

## Representation of the Concept *Loneliness* in Katherine Mansfield's Authorial World Picture\*

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### Abstract

The present paper aims at observing the peculiarities of the linguistic representation of the concept *loneliness* in K. Mansfield's authorial world picture. The authorial approach to the representation of the mentioned concept is studied in phonetic, lexical and syntactic aspects with the aim of discovering the specificities of interaction at micro and macro-levels of the text. A preliminary overview of the linguistic representation of the concept *loneliness* provided by the research will enable linking the results of the study with the cognitive stylistic individuality of the author.

**Key words:** concept *loneliness*, authorial world picture, micro- and macro-structure of the text.

### Introduction

Linguistics has long been concerned with the problem of the reflection of the author's feelings and his inner state in the language of his/her works. It has long been established that the constantly changing outer world forces one to respond to the events taking place in the real world that stir some kind of emotions. It is noteworthy that the problem of loneliness is not a new one and it can be easily traced in the writings of all ages. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept *loneliness* underwent some transformations. It became associated with categories like isolation, solitude, seclusion. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the problem of loneliness was even more complicated. Now it was viewed as a natural state of man (Puzanova 2003:4).

However diverse the ideas on the concept *loneliness* may be, it is generally agreed that it is a social phenomenon which arises as the result of a clash between the external world of social relations and the inner state of a person leaving him/her with a series of mixed emotions. In the case of men of letters they may find their way in their writings.

### The Concept *Loneliness* or the Lonely Characters in Katherine Mansfield's Stories

Generally, considering the role of concepts in a literary text, some linguists mention that poetic concepts are in direct contact with the authorial mindset, his/her personality, biography as a whole. It is generally assumed that a poetic concept finds its verbal expression in a poetic image or in a symbol and helps reveal the world of the author.

Moreover, the concept may go beyond the limits of a single text connecting it with the rest of the works by the same author, of the literature and the cultural constants of the nation” (Shurupova 2013:52). There is a close connection between the individual concepts of the author and his/her biography and worldview, with the epoch the writer lived in and created certain pieces of literature, with the genre (Shurupova 2013:214).

To demonstrate the case, in this article we will consider the interrelation between the authorial language and the personality of the author on the example of Katherine Mansfield’s short stories, which to our firm belief, can pave way toward better understanding of the individuality of Katherine Mansfield, the author so professionally hidden behind the “mask” – the story.

Katherine Mansfield is one of the most distinguished feminist writers who tried to depict the harsh life of women left alone in the entire world with their problems and thoughts. Not surprisingly, the center of all Mansfieldian stories are women, young and old, rich and poor, educated and illiterate – all with different life situations but all sharing the same problem – *loneliness*. This is the underlying concept recurrent in all of her stories. These are disillusioned, depressed women in despair who are struggling hard to find peace with themselves and with the world. These are women in constant search for a better treatment. Even if there are other characters, still the whole story develops around one central feminine character.

It is not difficult to draw parallels between Mansfieldian characters and Mansfield herself. The careful study of the letters and the diary of Katherine Mansfield, the author reveals a most disillusioned personality – in deep depression, especially during the later years of her life, because of an incurable disease, complicated relations, and constant travel from one place to another which left her in perpetual fatigue and tiredness. Though always accompanied by some close people ready to help and take care of her, loneliness was the feeling that befriended with the author.

The bundle of all these complex emotions is best expressed in the language material of each story. The linguistic analysis of the text can enable us to follow how the concept of *loneliness* is materialized at various text levels which in its turn will bring to understanding the ideological content of the literary text and penetrate into the mental sphere of the very literary personality (Askoldov-Alekseev 1997:278).

### **Realization of the Concept *Loneliness* at Lexical, Syntactic and Phonetic Levels**

We herein assume that the analysis of the key concepts in these short stories can pave way to the revelation of both Mansfield’s personality and individual characteristics, which will help the reader to perceive the text and understand the real motives lying behind it, which, in turn, will promote a more accurate interpretation of the text. The thorough and detailed investigation of the stories by Mansfield reveals that among the key concepts apparent in the short stories is that of *loneliness*.

To illustrate the peculiarities of the concept *loneliness* in Mansfield's stories we find it necessary to begin the analysis of the linguistic material at lexical level first, then turn to the syntactic and phonetic levels.

