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To lose myself in the soul of the other that I am not: The process of becoming in Katherine Mansfield's short stories

Abstract. The history of the critical reception of the short fiction of the writer Katherine Mansfield can be divided into two main areas: studies that investigate her short stories in their multiple relationships with Modernism, and more recent analyses that focus on her (post)colonial roots as a New Zealander. The cultural, gendered and physical *otherness* in her short stories is the privileged subject of criticism. Conversely, what is almost completely forgotten by the critics is her concern for the nonhuman world. What is most striking is how the *otherness* that ontologically characterises her life and her stories is not only a line of separation but also traces a link between different worlds. The elements of the binary paradigms are always in relation to each other and they exist only through this relation. Seen from this perspective, her short stories show the links and pave the way not to separation but to unity. This essay aims to highlight the relevance that the act of writing has for Mansfield in her attempt to create a new subjectivity that embeds human and nonhuman in a process of autopoiesis. Instead of seeing the world and its inhabitants in terms of static structures, she focuses on the network of relationships between them. It is in her network of relationships that she depicts what can be seen as her posthumanism *ante litteram*.

Keywords: Mansfield, short story, posthumanism

1. Introduction and methodology

Katherine Mansfield's writing (short stories, poetry, journals) has been extensively analyzed in recent decades in terms of her Otherness as a marginalized woman, modernist writer, and a colonial figure. However, ecocritical approaches remain rare, despite Mansfield's clear interest in nature and the growth of the field. Her concern for the nonhuman world, arguably "the most 'other' of otherness" (Harvey, 2011, p. 203), is almost completely forgotten. Yet, her stories and poems create a link, "or even a communion," between the self and the world (Mounic, 2011,

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p. 144). Her attitude towards nature and her focus on the human encounter with the nonhuman world is intertwined, on the one hand, with her “modernist desire [...] to define more vital links between humans and the natural environment” (Wilson, 2017, p. 21) and, on the other, with her continuous effort to create a new subjectivity that embeds human and nonhuman elements in a process of autopoiesis. Autopoiesis here refers to a process of self-creation of the self, involving complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values, “a process of becoming freed from ontological foundations for difference” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 159). In her short stories, Mansfield juxtaposes human and nonhuman realms, merging them to create what could be termed hybrids—fusions of different identities (animal, plant, insects, and human).

Studies on the relationship between human and nonhuman intertwine philosophical, historical, and cultural analysis and tend to redefine our conception of the nonhuman and our relationship with it. In particular, in the critical reading of Katherine Mansfield’s short stories, I will refer to the deconstructionist/postmodern current of decentering the human agent.

The approach draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s recognition of the interdependence of species; in *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (1987), the two philosophers here debating the boundaries of human identity focus not so much on a state of *being* but rather on a *process of becoming*. In their view, the human subject no longer occupies a position of fixed stability and supremacy.

One decade later, in 1997, Jacques Derrida reworks Descartes’ definition of man as a thinking being (*cogito ergo sum*) in *The animal that therefore I am*. In so doing, he challenges readers to reconsider their relationship with the nonhuman. For Derrida, it is in the encounter with the animal that human beings recognise their own human limits and, potentially, transcend them (Goodbody, 2016, pp. 254–5).

Decentering the human agency has also been a goal for the posthumanist thinkers. Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, in particular, have argued for and emphasized the centrality of relationship and interaction between human and nonhuman, which gives rise to new subjects. The distinction between subjects and objects is thus called into question, the hierarchy between dominator and dominated is dismantled, and the relationship between the two poles is read, as Haraway argues, as a “story of co-constitutive relationships” (Haraway, 2003, p. 11).

In this paper I will read Katherine Mansfield’s short stories through the lens provided by these posthumanist philosophers. In fact, Mansfield instead of viewing the world and its inhabitants as static structures, focuses on the network of relationships that link them. Moreover, it is through the very act of writing that she, in my opinion, achieves her goal: to make “the thing into a whole”, as she wrote to her brother-in-law Richard Murry on February 3, 1922 (in Kaplan, 1911, p. 203). It is in her creative writing that Mansfield manages to overcome the ‘great difficulty’ she felt in writing: “I find my great difficulty in writing is to learn to submit. [...] when I am writing of ‘another’ I want so to lose myself in the soul of the other that I am not ... (Mansfield, 1996, p. 180). She bridges the distance between human and nonhuman not through an act of domination or submission, but through an act of artistic creation. Thus, the short stories become

the poetic space where, precisely, “a process of becoming freed from ontological foundations for difference” takes place.

