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# Experiments in Narrative: Katherine Mansfield and the Close-up

**Abstract.** In the publications dedicated to Katherine Mansfield's oeuvre, the traces of the cinematic in her narratives and, in particular, the importance of close-up are duly noted. However, despite the fact that the writer's interest in close-up is earlier than her mature interest in cinema, the discussions do not devote much consideration to the beginnings of the technique visible in Mansfield's early works. The comparative analysis of two stories, i.e., "At 'Lehmann's'" and "The Little Governess," exemplifies, therefore, the development of Mansfield's close-up technique and, most importantly, describes how exactly the writer develops it. The essay points to the traces of this particular cinematic tool in the writer's pre-cinematic period and considers Mansfield's verbal close-ups with a close reading method. The analysis adds to the critical conversations over Mansfield's cinematic interests and their influence on her narrative technique. It demonstrates how the development of close-up enhances what is to become Mansfield's central point, i.e., the subject-object relationship, and how it influences the emotional reception of the character.

**Keywords:** close-up, narrative technique, cinematic, Katherine Mansfield

## 1. Katherine Mansfield and Cinema

The preoccupation with the new invention, namely film, was so great at the turn of the twentieth century that it influenced essentially all social classes and almost every aspect of human life. First cinemas offered entertainment which was not only new and modern but, above all, cheap. Everybody could afford to see a laconic show of the Lumiere brothers which consisted of a bunch of assorted scenes, the show that Tom Gunning (382) called "the cinema of attractions," and Béla Balázs (23) "a fairground sideshow." Such a cinema was based on "the ability to *show* something" (Gunning 382) and was often rooted in the popular and the well-known. With time, the shows composed of a few short films started to include one longer presentation. Yet, the footage was still of different type as well as

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quality. Subsequently, the scenes which appeared before the eyes of the viewers were ingrained in comedy (situational humour), drama (theatrical performance), travellers' stories (the foreign and the exotic) or vaudeville (dance) (Gunning 384). Nevertheless, for people like Georges Méliès or Edwin S. Porter, the pioneers of the fantastical-magical films, moving pictures, beside simple entertainment, generated a pass to the world of imagination, scientific experiment and artistic freedom (Gunning 1990, Kraceur 1992). As for the New Zealand Modernist writer Katherine Mansfield, she openly expressed her genuine fascination with the new invention. Her love of cinema can be evidenced in her private writings as well as her many film reviews and publications for *Atheneum*. What is more, she would eagerly broaden her knowledge about the medium of film by learning the details related to its production, scenography and props, or even by acting before a camera herself<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that Mansfield's literary works reflect her passion for the cinematic. In her short stories one can observe the employment of the techniques clearly reminiscent of silent film<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, close reading of her texts allows for detecting the provenience of close-up shots, camera movements, montage, or the interfusion of time and space (the use of diaphragms). In other words, in Mansfieldian narratives such aspects as body language, gesture, face mimicry, light or framing play a crucial role. This impact of the cinematic on Mansfield's narrative technique has been duly noted by many scholars, with some of them devoting longer discussions to the topic (Kaplan 1991, Casertano 2001; Sandley 72–83; Thomas 64–82; Ascari 2014; Kimber 2015). And in the opinion of one of them, Mansfield was “among the earliest writers to understand how the methods of film might be applied to prose” (O'Sullivan xxii). Unquestionably, the cinematic in Mansfield's narratives added depth to the psychological portrayals of characters, thus openly inscribing the writer in the general tendency of the Modernist fiction which aimed at bestowing “new significance to the inner life of characters, to psychic complexity, thoughts, and feelings” (Hutcheon 56)<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, the considerations devoted to Mansfield's verbal incorporation of early filmic techniques seem to lack detailed analyses which would show how exactly this incorporation was made. Therefore, the present article is dedicated to the discussion of one of the filmic modes which Mansfield seems to employ quite frequently, namely a close shot. Following, the aim of the article is to demonstrate, by employing a method

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2 As O'Sullivan (6) notes, the fact that “[s]he was an enthusiast for the cinema” and that “she acted in several movies” also impacted her private writings, for “her letters frequently took up such images as the months that ‘stream by like a move picture’ and threw out such phrases as ‘I am sorry we only saw each other for an interrupted moment; it was like a cinema!’.”

3 This constraint is due to the date of Katherine Mansfield's death. She died on 9 January 1923, so before the first “talkies” were released.

4 Interestingly, this feature of modernist writing Hutcheon (56) classifies as something that “exacerbated the division between print literature and Cinema.”

of close reading, how the silent movie technique of zooming in was adapted by Mansfield to the verbal medium of literature. Additionally, the article is to establish the effects of such a technique on the reception of a character.

