

# On the Narrative Art of Katherine Mansfield's Novels

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**Abstract:** *Katherine Mansfield, a famous writer from New Zealand, was born in 1888 and has a significant influence in the British literary world. Katherine Mansfield has an unusual talent in literature, which has played a very important role in the creation and reform of short stories. Katherine Mansfield is the main leader of the trend of modern literature at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In her short stories, she has incorporated many modern narrative methods and methods. Through the analysis and summary of the narrative art of Katherine Mansfield's novels, we can realize the unique value of Katherine Mansfield's literary and artistic creation, and provide an important reference for the reform and innovation of contemporary literary creation.*

**Keywords:** *Katherine Mansfield, Novel, Narrative art*

## 1. Introduction

Katherine Mansfield's short stories absorbed the excellent genes of British novel creation, and at the same time incorporated a certain amount of modernist narrative skills, reflecting people's mental state and certain social problems from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Some literary critics believe that the subject matter of Katherine Mansfield's short stories is shallow and narrow. In fact, these criticisms are unfair. Katherine Mansfield's novel creation has injected new vitality into the British literary world, and also brought the British short story creation to a new height. Therefore, studying the narrative art of Katherine Mansfield's novels has very important literary and historical value.[1]

## 2. The poetic narrative structure of prose

### 2.1. Dilution of plot

The so-called prose poetry mainly integrates the characteristics of poetry and prose into a literary theme, providing structural support for the lyric and ideological expression of the author. This form of literary creation can not only express the author's emotion in poetic language, but also be a free book like prose. Therefore, prose poetry, a literary form, is favored by many literary creators. As a poet and novelist, Katherine Mansfield integrated the relevant characteristics of prose poetry into the process of novel creation, forming a unique narrative structure of prose poetry. Katherine Mansfield's prose poetic structure in her novels is mainly reflected in the following two aspects: First, his novel creation does not focus on pursuing the requirements of traditional novels for plot conflict and plot drama, but focuses on writing some details in life and expressing the characters' description of their own subjective spiritual world. Secondly, Katherine Mansfield's novel creation has changed the traditional linear narrative structure, and the novel narrative of history has shown multi-dimensional effects through the inverted narrative mode of time and space. For example, Katherine Mansfield's novels do not have the traditional beginning and ending parts. She does not focus on the topics of people's general concern, such as the characters, time and place. She often starts with some key events and brings the readers into the relevant situation process with the help of the dialogues or scenes of the characters in the novels. In this process, the author is also able to gradually follow Katherine Mansfield's description to ponder and analyze the historical background and other information of the novel. This kind of novel opening design can close the relationship between readers and the novel content, so that readers can become the participants of the novel unconsciously, which has a very important positive significance for the stimulation of readers' reading interest and enthusiasm.[2] At the same time, Katherine Mansfield used the prose style to describe the environment in the novel during this process, creating a strong lyrical atmosphere. In contrast, some other writers' novels also use these techniques, but their purpose is often to serve the appearance

of characters and plot development. Katherine Mansfield only described it as a simple natural environment in a lyrical way. Although this process does not play a role in promoting the development of the plot of the novel, it has, to a certain extent, laid a good narrative tone for the full text of the novel.

In the middle part of the novel, Katherine Mansfield also showed a strong resistance to the linear narrative structure of traditional novels, which was not rigidly bound to the linear narrative structure of cause, process and result, but creatively used the writing method of combining fragments to form the main body of the story. People generally named her novel narrative method as the prelude method. The novel created by using the overture method does not have a complete story clue, nor does it develop linearly according to the time sequence, and lacks the corresponding logical relationship and continuous relationship. Each independent segment can become a separate novel structure, and different segments are linked through themes or emotions.

For example, Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Overture* contains a total of 12 parts. The first part describes the Bernel family's need to carry too much luggage during the move process, and transportation conditions have led to their need for multiple round trips. Kaicia and Roti can only temporarily have neighbors to take care of them; In the second and fourth parts, Katherine Mansfield describes the shopkeeper who takes Cathy and Rorty to their new home. At dinner, the protagonist's family talked about their wonderful life around the table. After falling asleep, Katherine Mansfield described two dreams of Belle; In the following fifth part, Katherine Mansfield describes Linda's dream, and focuses on the specific consciousness and activities of Linda's heart; In the sixth part, Katherine Mansfield describes the daily activities of the women and children who stay at home. This part actually reflects the insipidity and beauty of daily life; The seventh part describes Stanley's related scenes after returning home and Belle's inner activities during the guitar playing process; The eighth and ninth parts are mainly caused by a dialogue, describing the children's daily dialogue; The tenth part, from the point of view of the maid Alice, sets off the character characteristics of Belle and Alice; The eleventh part describes the specific situation of the protagonist's family during the dinner and the specific activities of the protagonist's family after the dinner, and intersperses Linda's dreams and ideological activities with descriptions; The last twelve parts are based on the letter from Belle's friend Nan, describing his recent life and life experience. The end of the story is to use the character of Caesia to bring Beryl's emotion back into reality. The final end of the story is to use the ellipsis, which also brings people infinite reverie.[3]