2. Blurring binary opposition

The presence and function of nature in Mansfield’s short stories has only recently begun to be read from an ecocritical perspective, but it has never been linked with posthumanism.

‘Nature’ is a controversial term. The main dictionaries and encyclopedias still display one set of meaning which could be summarized by the first entry of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: “the physical world and everything in it (such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc.) that is not made by people”, it is fundamental to underline how this definition overtly omits both humans and human-created environments as part of nature. Everything which has an anthropic root goes under another term: ‘culture’ (“the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively”). Even in our epoch, the dichotomy human-nature is a matter of fact. In opposition to this approach, Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway suggest an idea based on a non-dualistic understanding of nature–culture interaction. The given (nature) and the constructed (culture) are not opposite poles but rather an everchanging ‘living matter’, able to self-organise itself in a nature-culture *continuum*:

In my view, the common denominator for the posthuman condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself. This nature–culture continuum is the shared starting point for my take on posthuman theory (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 2–3).

This *continuum* is reiterated by Donna Haraway in *The companion species manifesto*:

Beings do not pre-exist their relatings. Prehensions have consequences. The world is a knot in motion. Biological and cultural determinism are both instances of misplaced concreteness-i.e., the mistake of, first, taking provisional and local category abstractions like ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ for the world and, second, mistaking potent consequences to be pre-existing foundations (Haraway, 2013, p. 6).

Prehensions measure and define a world made up of beings in relation to each other, and in this way, the nature/culture dualism is overcome; the two Cartesian polarities (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*) are replaced by a single lexical unit, *naturecultures*. This is a reciprocal principle that generates new and unprecedented meaning.

Braidotti (2013) strives towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject and her definition of posthumanism is strictly linked with her post-anthropocentric view. This view does not remove the *athropos* as much as experiment with new potential conjugations of human subjectivity:

The posthuman in the sense of post-anthropocentrism displaces the dialectical scheme of opposition, replacing well-established dualisms with the recognition of deep zoe-egalitarianism between humans and animals. The vitality of their bond is based on sharing this planet, territory or environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical, nor self-evident (Braidotti, 2013, p. 71).

What is at stake here is alleged human superiority. Both Braidotti and Haraway challenge the assumption of our privileged status, shifting the focus of their philosophical theories on the *bond* and the complexity of the *relationship* between human nature and nonhuman nature. They challenge the anthropocentric perspective not only by interrogating the binary oppositions and hierarchies between human and animal, but also by positing a more intimate material and conceptual entanglement between humans and non-humans. It is within this entanglement that they identify meaningful relationships and creative becomings.

3. The process of *becoming* in Mansfield's writing

Katherine Mansfield was born in a colonial house in Wellington, New Zealand. When she was fourteen, she moved with her family to London and then travelled to Paris, Brussels, and Germany. She returned to New Zealand in 1906, only to leave again in 1908, bound for London, then Bavaria, Garsigton, Switzerland and Italy, in search of a climate that would cure her tuberculosis, until she arrived in Fontainebleau at *Georges Ivanovic Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man* where she died on January 9, 1923. In a life characterised by displacement, Katherine Mansfield always felt a sense of otherness. Nevertheless, the New Zealand wilderness provided a crucial site of return and imaginative reconstruction throughout her artistic production.

What is more interesting here is how, since her adolescence, human and nonhuman are entangled and intertwined in her descriptions of the 'natural' elements of landscapes. Through an unusual use of personification and of anthropomorphism, and through what we could term a hypertrophy of detail, she blurs the boundaries between the two polarities, undermines the anthropocentric vision and traces in her artistic creation a *meaningful* space of relationship.

For her, writing is the search for unity through creating lists and connecting details: "Life [...] is enormously valuable, and marvellous when I'm alone, the detail of life, the life of life." (p. 81) she writes in her Journal in May 1915, and then in a letter to Samuel S. Kotliansky:

Do you, too feel an infinite delight and value in detail - not for the sake of detail but for the life in the life of it. I never can express myself (and you can laugh as much as you please.) But do you ever feel as though the Lord threw you into eternity - into the very exact centre of eternity, and even as you plunged you felt every ripple that flowed out from your plunging - every single ripple floating away and touching and drawing into its circle every slightest thing it touched (Vol. 1, p. 192).