## 2. Cinematic Close-up

At the beginning of the 20th century, the development of the cinema was quite rapid, and as early as 1910 some filmic tools were already formulated. Consequently, they enabled the silent cinema directors/producers to structure a comprehensible narrative sequence and to establish an emotional link with the viewer (Sandley 67). The most important strategy used in cinematic productions was the close-up (75). Anne Friedberg (1), in her discussion related to early 20th century film, explains that the close-up was understood as “a technical term for magnification through a lens, but also – more metaphorically – it meant close analysis, scrutiny, an ‘optic.’” Further, Friedberg adds that the close-up played a crucial role since it offered “a wholly new visual rhetoric” (1). In practice, the new way of presenting or looking at a film character facilitated control over the viewer. Now, with the help of a camera, it was possible to control the attention and the emotions of the cinema audience. According to one of the most influential film theoreticians, Jean Epstein<sup>5</sup>, the close-up not only limited and unconditionally directed the attention of the viewers, but also indicated their emotions (13). Other researchers, critics and theorists of cinema wrote about the function of the close-up in a similar vein. For instance, Béla Balázs, while considering Carl Theodor Dreyer’s film *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, underlined the fact that the close-up, by focusing on the human face, causes that “we move in the spiritual dimension of facial expression alone. We neither see nor feel the space in which the scene is in reality enacted” (74). And Walter Benjamin would note that paradoxically “with the close-up, the space expands . . . . The enlargement of a snapshot . . . reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject” (60). However, the most significant discovery of the potential of that form of communication with the viewer was made by David W. Griffith, who indicated that the close up was responsible not only for enhancing dramaturgy and deepening the psychological portrayal of characters, giving them thus a realistic brush, but that this technique was also capable of narrating (Grieverson and Krämer 2004; Bordwell and Thompson 2006; Keil 2018).

Discussing the close-up in silent movies naturally calls for some comment on the importance of gestures. Briefly speaking, the already mentioned Balázs highlights the fact that our gestures convey the indescribable. He states that “many profound emotional

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5 NB. Epstein was Polish by birth. His real name was Jan Stanisław Alfred Epstein; he was a filmmaker, a scriptwriter and a film theorist, but also a painter and a physician; he was born in Warsaw on 25 March 1887 and died in Paris on 2 April 1953 (Czeczot-Gawrak 5-8).

experiences can never be expressed in words at all” (Balázs 65)<sup>6</sup>. Such concerns are particularly exposed thanks to our body language and mimicry. Remarkably, in silent cinema especially, the gestures related to nervousness and the whole range of reflexes were particularly interesting to the viewer and highly revealing when it comes to both personality and the thoughts of a character (Epstein 13). Similar implications referring to gesture as such are to be found in the works of scholars whose field of interest is non-verbal communication. David McNeill (2), who, among other topics related to bodily movements, deals with gestures in film, is of the opinion that in gesture it is the imagistic aspect that is most essential. Another researcher focusing on human gesticulation, Adam Kendon (2010), compares gestures to a spoken language. In Kendon’s view, gestures, in terms of their functionality, can stand for whole utterances (1). The scholar argues that a (body) movement is similar to a word and thus, by analogy, it should be regarded as an element of a language. Following, body motions are very important in shaping and decoding the utterance (7). And last but not least, in the context of the present article, the words of Sarah Friedland are particularly vital. In her publication she remarks that a specific type of gestures is created by close-up. In her words,

the frame produces the gesturing potential of non-territorialized parts of the body. With the segmenting and focusing work of the cinematographic frame, any part of the body can attain the isolation and metonymy that the hand is seen as already possessing. The close-up endows the whole body as inherently (and through segmentation, necessarily) gestural; the metonymic function of gesture is amplified by the segmentation of the cinematic frame. Thus, gesture as such, is a cinematic construction. (Friedland 47)

Interestingly, in Mansfield’s stories gestures are one of the most important elements of characterization. The slightest, seemingly insignificant, body expression of the character is laden with relevance when it comes to plot, and charged with emotions and symbolism when it comes to characters.

### 3. Case Study Material

In the article two stories, namely “At ‘Lehmann’s’” and “The Little Governess,” will be analysed. There are two reasons behind such a choice. First, both stories revolve around a similar theme of the growing up of a young girl, where the liminal stage is marked with ignorance and the fear of the unknown, with seduction and deception. Moreover,

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<sup>6</sup> Earlier, on the same page, Balázs (65) writes that “[i]n the silent film facial expression, isolated from its surroundings, seemed to penetrate to a strange new dimension of the soul. It revealed to us a new world – the world of microphysiognomy which could not otherwise be seen with the naked eye or in everyday life.”

in both stories the female characters are approached one day by a stranger (a young man in “At ‘Lehmann’s’” and an old man in “The Little Governess”). Second, the two narratives come from two different stages of Mansfield’s writing career and therefore serve as excellent comparative material. “At ‘Lehmann’s’” was published for the first time in *New Age* magazine in 1910, so before Mansfield became a regular Cinema-goer (Sandley 74). A year later, the short story was included in *In a German Pension*, the collection which many critics regard as technically most feeble. Nevertheless, the stories already signal the direction in which Mansfield’s narrative interests will develop. It is quite clear that even in her early works Mansfield begins to experiment with the cinematic, and that zooming-in is among her favourite techniques. As for “The Little Governess,” it was ready in March 1915 and published in October the same year under the pseudonym Matilda Berry in *Signature*<sup>7</sup>. Thanks to the time span between their creation, the two short stories elucidate the progress of the application of the technique. Juxtaposing the two texts allows us to observe the change in Mansfield’s awareness of the use of the filmic close-up – from somewhat shy and intuitive at the onset of her cinematic fascination to a fully mastered two-media experiment five years later.