The investigation of the lexical material reveals a great number of recurrent themes and words that come to emphasize the feelings and emotions of the lonely characters depicted in the stories. Among the frequently encountered words are – *faint, chill, sigh, wind, dark, vague, strange, grey, wretched, weary, etc.* like in *faint chill, faint winds, faint stirring, chill with red clouds, chill old brain, chilling portrayal, dark corners, dark crept, dark page, grey crinkled water, grey flannel jacket, grey light hovered, grey cat, wretched children, she was extremely wretched, wretched time, wretched place, life is weary, weary droops her head, etc.* All these word combinations, though they might seem to have little to do with *loneliness* in the traditional meaning of the word, this way or another do convey feelings of loneliness and misery.

In Mansfieldean worldview the feeling of loneliness is often transferred through referring to natural phenomena. Generally speaking, the writer often turns to natural phenomena to portray the inner state of the characters, and, somehow, these phenomena take on the role of symbols in the stories. One of the usual symbols in her stories is *the wind*. In fact, it helps convey so many diverse feelings – fear, loneliness, anticipation of some dreadful event, etc.

*SUDDENLY – dreadfully – she wakes up. What has happened? Something dreadful has happened. No – nothing has happened. It is only the wind shaking the house, rattling the windows, banging a piece of iron on the roof and making her bed tremble. Leaves flutter past the window, up and away; down in the avenue a whole newspaper wags in the air like a lost kite and falls, spiked on a pine tree. It is cold. Summer is over – it is autumn – everything is ugly.*

(K. Mansfield “The Wind Blows”, p. 106)

*The wind, the wind. It's frightening to be here in her room by herself. The bed, the mirror, the white jug and basin gleam like the sky outside. It's the bed that is frightening. There it lies, sound asleep. . .*

(K. Mansfield “The Wind Blows”, p. 83)

The feelings of fear are accompanied with those of helplessness, powerlessness and loneliness in the face of a problem. The minute depiction of various plants plays an important role in revealing the characters, unfolding the storyline. For example, *the aloe* seems to be her favorite – strong and healthy on the one hand and isolated, lonely and thorny on the other. One may go as far as to state that with the help of the aloe the author, as a matter of fact, portrays herself – lonely, isolated from others, strong in spirit and thorny and conflicting in character.

...Nothing grew on the top except one **huge plant with thick, grey-green, thorny leaves**, and out of the middle there sprang up a tall stout stem. Some of the leaves of the plant were so old that they curled up in the air no longer; they turned back, they were **split and broken**; some of **them lay flat and withered on the ground**.

“Mother, what is it?” asked Kezia. 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**. The curving leaves seemed to be **hiding something**; the **blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it**. “That is an aloe, Kezia,” said her mother.

“Does it ever have any flowers?” “Yes, Kezia,” and Linda smiled down at her, and half shut her eyes. “Once every hundred years”.

(K. Mansfield “Prelude”, p. 98)

The author uses a number of stylistic devices to portray the aloe growing all alone amid the garden plants. The description provided by the author (*huge plant with thick, grey-green, thorny leaves, split and broken; lay flat, withered on the ground, swelling plant (hyperbole) with its cruel leaves (metaphor) and fleshy stem, claws instead of roots (metaphor), hiding something, the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it (comparison)*) leaves the reader with the impression of a lonely plant – different from the rest, unique in its type, deeply rooted in the earth and quite resistant to challenges. The aloe stands all alone – like the heroine herself, like the author. It does not give flowers as often as all other plants but “once every hundred years”.

*The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting – from nowhere, from the sky...*

...And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches – they would come in with a kind of accompaniment – **something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful – moving ...** And Miss Brill’s eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought – though what they understood she didn’t know.

...But to-day she passed the baker’s by, climbed the stairs, went into the **little darkroom** – her room like a cupboard – and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

(K. Mansfield “Miss Brill”, p. 35)

The above excerpted passages depict a middle-aged, lonely woman who is struggling to belong in the crowd she has nothing in common with. However, through a carefully presented contrast of the very crowd and herself the author makes it obvious that she simply ends up being a mere observer who has no place among the others. Among the crowd of people dressed in their best she tries persistently to look a happy woman, however, in the last part of the story the author reveals the secret – under the mask of a most successful and happy woman the reader recognizes a most depressed and lonely lady who makes the reader feel sympathetic toward the heroine.