She observes everything she encounters, she enters everything and feels everything. A “BUG in the kitchen”, “a large black louse” (p. 184), the trees “the life that goes on *within* a tree”, “a lilac jar” (p. 175), “jonquils & daffodils & big blue violets & white roses” (p. 206), the nonhuman world, as well as the human world, is a repository of details that the act of writing captures, lists and makes meaningful.

4. *The Urewera notebook*

There is something inexpressibly charming to me in railway travelling – I lean out of the window – the breeze blows, buffeting and friendly against my face – and the child spirit – hidden away under a thousand and one grey City wrappings bursts its bonds – & exults within me – I watch the long succession of brown paddocks – beautiful with here, a thick spreading of buttercups – there a white sweetness of arum lilies – And there are valleys – lit with the swaying light of broom blossom – in the distance – grey whares – two eyes & a mouth – with a bright petticoat frill [f. 3] of a garden – creeping round them – On a white road once a procession of patient cattle – wended their way, funereal wise – and afar – ^behind them^ a boy rode past on a brown horse – something in the poise of his figure – in the strong sunburnt colour of his naked legs reminded me of Walt Whit. Everywhere on the hills – great masses of charred logs – looking for all the world like strange fantastic beasts a yawning crocodile, a headless horse – a gigantic gosling – a watchdog – to be smiled at and scorned in the daylight – but a veritable nightmare in the darkness – and now & again the silver tree trunks – like a skeleton army, invade the hills – (p. 88).

These are the closing lines of the *Urewera notebook*’s opening paragraph. Before leaving New Zealand for good (she would leave Wellington on July 1908), Katherine Mansfield joined a camping trip on a tour of the North Island of New Zealand, in the wild and remote region of Urewera. She brought with her a travel journal where she collected her notes on the pulsing nature she saw and felt.

Already in this juvenile autobiographical writing, the author showed her peculiar interest in nature. Nature is for her something embracing and unsettling at the same time. What she saw from the train window was thrilling yet threatening. Through the window she became part of the visible and invisible life that inhabited the teeming *bush*.

Doorway, Window, Threshold are words that recur in Mansfield’s work, liminal places that mark the separation between the inner world and the outer world, between human and nonhuman. Windows function as both a constraint and a liberation for her characters: they simultaneously confine to one space while enabling the observation of another. It is through this act of observation that the transition from otherness to the formation of identity is realized; the windows metaphorically open, facilitating the individual’s transcendence of self-imposed boundaries and the subsequent discovery of identity in the other.

The mystery the *bush* conceals is a secret which could be felt but not realistically described or fully represented (Manenti, 2014, p. 172); only by thoroughly listing each detail she sees (the blossoming of multi-coloured flowers and the cattle, the shepherd boy, the charred logs and tree trunks like lugubrious skeletons and ravenous crocodiles) can she capture, if not name, the mystery.

Stafford and Williams underline that Mansfield “recognises the beauty of the *wild places* but fears its poison. She is drawn to the unfamiliar land, but it resists her approach. She touches it, but it recoils from her. She puts it into words, but it remains silent” (in Manenti, 2014, p. 159).

The relationship between human and nonhuman (flowers, trees, logs, the cattle, even the whares) is unbalanced; it is the human who tries to find a way to enter the nonhuman she is observing. In the process, the natural landscape observed is anthropomorphized. In so doing, the author does not renounce her human nature but neither is her use of anthropomorphism self-reflective (Taylor, 2011, p. 265). The unavoidably anthropocentric point of view of the observer is not a mark of human sovereignty (Derrida) but is the only means she has in order to meet nature and embrace it.