#### 4. “At ‘Lehmann’s’” (1910)

In “At ‘Lehman’s’” close-ups serve as a way to demonstrate, on the one hand, the innocence and naivety of the girl, and on the other, the lascivious behaviour of the man towards her. A series of momentary close-ups of hands, faces and hair tell a story of gullibility, of the awaking of desire, of growing up and seduction. The protagonist, Sabina, lives above the Lehmanns’ coffee house in which she is employed. She shares a room with Anna, the cook, who is older than Sabina, more experienced and more resourceful. For instance, Anna ‘generously’ lets her naive roommate do a part of her duties. Curiously, the cook is more interested in the matters of life (births, to be more precise) rather than cooking. It is clear from what she says that she has already assisted at birth-giving a couple of times, and when Frau Lehmann’s baby is due, Anna, who is generally lazy, suddenly becomes energetic and eager to act: “No complaints to-day. Importance – enthusiasm in Anna’s whole bearing” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 5). This type of enthusiasm is completely foreign to Sabina. The girl cannot understand why the event of birth fascinates Anna so much. The lack of understanding partially stems from the fact that Sabina knows nothing about men-women relationships. Remarkably, it is not the question of where children come from (“Frau had a baby inside her, which had to come out – very painful indeed. One could not have one without a husband – that also she realised” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 2)), but rather “what had the man got to do with it?” that Sabina “wondered

7 A very short-lived journal established by D. H. Lawrence and John Middleton Murry, Mansfield’s husband (McDonnel 80-81). The story was re-printed later in the collection *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920).

as she sat mending tea towels in the evening, head bent over her work, light shining on her brown curls” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 2). The scene of the girl sewing includes one of the first close-ups of the girl in the story. It is very brief, yet compelling. Within a fleeting moment, focusing on Sabina’s head, the narrator apparently manages to point to the fresh beauty of the girl. What is more, s/he emphasizes the loveliness of her hair and, simultaneously, the fact that the girl is not yet aware of her charms. Such a reading stems from the clash of voices and perspectives – Sabina’s thoughts about birth, her focus on the towels, are juxtaposed with the narrator-observer’s description of her neck and her hair. The narratorial remark about the color and type of Sabina’s hair, as well as his/her noting the light dancing on it, ostensibly allude to the girl’s awakening femininity. Additionally, the brief ‘shiny’ close-up of Sabina’s hair can be treated as a metaphorical representation of the brief, revelatory moments Sabina sometimes experiences with reference to her looks (for example when glancing at herself in the mirror or while undressing).

The next close-up communicates Sabina’s simple, uncomplicated world view. While trying to solve the puzzle of new life over old towels, Sabina suddenly remembers the picture of her late grandmother:

Death – such a simple thing. She had a little picture of her dead grandmother dressed in a black silk frock, tired hands clasping the crucifix that dragged between her flattened breasts, mouth curiously tight, yet almost secretly smiling. But the grandmother had been born once – that was the important fact. (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 2)

This time the zoom-in is on the description of the object the girl is thinking of. Interestingly, the itemized, precise description of the picture on the one hand makes the readers forget about the fact that Sabina is engaged in sewing, and on the other it draws their attention to the quality of her inner gaze: it is quite focused, the girl is concerned with the smallest details of both the dress and the body of her late grandmother. This type of verbal zoom-in is reminiscent of a filmic close-up – the background dissolves, the frames of the picture become the frames of the viewer’s/reader’s field of vision. The description acquires the atemporal quality. The time is as if suspended. Similarly to a prolonged close-up shot executed with a film camera, when the viewers are forced to linger over the shown object/body part, this intradiegetic description of the woman in the photograph forces the reader to pause and contemplate, together with Sabina, the nature of life and death. Furthermore, such a mode of presenting minimizes the distance between the reader and the character, and in turn results in the feeling of intimacy. The readers have an impression of both physical and psychological closeness with the character. The feeling of intimacy gets stronger once we realize how personal the photo is for Sabina. The emotional bond between her and the image (and, by analogy, between

her and the figure it represents) is expressed by her remarkable attention to detail. The girl remembers “tired hands,” “flattened breasts” or “mouth curiously tight.”

Further examples of cinematic-like close-ups demonstrate the gradual rise of self-awareness in Sabina. Her emotional change is triggered by the Young Man who one day comes into the café. At first Sabina is quite reluctant towards the customer. Yet, when the man starts to watch her, the girl realizes that she apparently enjoys his company. His gaze gives Sabina strange, unknown pleasure: “his restless gaze wandering over her face and figure gave her a curious thrill deep in her body, half pleasure, half pain” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 3). And when the man asks her name, Sabina’s body reacts in a way that surprises her: “She blushed and looked up, hands quiet in her lap, looked across the empty tables and shook her head” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 3). Even in such short utterances, one can detect the influence of a film camera. The way the narrator renders the scene is through a series of rapid movements: s/he starts with the close-up on the blushing face of the girl. Next the focus moves onto the girl’s motionless hands in the lap, and then it follows the glance of the girl over the tables and eventually centres on the head of the girl. The imposed order as well as the compactness of the presentation (suggested by the enumerative mode of the description) ends in the confusion experienced by the girl and felt by the reader. As a result, Mansfield manages to obtain a cinematic effect of dynamic change with verbal means. The depiction of the scene displaying Sabina’s emotional perplexity is composed only of verbs: blushed, looked up, (kept) hands in the lap, looked across, shook (her head). Following, they heighten the impression of motion and, at the same time, they illustrate Sabina’s feelings. Apart from that, the consecutive close-ups betray the feelings of the Young Man from whose perspective Sabina is shown. The way the man watches her and the elements of her body that arrest his attention evince his attitude towards the girl. While Sabina’s look goes away from the Young Man, he, on the contrary, freely contemplates her. He seems to devour her with his gaze, which wanders ceaselessly over her face, her hair, her figure.

