowers, stems, and leaves in “Prelude” and the realistic portrayal those values create:

The camellias were in bloom, white and crimson and pink and white striped with flashing leaves. You could not see a leaf on the syringa bushes for the white clusters. The roses were in flower—gentlemen’s button-hole roses, little white ones . . . pink monthly roses . . . cabbage roses on thick stalks, moss roses, always in bud, pink smooth beauties opening curl on curl, red ones so dark they seemed to turn black as they fell, and a certain exquisite cream kind with a slender red stem and bright scarlet leaves. (239)

Kezia ventures into this garden and observes the variety and colors of its flowers. She notices three hues in this image—white, pink, and red—but finally settles on red for a closer inspection. First, some red flowers are “so dark they seemed to turn black”; other flowers simply possess a “red stem” that presumably represents a middle value while the leaves are “bright scarlet” and lighter in value. By creating an intensely realistic image of flowers, especially through the use of three values of red, and by portraying Kezia’s delight after wandering through the garden (“She . . . gave a squeak and rolled over and

over into the thick flowery orchard grass” [239]), Mansfield replaces some of Kezia’s earlier fears with a mood of awe, wonder, and delight that emerges through her acute observation of color. As Thoma explains, in the visual arts “[b]rilliant red commands human attention. . . . Modified forms of red-rose, maroon, and pink are beautiful, expressive, universally appealing, and deeply emotional” (62).

In “At the Bay” Mansfield again relies on the three-value system to express Linda Burnell’s conflicting moods and to contrast those moods with her daughter Kezia’s reaction to the garden in “Prelude”:

In a steamer chair, under a manuka tree . . . Linda Burnell dreamed the morning away. . . . She looked up at the dark, close, dry leaves of the manuka . . . and now and again a tiny yellowish flower dropped on her. . . . Each pale yellow petal shone as if each was the careful work of a loving hand. . . . And when you turned it over the outside was a deep bronze colour. But as soon as they flowered, they fell and scattered. You brushed them off your frock as you talked; the horrid little things got caught in one’s hair. Why, then, flower at all? Who takes the trouble—or the joy—to make all these things that are wasted. . . . It was uncanny. (277-78)

Linda, too, feels the joy of nature as she looks at the “yellowish” flowers (a midtone), the “pale yellow” petals, and “deep bronze” underside. However, adult pragmatism and feelings of fatalism soon overshadow the yellow flowers’ cheerfulness. The mood quickly changes and contrasts sharply with Kezia’s buoyant happiness. According to Ronning, setting in the New Zealand stories reveals “a place of shared values and shared scenery . . . and the theme of parent-child relationship” (133). Mansfield more

specifically demonstrates (in “Prelude” and “At the Bay”) a polarization of mother and daughter/parent and child. Both Linda and Kezia enjoy the intricate beauty of nature, but Linda allows a critical and pessimistic nature to overtake her aesthetic appreciation of the moment—a reaction that may reflect yellow’s negative connotation of inconstancy.

In another scene from “At the Bay,” Mansfield achieves entirely different results by experimenting with intensities. Alice, the Burnell’s servant girl, accepts a social invitation from Mrs. Stubbs but finds Mrs. Stubbs’s home, interests, and conversation rather peculiar. Near the end of the scene, Mansfield describes Mrs. Stubbs’s neck in terms of four hues of different intensities: “She arched her plump neck. What a neck she had! It was bright pink where it began and then it changed to warm apricot, and that faded to the colour of a brown egg and then to a deep creamy” (287). Placing emphasis on different hues helps shift the emphasis from values to intensities as do the key words “bright . . . warm . . . faded . . . deep,” which collectively encompass a bright-to-dull spectrum. The overall effect offers a distasteful portrait of Mrs. Stubbs’s “plump neck,” which introduces the most significant passage in the scene. Earlier, Mrs. Stubbs has described her husband’s death and shown Alice his photograph, but following the narrator’s description of her neck, Mrs. Stubbs makes an astounding statement: “‘All the same, my dear . . . freedom’s best!’ Her soft, fat chuckle sounded like a purr. ‘Freedom’s best,’ said Mrs. Stubbs again” (287). Alice’s discomfort increases to the point that her “mind flew back to her own kitching [sic]. Ever so queer! She wanted to be back in it again” (287). Cued by the unsightliness of Mrs. Stubbs’s neck, Alice decides Mrs. Stubbs’s attitude is unseemly and desires a swift return to the security of the Burnell’s home. Mrs. Stubbs, a widow, exists in an odd world of memories and strange