Moreover, nature here is already something which goes beyond the natural landscape. Mansfield includes in the nature she describes the typical Maori hut – the *whares* – and even the herdboys with their tanned skin and naked legs. In her view, there is not an *opposition* between ‘nature’ and ‘human’; ‘nature’ is an all-embracing concept which includes environment as well as the living organism within it (human and nonhuman). Following this path, the nature-human dichotomy starts to be dismantled in order to achieve a more inclusive definition. As we read in the next paragraph of the *Urewera notebook*:

After brief snatches of terribly unrefreshing sleep – I woke – and found the grey dawn slipping into the tent – I was hot & tired and full of discomfort – the frightful buzzing of the mosquitos – the slow breathing of the others seemed to weigh upon my brain for a moment and then I found that the air was alive with birds’ song – From far and near they called & cried to each other – I got up – & slipped through the little tent opening on to the wet grass – All round me the willow still full of gloomy shades – the caravan in the glade a ghost of itself – but across the clouded grey sky the vivid streak of rose colour – blazoned in the day – The grass was full of clover bloom – I caught up my dressing gown with both hands & ran down to the river – and the water – flowed in – musically laughing – & the green willows – suddenly stirred by the breath of the dawning day – sway softly together – Then I forgot the tent – and was happy – – – (p. 89)

The feeling of discomfort is due to the combined action of the *buzzing mosquitos* and *breathing of the other* campers in the tent. Humans and insects are both involved to the same degree in shaping the author’s emotional state. This is more than intertwined with the environment that surrounds her; her emotional state is *due* to the environment she is involved with. Her feelings adopt the rhythm of nature (here meaning living and non-living organisms, including humans,

around her) and they change when she hears the birds chirping and sees the dawn rising and the water of the river laughing.

What is interesting in these lines is the multi-sensory experience of the natural landscape described: the visual imagery of the grey dawn *slipping* into the tent and the vivid streak of rose colour that *blazoned* in the day is intertwined with the auditory experience of the *buzzing* mosquitos, the *breathing* of the campers, the birds' *song* that *called & cried*, and the water *musically laughing* (Qing, 2018, p. 36). Nature does not mirror the human inner world but rather creates it.

5. *Prelude* and *At the bay*

Nonhuman nature has always been part of Mansfield's short stories. As Ryan (2018, p. 32) points out, focusing on the function of animals in Mansfield's work, since her mid-teens her stories "alternate between situating animals [...] as background figures that add local color to depiction of her hometown in Karori".² We could also find this attitude in Mansfield's urban early stories, such as *A blaze*, *The swing of the pendulum* or, with a slight shift, in the later *The fly* and *The canary* (1922), where nonhuman is simply a means to mirror (and in some passages to reveal) human inwardness.

Prelude and *At the bay* are both set in rural New Zealand and portray the same characters captured in two different moments of their lives.

Both stories display a great variety of details (including humans, animals, plants, flowers and rural landscapes). These are not used in order to depict the nonhuman as a symbol. Instead they demonstrate a type of 'democratic' treatment of human and nonhuman and achieve the effect of depicting a reality inhabited by the *terrestrial*, quoting Bruno Latour's definition, a congregation of species (Latour, 2017). The environment ceases to be something distinguishable from who or what inhabits it. Instead, it becomes the embodiment of the ecological relationships among species and between species and everything that surrounds them.³

Nature, here intended as human-created as well as natural environments, is neither a simulacrum of the human nor a mere interlocutor, but rather a significant other (Haraway, 2013, pp. 3–7) that contributes, together with human beings, to the creation and definition of the meaning. In her New Zealand stories there is not a hierarchy in which humans rule and subjugate the non-human, or a binary distinction between humans and their culture on one side and nonhuman and nature on the other (Braidotti, 2013, p. 79). As we will see, she neither anthropomorphises non-humans, embracing an anthropocentric point of view, nor zoomorphises humans in order

2 See for examples: *The pine trees*, *The sparrows*, and *You and I*, *Something childish but very natural*, *The woman at the store*, and others.

3 Being *ecology*: "The branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment. Also: the relationships themselves, esp. those of a specified organism" (https://www.oed.com/dictionary/ecology_n?tl=true).

to reverse the hierarchy. A posthuman approach could be seen in her stories if we take into account Braidotti's viewpoint:

In my view, the point about posthuman relations, however, is to see the interrelation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction. This is the 'mieu' of the human/nonhuman continuum and it needs to be explored as an open experiment, not as a foregone moral conclusion about allegedly universal values or qualities (2013, pp. 79–80).