Later in the story, close-ups continue to monitor the process of Sabina’s emotional awakening. One of them is particularly revealing. It is utilized in the scene in which the Young Man shows Sabina a picture with a naked woman.

He opened the book, and Sabina saw a colored sketch of a naked girl sitting on the edge of a great, crumpled bed, a man’s opera hat on the back of her head.

He put his hand over the body, leaving only the face exposed, then scrutinised Sabina closely.

“Well?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, knowing perfectly well.

“Why, it might be your own photograph—the face, I mean—that’s as far as I can judge.”

“But the hair’s done differently,” said Sabina, laughing. She threw back her head, and the laughter bubbled in her round, white throat.

“It’s a rather nice picture, don’t you think?” he asked. But she was looking at a curious ring he wore on the hand that covered the girl’s body, and only nodded. (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 3)

The above passage conspicuously recalls camera movements suggested by the changes of perspective. The narrator moves from one character to the other in order to show the difference between the world views of Sabina and her young companion, and the different stages of life they are at. The first close-up is of the picture the two are looking at. Then there is an extreme close-up of the man’s hand “over the body,” which immediately shifts the reader’s attention to the man and his gaze (he “scrutinized Sabina closely”). Next, it is the movement of the girl’s head and her “round, white throat” that become the focal point, hence the perspective of the man is preserved. After a brief moment the focus moves to the hand of the Young Man again, but this time it is presented from the point of view of Sabina (her genuine interest in the ring indicates the shift of focalization).

The colorful picture and its symbolism, instead of establishing some understanding between the two, plainly demonstrate how far apart they are. The girl by no means reads the nude picture as an invitation to the world of bodily pleasures. Rather, she perceives it as quite a literal representation of some woman, a hat, a bed, etc. This, in turn, points to her unawareness of the other, sensual reality. Her reaction to the picture only confirms that. Moreover, she finds the colored sketch very common and thus boring – “Oh, there’s plenty of those funny ones in the illustrated papers” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 3). What she identifies as far more fascinating is “a curious ring” on the man’s finger. Her lack of interest in the picture is also visible in her automatic nodding in response to the man’s question. For her thoughts wander miles away from the pleasures that fill the mind of the Young Man. The close-up of the man’s hand doubtlessly underlines Sabina’s ignorance and naivety regarding men-women relations. However, it also points to the lascivious intentions of the stranger towards the girl. Additionally, his hand covering the shape of the model’s body in the picture may serve as a foreshadowing of what is to happen later in the story, namely when the man kisses Sabina and puts his hands on her breasts. And when that happens, curiously, the girl does not protest. On the contrary, she likes it – the new sensation makes her feel as if she were drunk – “the room seemed to swim round Sabina” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 6). But suddenly the cry from upstairs, where Frau Lehmann is giving birth, disrupts Sabina’s entrancement. For a moment, the girl neither knows nor remembers what is going on. Focusing on the man, or rather on the new peculiarly pleasant experience, she has forgotten about, in her words, the “ugly – ugly – ugly” reality of the upstairs (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 4). For a while she is as if suspended in time. Therefore, she asks in surprise: “Who did that – who made that noise?” (Mansfield, “At ‘Lehmann’s’” 7). Without a doubt, Sabina intuitively realises that there is some link between what she experienced when the Young Man laid his hands



on her and the pregnancy of Frau Lehmann. In other words, for the time being, Sabina is uninterested in pursuing the strange, new pleasures stemming from contacts with men since she does not want to look and feel like her employer. This final scene of the story perhaps cannot be classified as a self-evident example of a close-up. Nevertheless, it plainly gestures towards it (suspension, atemporality, frequent shifts of focalization), as well as towards further experiments with a series of close-ups (the vertigo effect, soon to appear in many of Mansfield's stories, here foreshadowed by the distorted surroundings – the room swimming round Sabina)<sup>8</sup>.

To conclude, the analysis shows that Mansfield's early story "At 'Lehmann's'" already manifests successful attempts of employing the cinematic zooming-in mode. Although they are merely blots in the narrative structure, they are, nevertheless, exploited with skill and precision. The close-ups already have a mesmerizing power over the reader who, together with the protagonist, is taken beyond the time and space of the narrative. The readers become immersed in the emotional ventures of the girl, in the moments of Sabina's enthrallment, in her thoughts and her (newly experienced) cravings. The change of perspective and the shift of spacial-temporal planes are smooth and always structurally justified. Some of these first verbal close-ups seem to be underdeveloped, yet they serve as signposts of Mansfield's cinematic potential and of the direction of her experimentation with narrative construction.

## 5. "The Little Governess" (1915)

"The Little Governess," the short story classified by Sandley as an "episodic film vignette" (78), tells the story of a French girl who travels alone for the first time, and for the first time goes to a foreign country, namely Germany. The girl is very much afraid of this challenge but tries to raise her spirits by remembering that she knows German a little and that (theoretically) she knows how to behave while traveling on her own. As a matter of fact, she was told in the agency which had secured the post of governess for her that she should trust no-one. Yet, unfortunately, they did not make her aware of cultural differences. Later in the story, the lack of awareness of their existence proves quite tragic for the governess.