attempts to cope with reality as evinced by her account of her husband's death and her fascination with large photographs of herself. She begins "to pour out" to Alice (286) during the visit—an indication of loneliness—but her declaration of freedom conflicts with the impression of loneliness and sustains the mood of tension heightened by the intensities of skin color—all of which contribute to Alice's apprehension.

The effect of Mansfield's focus on Mrs. Stubbs's neck depends on the use of four intensities of dissimilar hues. Although Mrs. Stubbs's skin could be mottled, readers are not told of that possibility. The description most likely illustrates various intensities of light reflected from an uneven skin surface. Mansfield possibly had little knowledge of the formal principles of values or intensities used in painting and arbitrarily chose those colors. Although Dunstan points out that inexperienced artists show "a lack of purpose in their tonal [intensity] structure. . . . A 'jumpiness' of tone . . . [which] will inevitably lead to a lack of unity" (32-33), Mansfield's deft use of the three-value system to reveal greater understanding demonstrates a knowledgeable application of color theory. Therefore, it also seems likely that Mansfield intentionally manipulates intensities in this scene to create a sense of disunity, confusion, or distaste in the image of Mrs. Stubbs's neck. The colors and intensities in this illustration seem to be chosen with great care to illustrate the unattractive fat deposits and simultaneously induce a mood of tension or uneasiness. Although not bound by any rules of drawing or painting, Mansfield once again allows readers to experience the effectiveness of color in visual imagery—this time through intensity.

Mansfield's visual images occasionally capture colors she associates with atmospheric conditions; these images are reminiscent of paintings from the nineteenth-

century school of impressionism. Julia van Gunsteren finds Mansfield's general use of color impressionistic—a technique that portrays colors affected by variations of natural light. According to van Gunsteren, “A direct link between Mansfield's use of color and those of Impressionism in painting is her use of subdued colours in a manner resembling the Impressionist's law of subjective compensatory colour, which left the process of blending these tints and hues to the eye of the viewer” (emphasis added, 167). As van Gunsteren explains, these colors also may evoke moods and reveal “the mental state of the characters” (167). Although van Gunsteren implies that Mansfield's colors are often pastel hues or values that create shadowy or shimmering forms, evidence to the contrary demonstrates Mansfield's frequent reliance on high-intensity colors and sharply delineated objects and features. Nevertheless, van Gunsteren's point about the impressionistic techniques that Mansfield employs in many images is valid. As illustrated in the following examples, the link between Mansfield's use of color and the principles of impressionism is a source of light. Color exists, of course, when there is “sufficient light in the narrow band of wavelengths called the ‘visible spectrum’” (Edwards 205), but impressionism usually creates the suggestion of filtered light caused by atmospheric conditions that soften or blur a viewer's perception of objects. Rather than bright, separate colors like those that emerge from light projected through a clear prism, impressionistic colors blend in the diffused light of shade, fog, rain, haze, or mist.

In “At the Bay” Mansfield paints a verbal picture of a sunset observed by Linda that contains “subdued” colors that are the result of fading sunlight as it passes through clouds:

In the western sky there were great masses of crushed-up rose-coloured clouds. Broad beams of light shone through the clouds and beyond them as if they would cover the whole sky. Overhead the blue faded; it turned a pale gold, and the bush outlined against it gleamed dark and brilliant like metal. (293)

In “The Little Governess” another image of sunlight and changing color imparts an impressionistic effect: “The sun came out, the pink clouds in the sky, the strawberry clouds were eaten by the blue” (209). “Bliss,” too, focuses on the impressionistic separation and merging of colors in the light of dusk: “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” (338), and “When she had finished with them [the fruit] and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect. . . . For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air” (338-39). Even as early as “The Tiredness of Rosabel,” Mansfield demonstrates an awareness of the effects of impressionism: “Rosabel looked out of the windows; the street was blurred and misty, but light striking on the panes turned their dullness to opal and silver, and the jewellers’ shops seen through this, were fairy palaces” (3).