Prelude is set in Karori and allows us to observe the life of Burnell's family. The story opens with their moving to a new house in a rural area.

From the first section (the text is divided into XII sections) we can find a peculiar use of zoomorphism. We read that Lottie and Kezia, two of Burnell's three little girls, *chirrup* 'Thank you' (p. 57), Kezia "seemed to come flying through the air" (p. 61), the servant girl snores with a *honk, honk* (p. 65) and then her "silly voice went baa-baaing through the garden" (p. 67), Beryl's (Kezia's and Lottie's aunt) hair: "when she did it in a long plait she felt it on her backbone like a long snake" (p. 90).

The use of zoomorphism is paralleled with that of anthropomorphism: the moon "hangs over the harbour and dabbing the waves with gold" (p. 60), the wind *snuffling* and *howling* (p. 59), "the soft white bulk if it [the house] lay stretched upon the green garden like a sleeping beast" (p. 61), and "in the garden some tiny owls [...], called: 'more pork, more pork!'" (p. 65), "a tui sang his three notes and laughed" (p. 66). This continues until the epiphany of the aloe plant: "Linda looked up at the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem. 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" (p. 73).

There are also direct juxtapositions: "It was hard to say which of the two, Alice or the duck, looked the more basted" (pp. 84–85), and the beautiful description of Linda's Newfoundland dog:

For she really was fond of him; she loved and admired and respected him tremendously. Oh, better than anyone else in the world. She knew him through and through. He was the soul of truth and decency, and for all his practical experience he was awfully simple, easily pleased and easily hurt. . . . If only he wouldn't jump at her so, and bark so loudly, and watch her with such eager, loving eyes. He was too strong for her; she had always hated things that rush at her, from a child. [...] For all her love and respect and admiration she hated him. And how tender he always was after times like those, how submissive, how thoughtful. He would do anything for her; he longed to serve her. . . . (p. 87).

Here Linda's thoughts about her dog create an immediate link with her husband, Stanley (Qing, 2018, pp. 70–73). The Newfoundland dog and Stanley are intertwined and mingled in her fragmented thoughts, and a shocking truth is revealed: "she hated him".⁴

Moreover, Katherine Mansfield also creates wonderful hybridizations: the silence is a spider ("She heard the silence spinning its soft endless web, p. 68), and flowers have an insect's wings: "Pelaginiums with velvet eyes and leaves like moths' wings (p. 72). The nonhuman nature⁵ is stretched into a human one and beyond.

Hers are the eyes of *a terribly sensitive mind* (Woolf) together with the precision of the botanist (she names every flower and every plant)⁶ and the careful observation of the ornithologist (she attentively lists all the bird species Linda hears singing).⁷ Hers is not a narcissistic contemplation but rather an attempt at a "biocentric approach to anthropomorphism" (as the ethologist Bekoff terms it in "The emotional lives of animals").⁸ Even the tapestry comes alive:

She turned over to the wall and idly, with one finger, she traced a poppy on the wall-paper with a leaf and a stem and a fat bursting bud. In the quiet, and under her tracing finger, the poppy seemed to come alive. She could feel the sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud. *Things had a habit of coming alive like that* (Bekoff, 2007, p. 68).

4 "Her famous use of 'moments of being' functions as a technique that invites us to occupy narrative spaces that feel uncertain or undefined: they do not tell us what happens but enact the experience of its happening. What emerges are ambiguous glimpses – for us as well as for the characters – into complex possibilities of self and consciousness that resist, when they do not simply evade, the imagined control of the 'true self' (Gray, 2011, p. 79).

5 The nonhuman nature includes: living organisms (animals and plants); landscapes (seas and mountains); celestial objects, (the moon or the sunlight); as well as other non-living entities like natural elements (water) and forces (the wind).

6 "There were clumps of fairy bells, and all kinds of geraniums, and there were little trees of verbena and bluish lavender bushes and a bed of pelargoniums with velvet eyes and leaves like moths' wings. There was a bed of nothing but mignonette and another of nothing but pansies—borders of double and single daisies and all kinds of little tufty plants she had never seen before. The red-hot pokers were taller than she; the Japanese sunflowers grew in a tiny jungle" (p. 72).