The most crucial turning point of the story takes place in the second part of her journey when, travelling by train, Little Governess meets an old man. The stranger gradually gains her trust by being caring, funny and well-mannered. He is every inch a gentleman and one that suggests the figure of a grandpa: "What a perfect grandfather he would make! Just like one out of a book!" (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 141). However, it will turn out soon that his grandfather-like, affectionate looks veil heartlessly evil

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8 For an interesting discussion related to the usage of the vertigo effect by Mansfield in her stories, see Casertano 100-113.

intentions. The man will play the role of an amiable and sympathetic person until the moment he manages to lure the naive governess to his flat in Munich. There, the old man falls on her, thrusts her against the wall and kisses the governess on the mouth. Thus, finally, the scales fall from the girl's eyes. However, it is too late, for even though the girl manages to run away, she does not manage to keep the appointment with the lady who was to hire her for the job of a governess. As a consequence, she is alone in a big, foreign city, with neither money nor friends.

The story of the governess, her emotional states and traumatic experiences, as well as the falsity, hypocrisy and cruelty represented by her co-passenger are presented by Mansfield with the help of the same technique as in the previously discussed story. This time, however, the usage of the close-up is more frequent and more complex since the technique is now the basis of the whole text construction. Let us look at one of the very first descriptions of the girl. She is in her compartment alone, before the old man joins her:

As she stood up to feel if the dress-basket was firm she caught sight of herself in the mirror, quite white, with big round eyes. She untied her "motor veil" and unbuttoned her green cape. 'But it's all over now', she said to the mirror face, feeling in some way that it was more frightened than she. (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 137)

The above scene is presented from the point of view of the girl. Her lack of experience and fear of the unknown are underlined by the diminishing of the distance between the reader and the protagonist. We have no choice but to be very close to the governess, almost touching her. With the use of the mirror frame, the narrator skilfully narrows the reader's perspective to that of the girl in the glass<sup>9</sup>. And what the reflection shows is fear: the apprehension felt by the girl makes the reader worry about her (her future). For although the Little Governess tries to behave like an adult (she checks the luggage, unties her "motor veil," unbuttons her cape and cheers herself up by saying: "it's all over now"), her face communicates something entirely different. Her "quite white" frightened face and "big round eyes" are reminiscent of a child rather than a grown person. This effect is additionally amplified by the colors of the scene, namely white and green, symbolically connoting innocence and hope. In such a context, the phrase "it's all over" is merely seemingly comforting and should be rather read as proclaiming the coming trouble.

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9 It is worth noting the popularity of this framing device. The mirror was crucial in silent film productions, especially in German Expressionist cinema (Eisner 99-107), but also in English, French, Russian and American movies. The mirror was employed to expose psychological truths about the protagonists (Balázs 76-78). Its use in Mansfield's "The Little Governess," therefore, amplifies the associations with film. Also, the mirror was among those elements Mansfield would frequently exploit in many other of her narratives (Ascari 50).

Also, the act of untying her veil and unbuttoning her green cape, in the context of the whole story, gains a symbolic meaning. Subsequently, the close-up of her gestures emphasises the importance of the activities performed. They foreshadow the future events: soon the girl is to meet the cunning stranger to whom she will eventually entrust herself. Accordingly, showing her face and bare hands means exposing herself to danger. Before long, such an interpretation is confirmed by the plot since shortly an old man enters the compartment. At first the governess wants to protest (she does not realize that, due to a cultural misunderstanding, she is not in a compartment for single women travelers), yet, after a brief hesitation, she decides that to have such a good-looking co-traveller is only for the better – she will not be traveling alone and, as a result, she will feel safer.

One of the first close-ups of the man is from the Little Governess's perspective: "He looked very old. Ninety at least. He had a white moustache and big gold-rimmed spectacles with little blue eyes behind them and pink wrinkled cheeks. A nice face and charming the way he bent forward..." (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 138). The girl's innocent and naive perception is suggested first of all, by her exaggerated evaluation of her co-passenger's age, and second of all, by the details in focus: "a white moustache," "big gold-rimmed spectacles" with a pair of "little blue eyes" to match, plus the "pink wrinkled cheeks." All these colorful elements of the man's face allow her to quickly classify the stranger as nice and charming. This childish, because based on theory and fairy tales rather than experience, schematic perception continues in the close-ups that follow. Likewise, the child-like observer is revealed by the focal points and the simple, color-saturated language:

a pearl pin stuck in his black tie and a ring with a dark red stone on his little finger; the tip of a white silk handkerchief showed in the pocket of his double-breasted jacket. Somehow, altogether, he was really nice to look at...his cheeks were so pink and his moustache so very white. (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 138)

The more relaxed she feels in the company of the man, the more details about him she notices. However, these are still quite perfunctory features, indicative of the social standing of the man but not necessarily of his (true) personality. The zooming-in descriptions of the bust, the face, the specific parts of the body (hands) of the man are characterized by the employment of the limited range of vocabulary, short words, repetitions and an unvarying color scale. The spotlessly dressed man who is "really nice to look at" affirmed her naïve belief that he is genuinely good and friendly. What is also important is that the colors white, pink and blue re-appear within the course of the story. However, their symbolic meaning undergoes modifications in accordance with the emotional dynamics of the narrative.

In the following series of close-ups, the perspective of the girl is juxtaposed with the perspectives of the man and of the narrator, respectively. The first close-up to be

discussed is that of the girl's face, which notes her reaction to the question she is asked by the man. Specifically, the moment he asks the governess about her knowledge of German, her cheeks become crimson: "she was blushing a deep pink color that spread slowly over her cheeks and made her blue eyes look almost black" (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 138–139). The narrator draws our attention to this very emotional response of the girl's body. It displays her lack of linguistic experience (of German) as well as her bashfulness caused by the possibility of entering into a conversation with a real German (male) person. The close-up focuses on the eyes of the girl and her cheeks. Their colors once more evoke positive feelings, and the adverb "dark" merely intensifies the associations with the world of children and innocence. Moreover, the colors seemingly unite the two characters – they both have blue eyes and pink cheeks. Thus, by analogy, the colors misleadingly suggest that the two passengers are equally nice.