Canaday expands the definition of impressionistic painting from simply capturing the “light and atmosphere of a particular time of day” to applying colors in a very spotty or irregular manner that allows the eye to blend the colors into recognizable atmospheric effects (81). According to van Gunsteren, Gillian Boddy noted Mansfield’s ability to reproduce this technique in her fiction by blending, merging, or modifying objects or

features that capture “the light and the shade, the overall impression or mood”(142).

Although van Gunsteren does not elaborate on the specific details Boddy observed

Mansfield softening or changing, color must certainly be among those features.

Interestingly enough, in some of Mansfield’s images that create impressionistic atmospheres through blending of color, she actually follows the images with explanations of the moods as if concerned that readers may misinterpret them. These explanations may represent her uncertainty about the effectiveness of techniques borrowed from impressionistic painting in creating moods in fiction, or she may have recognized the fact that moods perceived as arising from impressionistic blending of colors may be highly subjective.

In “At the Bay,” for example, Linda witnesses the fading sunset. As Burgan points out, the beautiful sunset contains both “the threat of a world made for men and the solace of the woman’s destiny,” in which case the former expresses Linda’s fears about her role as wife and the latter reveals her reconciliation with her role as a mother (113). Fear and joy coexist in a single visual image illustrating divine power and natural beauty, but Mansfield’s omniscient narration clarifies the matter and reveals Linda’s acceptance of her life. Linda thinks of the power of “Jehovah . . . Whose eye is upon you, ever watchful, never weary” (293) until she realizes that “to-night . . . there was something infinitely joyful and loving in those silver beams” (294). Similarly, in “Bliss” Mansfield informs her readers that the lovely fruit, bowl, and dish seen in the “dusky light” heighten Bertha’s blissful mood and cause her to laugh (339). However, this image, too, contains a polarity of moods, as explained by Pamela Dunbar in “What Does Bertha Want?: A Re-reading of Katherine Mansfield’s ‘Bliss.’” Dunbar states that “even before she settles

down to arrange her tray of fruit—Bertha’s reaction to this ‘blissful’ mood is complex: she both fears it and endeavors to precipitate an increase in its power” (130-31).

Arranging fruit makes Bertha laugh, but she also realizes that she is “getting hysterical” and quickly leaves the room (339). The rapidly fading light, the shimmering colors of the fruit, and the deepening shadows in the room impart joy but also threaten Bertha’s bliss. This softening effect of impressionistic light and color captures the varying moods experienced by a single character, but Mansfield’s narration confirms the ambiguity of moods arising from impressionistic light and colors that support the theme of change or transition.

Katherine Mansfield’s love of color is expressed in many of her short stories. Her growth as a writer parallels her increasingly sophisticated use of color, and her reliance on the psychological effects of color to reveal moods demonstrates her awareness of a visual language that sometimes exceeds the power of the written word. The visual language of color taps into an understanding of human emotions that Mansfield grasps and uses to connect readers to the perceptions and emotions of her characters.

“A Proper Design”

Katherine Mansfield produced many visual images that illustrate her interest in details, but details require a system of organization if they are to become meaningful. Mansfield’s visual imagery frequently reveals a dependence on methods of organization based on several principles of visual composition. As Julia van Gunsteren indicates, “[f]or Mansfield the world constituted an indistinct picture, it needed a proper design, ‘a whole scheme’” (87). Mansfield seems to have discovered that “a proper design” in visual imagery could be produced by borrowing concepts from three principles of visual composition that guide readers to the most important details of her images. The principles she relied on are focal point, reductive imagery, and perspective.