7 "And then at the first beam of sun the birds began. Big cheeky birds, starlings and mynahs, whistled on the lawns, the little birds, the goldfinches and linnets and fan-tails, flicked from bough to bough. A lovely kingfisher perched on the paddock fence preening his rich beauty, and a *tui* sang his three notes and laughed and sang them again" (p. 66).

8 Ryan (2018, p. 43) underlines that it is no coincidence that the author signs one of her letters with the name Fabretta, inspired by the French naturalist Jean-Henri Fabre: "By playfully signing the letter *Fabretta* —a moniker inspired by the entomologist and pioneer of ethology, Jean- Henri Fabre—Mansfield records her position as both observer and creator".

Mansfield's description of the living and non-living inhabitants of our Earth is neither a documentary account nor a mere anthropocentric narration. The landscape in *At the Bay*, for example, could be read as a character of the story. From the beginning the pastoral scene that opens the narrative is plotted through the shifting of narrative focus and a selective use of personification (the narrator, the sea, a flock of sheep, an old sheep-dog). "The narrator's description of herding not only focuses on the external appearances, behaviors, and environments of the nonhuman figures; it also speculates on the feelings and thoughts of the sheep and sheepdog by entering into a figurative realm" (Ryan, 2018, p. 40). This attitude reveals Mansfield's commitment to exploring human-nonhuman relationships beyond using nature to reflect human-centered concerns.

Two other examples are the passages about the dog Snooker and the cat Florrie. Florrie, the Burnell's cat, speaks in human language when she first sees the shepherd-dog: "When she saw the old sheep-dog she sprang up quickly, arched her back, drew in her tabby head, and seemed to give a little fastidious shiver. 'Ugh! What a coarse, revolting creature!'" (p. 344); Snooker (we know from the *Prelude* that he is the dog of the Burnell's relatives, the Trouts, a loyal dog so fond of his child owners that he tolerates their tortures) is a mongrel dog with "blue eyes", "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 cart to come along" (pp. 356–357). Florrie and Snooker are anthropomorphized creatures who speak human language (or rather whose supposed thoughts are translated in human language by the author) but are anthropomorphised for non-anthropocentric ends. Mansfield cannot avoid the 'pitfalls' of anthropocentrism. Snooker and Florrie are anthropomorphised creatures who speak in the language of humans yet the human language Mansfield confers to animals does not signal appropriation of the animal; rather it might allow for a subtle and careful speculation about nonhuman experience (Ryan, 2015, p. 44).

A final note on dreams: both in *Prelude* and in *At the bay* dreams interweave throughout the stories.

Linda, in particular, often has dreams which are crowded with flowers, plants and animals but in neither story did they use the nonhuman purely to disclose secrets about her psyche. In fact, if in *Prelude* Linda's manifest dream-contents seem to be the direct transposition of their latent content and the nonhuman (in particular the plant world), it is actually little more than a system of symbols used as a way to substitute the desires buried in her subconscious. In *At bay*, dreams undergo a change: they are not a means with which to understand only her most hidden human impulses anymore. Conversely, here the oneiric activity is tightly woven into the unfolding of the plot.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of Katherine Mansfield's two short stories set in rural New Zealand reveals several literary devices employed by the author to achieve her 'ecological' goal. Firstly, the hypertrophy of detail illustrates her attentiveness to the environment, which is neither a mere backdrop to the

characters' lives nor a reflection of their emotions, but rather a character in itself that interacts in a reciprocal relationship with human and nonhuman beings (animals, plants, insects). Thus, the environment is no longer conceived solely as the context for human existence or a mirror of human sentiment; rather, it transforms into the embodiment of inter- and intraspecies relationships and their encompassing environment. Furthermore, the employment of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism constitutes another significant aspect of her short stories. Mansfield utilises both techniques to access the inner lives of nonhuman creatures and enables a merging of her human characters with them. This approach has been termed in this paper as 'democratic,' drawing on Bruno Latour's definition, due to her parallel and alternating application of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. This strategy serves to dismantle the hierarchical Cartesian order, and in her work even anthropomorphism functions not as a means of subjugating the nonhuman but rather as a technique for acknowledging nonhuman agency.

Through these literary devices, the human and nonhuman subjects become entangled, culminating in an interstitial space where Mansfield's characters transcend binary categorization as fully animal or fully human, instead embodying an unprecedented posthuman *whole*.

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