Through the structural analysis of the above novels, it can be found that although the novel does not have a long time span, it can still be felt from the author's description that the plot continues to develop in a chronological order. However, in this process, Katherine Mansfield has broken the traditional sense of the novel's temporal order and causal relationship, making the novel lack corresponding dramatic conflicts, only full of life fragments and associations. Katherine Mansfield arranges the plot in the novel in the inner world of the characters, and projects the external world through the eyes of the characters. In this way, Katherine Mansfield can realize the continuous transformation of the narrative subject and integrate human's ideological activities and inner emotions into the text, which also desalinates the proportion of the dramatic plot in the novel.

## ***2.2. Interlace of time and space***

Generally speaking, the creation of novels in the traditional sense mostly follows the corresponding principles of temporal and spatial order. However, some writers represented by Katherine Mansfield have abandoned the adherence to the concept of time and space in traditional novels. But they have inverted time and space through the reversal and overlap of time, as well as the dislocation and decomposition of space, which can also show Katherine Mansfield's modernistic characteristics in her novels.

Generally, the so-called temporal and spatial errors mainly refer to the dislocation of story time and narrative time in the novel, and at the same time, the spatial locations in the novel will also undergo corresponding interleaving. In this process, Katherine Mansfield also uses the method of sequencing to integrate some scattered life fragments, and the connection point of integration is the instantaneous emotions of the protagonist or a character in the novel. This can give the novel a strong lyrical atmosphere and prose poetic romantic charm to a certain extent, and in this way, Katherine Mansfield can also enable people to find the aesthetic value of literature in the process of reading the novel, thus giving a new vitality to the short story

### 3. Unique narrative discourse

In novel creation, the dialogue between the characters can provide an important impetus for the shaping of the characters and the development of the story. In fact, in addition to the expression of human language, the expression of character discourse also includes the third party's reporting of character discourse and the processing and editing in the process of reporting. With the continuous deepening of people's research on novels, people began to conduct in-depth research on the different ways of characters' discourse in novels. In this process, Katherine Mansfield's novel character discourse has unique and personalized characteristics, and also presents many highlights in the expression of character discourse. In Katherine Mansfield's novel creation, she usually uses the technique of direct inner monologue for the characters' words, and with the continuous maturity of her novel creation, she appropriately adds some descriptions of surrounding scenes and characters' behaviors on the basis of her inner monologue technique. At the same time, Katherine Mansfield has her own originality in the use of indirect speech. The indirect speech she uses is the same as the narrative description in person and tense, and can strengthen the ironic effect in the novel by the contrast of objective and reliable narrative description.

For example, the main content of Katherine Mansfield's novel "Modern Marriage" is that William is a man who needs to work and travel outside for a long time. In the long life, he gradually can't tolerate the interaction between his wife and those fashionable friends outside, so he is ready to divorce his wife. In fact, Katherine Mansfield described William's feelings about his wife through a free indirect quotation: however, Isabella was not as happy as she was. She didn't even notice it at all. She was completely confused and aggressive. God, she is really blind. At that time, Jing didn't see at all that she hated the inconvenient little house in her heart and thought that the fat nanny was trampling on her children. She also did not see that she was so lonely that she wanted to make fashionable friends, touch fashionable music, paintings and other things. Although we can see from this passage that William has some introspection on his wife's behavior, we can find that William does not actually express regret from it. At the same time, combining with the context, it is found that the words "if not" in the text also express William's feelings of disgust. Therefore, the use of free indirect speech to express William's own ideas is in fact to describe his wife's behavior and opposite accusations through William's reflection, which actually reflects the ironic description effect of the characteristic of free indirect speech.[4]

### 4. Flexible and free narrative perspective

Katherine Mansfield's novel creation has strong modernist characteristics. In terms of narrative perspective, she uses the "selective omniscient perspective" in the "external perspective" and the "limited perspective of transformational characters" in the "internal perspective" to describe, with very good narrative effects.