Mansfield seemed to realize that she needed a method to underscore the most meaningful lines, colors, and objects in her stories. Angela Gair observes in The Watercolor Painter’s Solution Book that in painting it is necessary to have “a strong focal point . . . somewhere for the viewer’s eye to linger” and that “[e]qually important . . . is guiding the viewer’s eye through the picture toward the focal point” (52). Many of Mansfield’s significant visual images display a concern with visual focal point and methods of directing attention to it, accomplished by describing one group of objects or features that create a background and then a second group that adds more complex and meaningful elements to the scene. For example, Mansfield offers a sketchy overall setting in the opening of the story “Ole Underwood”: “On one side of the hill

grew a forest of pines from the road right down to the sea. On the other side short tufted grass and little bushes of white manuka flower” (135). Against this background she focuses on the three most important linear details as discussed in Chapter One: the “topmost branches” of the pine trees, the umbrella, and the windblown cape (135), which together suggest anger. Similarly, in “The Tiredness of Rosabel” Mansfield provides a simple description of Rosabel’s daydream about the beautiful young woman’s bedroom the night of a ball, but she ends with a focal point of intense color: “A fire in her bedroom . . . and her beautiful, shining dress spread on the bed—white tulle over silver, silver shoes, silver scarf, a little silver fan” (7). This brief description highlights Rosabel’s juvenile notion of happiness—material wealth. As she walks into her bedroom, a “fire” initially reveals a bed and a “beautiful, shining dress.” Rosabel then focuses on the color silver, which as explained previously, intensifies the mood of naiveté.

The focal point of some visual imagery stresses significant objects rather than lines or colors. In “The Woman at the Store,” for example, Mansfield guides readers through a room but concludes with objects that introduce a theme:

It was a large room, the walls plastered with old pages of English periodicals. . . . A table with an ironing board and wash tub on it, some wooden forms, a black horsehair sofa, and some broken cane chairs pushed against the walls. The mantelpiece above the stove was draped in pink paper, further ornamented with dried grasses and ferns and a coloured print of Richard Seddon. There were four doors—one, judging from the smell, let into the “Store,” one on to the “back yard,” through a third I saw

the bedroom. Flies buzzed in circles round the ceiling, and treacle papers and bundles of dried clover were pinned to the window curtain. (127)

The flies are the only living creatures in this scene that describes the simple home of the woman and her daughter. More importantly, the inhabitants' desire to capture flies becomes apparent in the presence of the "treacle papers" and the "dried clover" used to attract flies—a subtle technique for introducing the theme of entrapment.

Mansfield also directs readers to the focal point, or most important object, in visual imagery from "At the Bay" to support a different theme. Each of the three introductory paragraphs of this section of the story begins with inanimate objects before demonstrating signs of lower life forms, but this example—the third paragraph—reveals the first evidence of human life:

The green blinds were drawn in the bungalows of the summer colony. Over the verandas, prone on the paddock, flung over the fences, there were exhausted-looking bathing-dresses and rough striped towels. Each back window seemed to have a pair of sand-shoes on the sill and some lumps of rock or a bucket or a collection of pawa shells. The bush quivered in a haze of heat; the sandy road was empty except for the Trouts' dog Snooker, who lay stretched in the very middle of it. His blue eye was turned up, his legs stuck out stiffly, and he gave an occasional desperate-sounding puff, as much as to say he had decided to make an end of it and was only waiting for some kind of cart to come along. (281)

Even though humans are only represented by their possessions, compared to the two preceding portrayals of minute sea life, the imagery in this scene suggests higher forms of

life that culminate in the description of Snooker. The image of drawn blinds, damp clothing, and abandoned shoes and collections provide a sense of desertion, but Snooker's presence ends the mystery of human inactivity. The hot afternoon sun causes exhaustion, and humans along with many other creatures require a period of idleness. This final description of an overheated, motionless dog sustains the implied, paradoxical themes of the fragility and continuity of life that is apparent in the conversation between Kezia and her grandmother in the next scene.