The culmination makes the reader re-evaluate the whole story, and retrospectively the reader realizes that he/she knew it all throughout the story, it was not printed in black and white, but the secret sadness and the feeling of loneliness never left her a moment due to the gentle “melody” that Katherine Mansfield managed to create with the help of the skillful manipulation of the letters.

Throughout the story the reader is bombarded with words like *motionless, chill, sad, disappointing, yellow leaves dropping, cold, trembling smile, soundlessly singing, little dark room*, etc.. However, in fact it is not with certain words that the concept of *loneliness* is produced, rather it is accomplished through a series of stylistic devices, or rather these are everyday words with no special stylistic coloring that gain one through their specific arrangement in the sentence. Namely, through repetition and gradation, the author manages to take the simplest words and make them absolutely special and decisive in the image of loneliness.

*And when she breathed, something light and sad – no, not sad, exactly – something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.*

*The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill – a something, what was it? – not sadness – no, not sadness – a something that made you want to sing.*

(K. Mansfield “Miss Brill”, p. 37)

All types of heroines, old and young, tired of misfortunes and problems, despaired and desolate make their appearance in her stories and the misery and sufferings they live through get more realistic and tangible and make the reader feel as lonely as they do. The mixed feelings of loneliness, powerlessness and desolation are all summed up in the following examples.

*It was cold in the street. There was a wind like ice. People went flitting by, very fast; the men walked like scissors; the women trod like cats. And nobody knew – nobody cared. Even if she broke down, if at last, after all these years, she were to cry, she'd find herself in the lock-up as like as not.*

(K. Mansfield “Life of Ma Parker”, p. 137)

Here is a very nice comparison between the inner state of the heroine, the weather outside and the indifference of the people to her grief. *Cold wind, like ice, went flitting by, very fast, me walked like scissors, women trod like cats* come to make the image more complete.

The ending of the story is even more touching. The heroine quite overwhelmed with her thoughts and emotions that were suffocating her was trying to find a place to cry and relieve the pain gnawing inside. Lost in her own feelings and lost in the crowd, she was alone with her suffering and was unable to find a lonely place.

(1) *Oh, wasn't there **anywhere** where she could hide and keep herself to herself and stay as long as she liked, not disturbing **anybody**, and **nobody** worrying her? Wasn't there **anywhere** in the world where she could have her cry out - at last?*

(K. Mansfield "Life of Ma Parker", p. 249)

(2) *Ma Parker stood, looking up and down. The **icy wind** blew out her apron into a balloon. And now it began to rain. There was **nowhere**.*

(K. Mansfield "Life of Ma Parker", p. 249)

(3) *And the night passed. Presently the **cold fingers of dawn** closed over her **uncovered hand**; **grey light** flooded the **dull room**. Rosabel **shivered, drew a little gasping breath**, sat up. And because her heritage was that **tragic optimism**, which is all too often the only inheritance of youth, still half asleep, she smiled, with a little **nervous tremor** round her mouth.*

(K. Mansfield "The Tiredness of Rosabell", p. 437)

*Cold fingers of dawn closed over her uncovered hand, grey light flooded the dull room, shivered, drew a little gasping breath, tragic optimism, nervous tremor all come to underline the feelings she was experiencing.* These are, in fact, complex emotions, a blend of emotions, however, they all can be grouped under the umbrella concept of *loneliness*, one that is typical of all Mansfieldean women, one that was experienced by Mansfield herself, and one that transgresses the "borders" of the text and "captivates" the reader, as well.

As in nearly all stories by Mansfield, here, too, there is the perpetual contrast between the dream, the desired life and the harsh reality. The girl longs for love, an affectionate glance and a warm embrace and lives in a kind of unreal daze daydreaming, hoping for strong emotions.

On the syntactic level, the repetition and parallel constructions, which are quite abundantly used throughout the stories, serve as intensifiers of the concept *loneliness*.

Moreover, in some cases we can notice that repetition and parallel construction are the logical base of the stories.