#### 4.1. *Selective omniscient perspective*

The selective omniscient perspective mainly refers to the fact that the narrator, although he is omniscient in nature and chooses his own perception range to describe. Through this perspective, although the narrator can see everything, he will not easily make comments on external people and things. This kind of description usually can make the distance between the narrator and the text constantly enlarge, thus reducing the narrator's intervention in the text and improving the aesthetic characteristics of the novel. At the same time, readers' involvement in this process has also been enhanced, enabling them to achieve self-judgment and self-recognition in the exploration of the characters' inner world.

#### 4.2. *Limited perspective of transformational characters*

Compared with the selective omniscient perspective with God's perspective, the limited perspective of transformational characters can use the perspective of different characters to present the plot of the story and the inner world of the characters, which can effectively supplement the limitations of the perspective of a single character. Katherine Mansfield tried to use this technique for the first time in her novel *The Prelude*, which was highly praised by people, especially the critics of the novel. In this way of narration, different narrative roles can transform each other, making people feel that the narrator seems to know everything, but the narrator is not a unified and fixed whole. In addition, Kathleen Mansfield also used this narrative method in her essay "In the Bay", which skillfully introduced the narrator into different characters and even the natural environment, using changes in the natural environment to

smoothly change the narrative perspective, thereby achieving a very good narrative effect.[5]

## 5. Repetitive narrative forms

Many critics believe that Mansfield's novels have the shortcoming of "the same narrative form", which actually shows Mansfield's depletion of writing inspiration and lack of writing ability. In fact, this criticism of Mansfield is grossly unfair. Many of Mansfield's novels describe the spiritual confusion of human beings in the early 20th century, the alienation of interpersonal relationships, and the relationship between the sexes. He just described these themes repeatedly in different novels. Therefore, it cannot be simply and crudely considered that Mansfield's repetition of themes is equivalent to the exhaustion of inspiration. In addition, the narrative form of Mansfield's texts is not simply the same, but integrates the characteristics of differences into the narrative, thus realizing the superposition and sublimation of meaning.

### 5.1. Repetition of theme and theme

The themes of Mansfield's novels are seldom related to some social and historical themes, but only start with some simple life fragments, and explore the essence of life and human nature from small to large. However, due to the relatively simple structure of Mansfield's novels and the relatively implicit expression of themes, many critics question the depth of Mansfield's novels. In fact, Mansfield's novels contain rich and profound themes under the euphemistic twists and turns, and the calm appearance. For example, when Mansfield feels that the spirit alienates him from the world, she expresses a very strong sense of loneliness in the novel. In the short stories "The Baron", "The Baroness's Sister" and "Sunbath", although the protagonists, plots and scenes of the stories are independent of each other, the concerns of these novels are similar. This repetition of themes and themes is not due to the author's lack of life experience and lack of inspiration, but Mansfield uses the alienation of different protagonists to the same theme to show his anxiety about the characters' own cognition and the contradiction of values. A more artistic form of fiction writing.

### 5.2. Repetition of images and symbols

Mansfield's works are characterized by rich symbolic meanings and symbolic images. The appearance of these rich symbolic contents in different works constructs the superposition and value-added of symbolic meanings, thus endowing short stories with stronger appeal and deeper thoughts emotion. In Mansfield's novels, some images such as the sun, the moon, and the sea represent masculine masculinity, femininity, and the tenacious qualities expressed by women in the process of fighting against life. For example, Mansfield used the image of the sun repeatedly in his novels "Prelude" and "The Late Colonel's Daughter". The two novels symbolize the strong character of the protagonist.

In short, in many of Mansfield's short stories, whether it is the repetition of themes, themes or images, Mansfield expresses Mansfield's skillful use of repetitive narrative techniques, a novel description method. Grand themes such as family, personal emotions, marriage and love, war and death are integrated into the simple daily life process, revealing the essence of life and the truth of life in a peaceful place. The appearance of repetitive intentions in different novels can also endow the creation of novels with intertextual characteristics. At the same time, it plays a prominent and emphatic role in the expression of themes and emotions, which paves the way for the shaping of characters. In addition, there are some lyrical sentences recurring in Mansfield's different short stories, which also enhances the artistic effect of Mansfield's novel creation to a certain extent.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, Katherine Mansfield's novel creation has very obvious personal characteristics and artistic style. From her novel content, we can see the creative characteristics of many European writers, and we can also feel the unique characteristics of British romanticism. Katherine Mansfield has spent her whole life searching for a more perfect artistic style and creative skills in novel creation, and wants to endow novel creation with a more perfect narrative method. Through the analysis of Katherine Mansfield's novel artistic creation, it has a very important driving significance for contemporary literary criticism and literary creation.

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