The next two close-ups provide, respectively, the perception of the old man by the narrator and the perception of the governess by the man. At some point the seemingly kind man asks the girl if she would like to look through the illustrated papers he has on him. The Little Governess eagerly accepts the offer and starts to study the pages with childlike attention.

[She] sat down again, more comfortably this time, her feet crossed, the papers on her lap. How kindly the old man in the corner watched her bare little hand turning over the big white pages, watched her lips moving as she pronounced the long words to herself, rested upon her hair that fairly blazed under the light. Alas! how tragic for a little governess to possess hair that made one think of tangerines and marigolds, of apricots and tortoiseshell cats and champagne! Perhaps that was what the old man was thinking as he gazed and gazed, and that not even the dark ugly clothes could disguise her soft beauty. Perhaps the flush that licked his cheeks and lips was a flush of rage that anyone so young and tender should have to travel alone and unprotected through the night. (Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 139)

This time the description of the old man belongs to the narrator. In his/her view, the cheeks of the man sharing the compartment with the governess lack a friendly pink shade and instead they are marked by an unhealthily looking red flush sprawling all over his face. Importantly, the focus is on the very act of looking – the repetitions of "watched" and "gazed," the use of the ambiguous word "rested," which also suggests physical contact (here, it might be the man's intention of touching the girl's hair). The old man is noticeably attracted by the looks of the little passenger, ignoring entirely her emotional state. Such a physical approach towards the girl informs the reader about the true nature of the man. He is interested in her young, still childlike, body. The narratorial comment also gestures to the fact that the man is not oblivious to the governess's low

social status. The rude remark about her “dark ugly clothes” shows the focalizer’s attitude towards the girl and merely underlines the lascivious character of his affection for her. The man’s consumptive approach towards the girl is further suggested by the mentioning of fruit and champagne. However, what is even more important is the repetition of the word “flush” and the employment of the word “lick.” Both lexical items have negative connotations and imply almost animalistic desire glowing on the face of the man. In addition, the word “flush” is in stark contrast to the word “blush,” previously used by the narrator to illustrate the emotional state of the girl. “Blush” evokes positive associations – it rings of pink color and childish shyness. Next, the length of the above description of a series of close-ups, as well as the fact that the figure of the girl is excluded from the scene (the reader follows the gaze of the narrator, who is observing the old man who, in turn, is watching the reading girl), forces the reader to focus for quite a while on the lewd passenger. Yet, surprisingly, our thoughts during the close-up go over to the little governess. The narrative strategy employed here by Mansfield is reminiscent of a cinematic eye-level close-up, and likewise, it touches upon the most intensive emotions of the readers. As a result, the recipients of the text feel like warning the credulous young character against the f(r)riend who shares the compartment with her.

The shrinking of the distance visible in the discussed passage happens not only between the reader and the man (when the narratorial ‘camera’ brings us close to his face), but also between the girl and the man (due to his gaze). Furthermore, such a narratorial situation, namely the vividly suggested closeness between the two characters as well as between the reader and the characters, on the one hand highlights the indecency of the kind-looking man, and on the other it puts the reader into an emotionally uneasy state. The whole situation becomes more startling once we realize the helplessness of the female character. Yet the reader is powerless as s/he is merely in the position of an inactive observer – the victim, the oppressor and the witness (as if) locked together in the cramped space of the compartment. As a result, the ambience of the story becomes heavy and disheartening, almost physically unbearable. Additionally, the suffocating atmosphere and oppressive tension are strengthened by the silence of the scene. Mansfield’s way of constructing the spatial situation is analogical to the cameraman’s choosing a particular set-up and a particular angle which “can make things hateful, lovable, terrifying, or ridiculous at will” (Balázs92).

In Mansfield’s story, every change of focus induces an emotional turning point. For that reason, the ambience of the narrative situation changes when the girl re-appears within the frames of a close-up:

Little sounds made themselves heard; steps in the corridor, doors opening and shutting – a murmur of voices – whistling . . . Then the window was pricked with long needles of rain . . . But it did not matter . . . it was outside . . . and she had her umbrella . . . she pouted, opened and shut her hands once and fell fast asleep.

“Pardon! Pardon!” The sliding back of the carriage door woke her with a start. What had happened? Someone had come in and gone out again. The old man sat in his corner, more upright than ever, his hands in the pockets of his coat, frowning heavily<sup>10</sup>. (Mansfield, “The Little Governess” 140)

This time the presented space seems to be larger, and this is thanks to the noises coming from the corridor. Yet, in the reality of the compartment the girl is in, these are but a collection of detached sounds (the door opening/shutting, the rain, the voices, the whistling). Curiously, their role corresponds to the function of the filmic off-screen diegetic sounds, namely those which only imply certain elements of a story, like places, objects, people, and therefore add extra space to the narrative. In the case of Mansfield’s short story, the sounds allow the reader to remember that the compartment the governess is in belongs to a larger world presented. However, the realisation does not result in the possibility of leaving the claustrophobic location. The close-ups keep both the young female character and the reader within the four walls of the compartment. Throughout the story, the narrator ceaselessly moves his/her watchful gaze from one passenger to the other, as if recording a silent conversation between the two characters, who are mentally in two separate worlds – the Little Governess nervously falls asleep (she pouted, opened and shut her hands) while the old man is awake as if on guard (in case someone wants to walk into ‘their’ compartment). The moment (its duration) when the governess slowly and nervously falls asleep under the watchful eye of the old man, as well as the passing of time are additionally suggested by ellipses and by the division of the scene description into two paragraphs. Such a treatment resembles a cinematic montage, the technique allowing for, among other things, condensing time. The ellipses cover for the moments when the girl closes her eyes and gradually stops registering what is going on around her, while the continuation of the scene in the next paragraph (whose dynamics *nota bene* contrast with the previous one, which is silent and sleepy) clearly points to the passing of time.