Mansfield also chooses to emphasize small objects and minute details in many images, at times narrowing the focus to almost microscopic proportions in order to evoke moods or reveal themes. Berkman cites this interest in reduced detail as an example of Mansfield's use of reductive imagery, which Berkman defines as "a reduction of scope . . . which allows for high particularization of detail. . . . Material objects are visualized with minute precision" (157). Reductive imagery in Mansfield's stories actually relies on one of two artistic methods: magnification or miniaturization. In some images she simply tightens the focus on details to reveal only minute features, a method that resembles magnification, but in other images she reduces entire figures or features to minute proportions. Berkman finds the use of reductive imagery in Mansfield's numerous indoor visual images (157), but even some outdoor panoramic views narrow to reveal precise details as in the following example from "At the Bay":

The tide was out; the beach was deserted; lazily flopped the warm sea. The sun beat down, beat down hot and fiery on the fine sand, baking the grey and blue and black and white-veined pebbles. It sucked up the little drop of water that lay in the hollow of the curved shells; it bleached the

pink convolvulus that threaded through and through the sand-hills.

Nothing seemed to move but the small sand-hoppers. Pit-pit-pit! They were never still. (281)

The clear, bright sky and low tide provide the necessary conditions for seeing the pebbles' minuscule veins and the evaporation of the "little drop of water" resting within abandoned seashells. Mansfield begins with an expansive frame of reference—a deserted beach on a hot afternoon—and then narrows viewers' vision to reveal easily overlooked details. In this particular example, the tiny details also subtly imply the continuity of life through the presentation of the drying seashells, the thriving convolvulus, and the moving sand-hoppers that seem immune to the intense heat. Mansfield expands on that theme in the next paragraph through the curved lines of the convolvulus, marine life, and rippling water, a scene that progresses to the scene describing overheated Snooker, the dog, which ultimately leads to the conversation about death and the expression of love between Kezia and her grandmother.

In "Psychology" (1920), Mansfield applies reductive imagery to a characters' imagination. The woman in this story pictures herself and her companion as figures in a tiny portrait. Mansfield reduces this imagined scene to a quaint miniature painting (reminiscent of the tiny designs on Russian lacquer boxes or monastic manuscripts of the Middle Ages) of a man and woman who may seem totally at ease with each other:

Yes, while she shook the teapot hot and dry over the spirit flame she saw those other two, him, leaning back, taking his ease among the cushions, and her, curled up *en escargot* in the blue shell arm-chair. The picture was

so clear and so minute it might have been painted on the blue teapot lid.

(315)

The details of the scene reveal something further, however. The man appears to be comfortable, but the woman seems to be withdrawing like a snail into the “blue shell arm-chair.” This imaginary work of art thus subtly introduces the theme of vulnerability that becomes readily apparent as the story progresses and the man and woman struggle to maintain their platonic friendship and suppress physical and emotional desires.

Mansfield employs the third artistic principle, linear perspective, in some of the visual images of “Sun and Moon” (1920) to develop, once again, a notion of naiveté. In “Katherine Mansfield’s Images of Art,” Kirsty Cochrane describes Mansfield’s technique in this story as “sustained oblique perspective made up of the elongated or foreshortened view which the children’s physical relationship to the adults gives them, together with their innocence. Their sightline is part of their innocent vision” (153). As the story develops, Mansfield uses linear perspective of various objects and people and the sense of naiveté it produces to introduce a theme of appearance versus reality. The story begins as the children, Sun and Moon, observe the preparations for a party in their home from various distances and angles, creating linear perspective:

In the afternoon the chairs came, a whole big cart full of little gold ones with their legs in the air. And then the flowers came. When you stared down from the balcony at the people carrying them the flower pots looked like funny awfully nice hats nodding up the path.

Moon thought they were hats. She said: “Look. There’s a man wearing a palm on his head.” But she never knew the difference between real things and not real ones. (378)

Mansfield continues to rely on artistic linear perspective to illustrate the children’s simplicity and candor: “The big piano was put in a corner and then there came a row of flower pots and then there came the goldy chairs” (378); “If she [Moon] got tangled in people’s legs they only threw her up and shook her till she squeaked” (378); the cook, Minnie, “lifted them up on to the flour bin so that they could watch the wonderful things she and the man were making for supper” (379); and “they all went into the dining-room. Sun and Moon were almost frightened. They wouldn’t go up to the table at first; they just stood at the door and made eyes at it” (379). Mansfield imparts a sense of the children’s innocence by using angles and distance to emphasize their childish perspective and perceptions and make it part of their world, including the adults’ creation of a beautiful setting for the party.