(1) *And then **she too, she too**, and the others on the benches – they would come in with a kind of accompaniment – **something low**, that scarcely rose or fell, **something so beautiful** – moving.*

(K. Mansfield “Miss Brill”, p. 228)

(2) *Although it was so brilliantly fine...The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water, before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting – **from** nowhere, **from** the sky.*

(K. Mansfield “Miss Brill”, p. 225)

(3) *She wanted to run, she wanted to hang on his arm, she wanted to cry every minute.*

(K. Mansfield “The Little Governess”, p. 56)

The overall repetition of certain structures and phrases bring on some kind of melancholy to the stories. The “melody” which one can find in Poe’s poems can be well traced in the short stories of Mansfield. In fact, Mansfield, for some time, bore the influence of E.A. Poe and his symbolism. (Stafford, Williams 2006:144-145). Another peculiarity of Mansfieldean repetitions is their arrangement in a sentence. They form a kind of a chain which stretches all through the story. The examples are quite many.

(1) *... dashed off distracted, **like a lost dog** who thinks **at last, at last**, he hears the familiar step again.*

(K. Mansfield “Je ne Parle pas Francais”, p. 146)

(2) *The **silence** – really, **the silence** seemed to come drifting down **like flakes of snow**.*

(K. Mansfield “Revelations”, p. 155)

The phonetic aspect of the stories calls for a special attention since Mansfield herself mentioned that she never wrote randomly but rather paid close attention to each word and each sound. She chose them very carefully, reading sentences out loud so that she could put some “music” in them. Hence, the accumulation of certain vowels and consonants create a kind of tragic tone, a melody that runs through the story. In fact, alliteration and assonance as such play a key role in Mansfieldean stories.

*Again her, again she is blotted against the tall tree. Squares of gold light show in the houses; the street lamps gleam through the new leaves;*

*yellow fans of light follow the dancing boats. For a moment she is a blur against the tree, white, grey and black, melting into the stones and the shadows. And then she is gone.*

(K. Mansfield "Spring Pictures", p. 536)

*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. These last she had bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them.*

(K. Mansfield "Bliss", p. 70)

### Conclusion

The preliminary study of the concept *loneliness*, which is not a new one in literature, is most evident in the short stories by K. Mansfield. The tiredness and loneliness of the heroine are best manifested at the lexical level with certain words directly connected to that feeling, but also indirectly, through the carefully planned syntax and sound envelope. As a result of our preliminary study it becomes evident that the thorough analysis of the mentioned key concept helps reveal both Mansfield's personality and individual characteristics, which will lead to a better understanding of the text. The analysis of the concept is carried out taking into account the specificities of interactions between the various units of micro- and macro levels of the text.

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**Միայնություն հասկացույթի արտացոլումը Ք. Մենսֆիլդի աշխարհի հեղինակային պատկերում**

Սույն աշխատանքի շրջանակներում նախնական ուսումնասիրության է ենթարկվել *միայնություն* հասկացույթը՝ Ք. Մենսֆիլդի աշխարհի հեղինակային պատկերում լեզվական դրսևորումների յուրահատկությունների տեսանկյունից: Նշված հասկացույթի լեզվական դրսևորումները քննարկվել են հնչյունային, բառային և շարահյուսական մակարդակներում՝ փորձելով վերջիններս կապել տեքստի միկրո- և մակրոմակարդակների միջև փոխհարաբերությունների հետ: Այս հետազոտության արդյունքները հնարավորություն կընձեռեն հետագայում շարունակել նշված հասկացույթի քննությունը՝ այն կապելով հեղինակի անհատական ոճի ճանաչողական-ոճարանական դրսևորումների հետ:

**Репрезентация концепта *одиночество* в авторской картине мира К. Мэнсфилд**

В данной статье рассматриваются особенности лингвистической репрезентации концепта *одиночество* в авторской картине мира К. Мэнсфилда. Индивидуальный подход репрезентации данного концепта изучается на фонетическом, лексическом и синтаксическом уровнях с целью раскрыть специфику соотношения элементов микро и макроуровней текста. Первоначальные результаты данного исследования будут служить для дальнейшего изучения когнитивно-стилистической индивидуальности авторского стиля.