One of the most important verbal close-ups in the short story under consideration is the scene with strawberries<sup>11</sup>. During the said scene the fate of the girl is finally and irrevocably determined. On the symbolic level, it happens when the governess accepts a present from the cunning old man, namely sweet, juicy strawberries she had been dreaming of. This is also the moment when the girl eventually decides to trust the stranger utterly. The act of accepting foreshadows her tragic end. The following passage shows the girl eating the fruit:

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10 The ellipses in this quotation are an integral part of the text and thus do not stand for abbreviated fragments.

11 For a more detailed analysis and discussion related to the symbolism of strawberries in this particular scene as well as in other short stories by Katherine Mansfield, see Kwiatkowska 101-113.

Timidly and charmingly her hand hovered. They [strawberries] were so big and juicy she had to take two bites to them – the juice ran all down her fingers – and it was while she munched the berries that she first thought of the old man as a grandfather. . . . The sun came out, the pink clouds in the sky, the strawberry clouds were eaten by the blue. “Are they good?” asked the old man. “As good as they look?” (Mansfield, “The Little Governess” 141–142)

The scene begins with an extreme close-up of the girl’s hand. The narrator dutifully registers its movement and the juice running down its fingers. The verbally sketched picture is seemingly serene and innocent. For looking closely, it turns out that this simple scene of fruit eating is a comment on a far more complex issue of consumption. Apparently, the process of eating takes place on three different levels. First, there is the governess happily engrossed in munching the strawberries. Second, there is the old man, who is devouring the young girl with his eyes, and third, as if to match, outside the train, above their heads, pink clouds are “eaten by the blue.” But of this celestial feast the two passengers are oblivious. Yet, the sky close-up foreshadows the future events. Its color scheme matches the one used earlier for the description of the faces of the two characters (their pink cheeks and blue eyes). In other words, the color of the sky together with the devouring taking place there are to underscore the vile, consumptive intensions of the blue-eyed man. Following, the sky serves as an illustration of the mental states of the characters. It reflects the innocence of the girl (pink clouds) and the lewd intentions of the man (the blue<sup>12</sup> devouring the clouds). Thus, the close-up from the train compartment enters into a dialogue with the close-up of the sky – a seemingly unimportant backdrop becomes the comment on the events and acts as their enhancement.

The above-mentioned colors are referred to again in two more close-ups at the very end of the story. While having a walk with the governess in Munich, the old man treats the girl, among other things, to some beer (“which he told her wasn’t intoxicating, wasn’t at all like English beer” (Mansfield, “The Little Governess” 143)). Later in the day, when the governess starts to feel overexcited with all the pleasures showered on her by the ostensibly kind man, the alcohol only fuels her childish, youthful excitement.

After lunch they went to a café to hear a gypsy band, but she did not like that at all. Ugh! such horrible men were there with heads like eggs and cuts on their faces, so she turned her chair and cupped her burning cheeks in her hands and watched her old friend instead . . .<sup>13</sup> (Mansfield, “The Little Governess” 143)

12 Remarkably, the color blue expresses sadness, lewdness or even pornography. The first records of ‘blue’ used in association with sex appeared in Scotland around 1824 (for instance, MacTaggart 446).

13 The ellipsis in this quotation is an integral part of the text and thus does not stand for abbreviated fragments.

For a very short moment the narrator shows us the faces of other people (the members of a gypsy band). This quick scrutiny is done from the perspective of the girl. This conclusion can be drawn, for example, from the childish and simplistic comment (about “horrible men” with “heads like eggs and cuts on their faces”). They look ugly to her, especially in comparison with her companion. Immediately, after the brisk presentation of the surroundings, the narrator focuses on the author of the comment: a child-like figure with its back turned to “the horrible men,” with the head charmingly “cupped” in her hands and with “burning cheeks” (the pink transformed now into fiery red) watching her “old friend” with true admiration. Technically speaking, this close-up is analogous to the one encountered earlier, that is when the man was watching the girl with similar eagerness earlier on the train. As in the compartment scene, the object of the admiration is not included within the (verbally) presented picture. The presence of the man is suggested by the behaviour of the girl but no details as to the man’s reaction / facial expression are supplied. Interestingly, throughout the story, almost all close-ups related to the old man focus predominantly on the elements of his apparel (the coat, the pockets, the cloak, the buttons of his vest, the gloves, etc.). His body is meticulously covered as if guarded against the eyes of both the girl and the reader. Even his eyes are shielded with glasses. On the symbolic level, such focus communicates the sly and duplicitous nature of the man as well as the silliness of the Little Governess. Paradoxically, although the two characters think of each other in a shallow, physical manner, each of them has something different in mind: the girl focuses on his gentlemanly manners, his wealth, and above all his grandpa looks, whereas the man focuses on her beauty.