Adult characters’ perceptions call attention to the children’s naïve idealism by repeatedly referring to the children in their costumes and the beautiful party decorations as “pictures” of perfection: the housemaid describes the dining room table decorated with “ribbons and bunches of roses” and “a lake with rose petals floating on it” as “a picture” (379); the children’s mother cries ““What a picture”” when she sees her children in their costumes (381); and admiring guests exclaim ““What a picture!’ . . . ‘Oh, the ducks! Oh, the lambs! Oh, the sweets! Oh, the pets!’” when the children appear at the party (381). Adult responses metaphorically reinforce the children’s perception of perfection first introduced by their visual perspectives.

Sun is slightly older than Moon and reveals a growing awareness that the world is not always what it seems to be. When Sun sees the little “ice pudding” house with its “brown door and . . . nut for a handle” that will become a table centerpiece at his parents’ party, he suddenly feels “quite tired” (379) as if the miniature-but-proportionally-correct house confuses his notion of reality. Mansfield depicts Sun’s discovery of imperfection as, after the guests leave the home in shambles, she portrays the young boy’s railing at a situation that leaves him disillusioned:

And the little pink house with the snow roof and the green windows was broken—half melted away in the centre of the table.

“Come on, Sun,” said Father, pretending not to notice. . . .

“Have a bit of this ice,” said Father, smashing in some more of the roof. . . .

But Sun did not move from the door. Suddenly he put up his head and gave a loud wail.

“I think it’s horrid—horrid—horrid!” he sobbed. (383-84)

While gazing at the ruins of an adult party and watching his father carelessly smash “the little pink house,” Sun demonstrates painful uncertainty. He struggles with the memories of perfection he had viewed and had heard confirmed by adults on the one hand and the reality of imperfection on the other. Cochrane indicates that the disparity between child and adult perceptions may simply arise from the multifaceted and paradoxical nature of reality:

In what sense was the child’s original perception of reality not “real”?

Perspective in this story is something literal, deriving for instance from the

children's line of vision upstairs looking down, so that their "point of view" is something actual, as well as being a matter of emotional attitude. This can cause us to ask: What is real? How can we tell? Is truth after all a matter of perspective? (153)

Cochrane implies that all levels of perspective may offer equally valid perceptions of reality. Mansfield shows in a moment of epiphany, however, that Sun realizes the old, idealistic reality no longer exists for him.

Mansfield's use of focal point, reductive imagery, and perspective designate a purpose for visual imagery beyond the realm of setting, characterization, or simple portrayal of sensory perception. Each method helps focus readers' attention on the most meaningful elements of visual images and guides readers through the maze of detailed imagery Mansfield so thoroughly relished.

Heart of a Writer—Soul of a Painter

Although Katherine Mansfield is best known for her ability to create short stories that contain sensuous imagery and feature moments of epiphany, she also reveals a growing sense of the power of the visual arts to communicate through principles of line, color, and composition. As a dedicated writer, her creativity flows through language based on written and oral traditions, but she also speaks through the visual language of forms and colors to those who are attuned to its powers. In support of this study, an account of Mansfield's portrayal of artistic characters and an investigation of her relationship with Dorothy Brett provide further evidence of the essential nature of the visual arts in her work.

Although Mansfield did not leave direct evidence of her reliance on artistic principles, she created some characters who demonstrate varying degrees of artistic interest or talent. These characters offer glimpses of the vital role the visual arts and artists play in her fiction. In several stories male characters demonstrate an interest in painting. For instance, in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" a handsome young man triggers Rosabel's daydream about love and wealth when he asks, "Ever been painted?" (6). In "Daphne" (1923) a self-assured male first-person narrator establishes a sense of mystery about his work and intentions: "Painting is far and away the most important thing in life—as I see it. But—my work is my own affair. It's the separate compartment which is me. No strangers allowed in. I haven't the smallest desire to explain what it is I'm after"

(645). In other stories Mansfield features female characters who take active roles in drawing or designing. In “At the Bay,” for example, Kezia draws an imaginary picture in the air while conversing with her grandmother (282), while the little girl in “The Woman at the Store” (1912) draws a picture that reveals the truth about her mother (134). In “The Garden-Party” (1922) Laura’s mother states, “‘you’re the artistic one,’” and places the responsibility for arranging the house and lawn for the party on Laura, who believes “she could do it so much better than anybody else” (534). While these examples generally display limited roles of artists and artistry in the development of the respective stories, they nevertheless suggest Mansfield’s fascination with the visual arts.

Mansfield’s own life provides more crucial evidence of her interest in visual art and the merging of verbal and visual languages. Several of Mansfield’s letters and journal entries indicate her admiration for painting and painters, particularly Dorothy Brett, and these sources sometimes expose a relationship between painting and her writing. In “Katherine Mansfield and the Honourable Dorothy Brett: A Correspondence of Artists,” Gardner McFall states that Mansfield enjoyed Manet and van Gogh’s paintings (66). More specifically, according to Sandley, she mentioned van Gogh’s Sunflowers and one unidentified painting as influential in her writing: “‘It [Sunflowers] lived with me afterwards. It still does—that & another of a sea-captain in a flat cap. They taught me something about writing, which was queer—a kind of freedom—or rather, a shaking free’” (72). These two paintings spoke to Mansfield on a personal level and somehow imparted the notion that she, like van Gogh, was free to express herself in whatever form or language that suited her needs.

Mansfield's friendship with painter Dorothy Brett most likely proved the greatest incentive to attempt a blend of verbal and visual languages. McFall explains that even though Brett had an affair with Murry, Mansfield "was able to rise above the personal grievances she harbored, for the sake of addressing and perfecting her work" (56). Correspondence with Brett proved essential, McFall states, because "[a]bsent, across the distance, Brett could be for Mansfield the kind of friend that Roland Barthes has described as 'one who constructs around you the greatest possible resonance'" (69). McFall also indicates that Mansfield "could draw from her [Brett] what was analogous to and important for her own writing without being bothered or impeded by the reality of Brett's presence" (65). Brett evidently shared Mansfield's aesthetic and psychological concerns about composing meaningful artistic works, just as Mansfield valued her friend's talents and opinions as revealed in this response to one of Brett's works: "I seem to see what you're getting at . . . the sudden arrest, poise, *moment*, *capture* of the figure in a flowing shade and sunlight world" (McFall 66).

A significant indication of the importance of Mansfield's friendships with painters occurs in a prose piece from her journal, which McFall claims was probably written with Anne Estelle Rice in mind but also reflects her relationship with Brett:

When the two women in white came down to the lonely beach—*She* threw away her paintbox—and *She* threw away her notebook. Down they sat on the sand. The tide was low. Before them the weedy rocks were like some herd of shaggy beasts huddled at the pool to drink and staying there in a kind of stupor.

Then *She* went off and dabbled her legs in a pool thinking about the colour of flesh under water. And *She* crawled into a dark cave and sat there thinking about her childhood. Then they came back to the beach and flung themselves down on their bellies, hiding their heads in their arms. They looked like two swans. (McFall 56)

The painter and writer in this passage shed the tools of their respective trades, retreat into thought, and emerge with twin identities. This sketch appears to be an acknowledgment of Mansfield's belief that painters and writers share essential creative natures and processes.

McFall claims "there was something of the painter in Mansfield, and something about the nature of painting meaningful to her work" (66). Discovering that "something" about painting which reveals itself in many of her visual images requires not only an understanding of her exposure to and interest in the visual arts and artists but, more importantly, a careful analysis of the shared elements of her visual imagery and painting. This study points to possibilities that may have permitted her to write many stories in two interwoven languages to satisfy her own creative nature as well as to provide an alternate means of disclosing moods and themes.

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