The last example refers to the scene of a physical assault the man inflicts on the girl in his flat. The scene is composed of two consecutive close-ups. The first one centres on the face of the man:

“No, no, no!” she stammered, struggling out of his hands. “One little kiss. A kiss. What is it? Just a kiss, dear little Fräulein. A kiss.” He pushed his face forward, his lips smiling broadly; and how his little blue eyes gleamed behind the spectacles! (Mansfield, “The Little Governess” 145)

The above description evokes the close-ups of faces and heads from the films by Griffith. The figure of a kind, pink-cheeked, grandpa-like elderly man suddenly disappears, and Mansfield’s protagonist is confronted with a horrifyingly huge mouth “smiling broadly,” accompanied by a pair of little, unhealthily gleaming blue eyes (“behind the spectacles”). This almost surreal scene emanates brutal force and fear. Due to the extreme close-up of the man’s face, the mood of the narrative suddenly changes into openly scary and horrifying, and the distance between the victim and the oppressor shrinks drastically. Subsequently, the reader also almost physically feels the strength of the assailant, the



strength of his grip and, simultaneously, the shock and vulnerability of the governess, who cannot escape and, what is even worse, has no-where to escape to. The prophesy about the big blue devouring the pink clouds is just being realized in the second close-up:

he held her against the wall, pressed against her his hard old body and his twitching knee, and though she shook her head from side to side, distracted, kissed her on the mouth. On the mouth! Where not a soul who wasn't a near relation had ever kissed her before . . .<sup>14</sup>  
(Mansfield, "The Little Governess" 145)

Based on the description, the image conjured in the reader's mind is quite fragmentary and somewhat chaotic. As a result, his/her reaction is emotional rather than visual. In other words, the reader is forced to feel rather than 'see' the fear of the girl caught between the wall and the brutal man. The elements of the description are presented as if in separation, which creates an impression that they are in motion: the "twitching knee" of the old man, the head of the girl moving "from side to side," the girl's mouth. The narrator very quickly moves from one point of attention to another. Also, it is difficult to say where exactly the observer of the scene is. Moreover, the dynamics of the ongoing scene are underlined by the style of report, which is based largely on verbs and (grammatically) unfinished units. The description as if gains speed: the verbs start to appear one after another (shook, distracted, kissed) and the grammatical structure gets simplified. The thoughts are merely suggested, underdeveloped and discontinued, but in a constant flow. The verbal expresses the emotional – it renders the point of highest tension – the moment of the forced kiss. Obviously, Mansfield not only makes use of the filmic-like close up, but she also manages to render the camera-like motion.

The above presented passages from "The Little Governess" markedly illustrate Mansfield's usage of the silent movie technique of the close-up in a manner which recalls Griffith and/or Balázs. The writer manipulates the readers' emotions the way silent film makers manipulated their audiences, that is by riveting the attention of the recipients on carefully selected and framed spatial details. The structure of the story, built on fragmented zooming-in, is additionally redolent of German Expressionist film makers, who "dissected the integrity of the time-space continuum of the world, cutting it up into fragments" (Stam 76).

## 6. Conclusions

The above analyses show that Katherine Mansfield, from the early stage of her writing, quite deliberately employed the technique of the filmic close-up to infuse her narratives with tangible emotions. As might have been expected, it seems that at the beginning her

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<sup>14</sup> The ellipsis in this quotation is an integral part of the text and thus does not stand for abbreviated fragments.

new method was used more intuitively, as if the writer did not know how to realize its full potential. Therefore, in “At ‘Lehmann’s’” the first close-ups tend to be heavily shrouded in conventional, Modernist, narrative modes. The brief and sporadic, yet emotionally compelling, zoom-ins quickly dissolve into scenes in which such techniques as interior monologue, dialogue, and description take over. But within the five years that elapsed between “At ‘Lehmann’s’” and “The Little Governess,” the technique of close-up visibly evolved and gained importance in Mansfield’s narratives. For in “The Little Governess,” the readers are presented with a whole range of close-ups which form the base of the entire narrative structure. Compact and perfectly constructed, Mansfield’s film-like zooming-in becomes exceedingly significant and telling when it comes to characterization. Like film makers, Mansfield uses the technique of close-up to endow her protagonists with psychological depth and make them (emotionally) true to life. Furthermore, the zooming-in, which in the cinema frequently creates the feeling of “psychological intimacy” (Hutcheon 58–59), in Mansfield’s stories results also in establishing an emotional relationship between the reader and the character. In addition, her verbal close-ups often appear in succession. The transition between them is very smooth and natural. The reader, following the narrator, as if moves his/her eyes from one point/character to another. Consequently, in both short stories under consideration the perspective of the presented events/characters and the point of view constantly shift, creating thus an impression of movement. At the same time, the distance between the characters, as well as between the reader and the described scene, is reduced. Moreover, Mansfield communicates most significantly through silence – the scenes devoid of dialogue but rich in gestures and facial expressions speak volumes about the protagonists and their respective (inner) worlds.

Similarly to a cameraman who, according to Balázs, injects his “subjective viewpoint and mood into the picture of the object” (185), the narrator in Mansfield’s stories, through the constricted, carefully selected scenes, acts as a silent observer and commentator of the depicted events. Like a cameraman, the Mansfieldian narrator gestures to those elements of the ‘verbal plane’ which are important for the story being told, and to those parts/gestures of characters which render their emotional states best. Remarkably, this fragmentariness results in a very vivid, psychologically alluring and physically tangible image of the presented world.

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