"I Am Just As Much Dead as He Is": Community, Finitude and Sibling Intimacy in Katherine Mansfield

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore sibling intimacy in Katherine Mansfield as an alternative communitarian experiment that emerged after the utter failure of the community of lovers, both in her life and fiction. Thomas De Quincey's idea of "the palimpsest of the mind" and his trip down memory lane to exorcize his sister's death in Suspiria de Profundis (1845) can be used to shed light on the interplay between autobiography and fiction in Mansfield. The analysis of Mansfield's short stories "The Wind Blows" (1920) and "The Garden Party" (1922) will show her manipulation of sibling intimacy after her brother Leslie's sudden passing. Anxiety towards death triggers her desperate search for a primordial self, similar to De Quincey's, which she camouflages behind the disruptive community of lovers/friends envisioned by Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot. My objective is to investigate Mansfield's post-mortem relationship with her brother—which has rarely been examined closely in Mansfield studies—to prove a paradoxical yet effective combination of operative and inoperative communitarian traits—terminology used by both Nancy and Blanchot. Mansfield's writing of the body, or what Nancy calls corpus, will provide an interesting way to channel De Quincey's palimpsest into a writing model that aims to approach death without symbolic filters.

Keywords: Katherine Mansfield; community; death; sibling intimacy; incest; Jean Luc Nancy's corpus; palimpsest

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References


Am Just As Much Dead as He Is': Community, Finitude and Sibling Intimacy in Katherine Mansfield. Article. Full-text available. Dec 2016. Gerardo Rodriguez Salas. The present study aims to explore sibling intimacy in Katherine Mansfield as an alternative communitarian experiment that emerged after the utter failure of the community of lovers both in her life and fiction. The interplay between Mansfield's autobiography and fiction—with the selection of two short stories: “The Wind Blows” and “The Garden Party”—will show Mansfield's manipulation of sibling
Katherine Mansfield has played an important role in the genre of the short story. The New Zealand-born writer, who spent much of her adulthood in Europe, "is a central figure in the development of the modern short story," noted Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism. Mansfield also began writing short stories for a journal called New Age. It was in the south of France that she penned her first major story, "The Aloe," which in a revised form was published first in 1918 as "Prelude." It "set the standard and established the pattern for all her later work," wrote Gordon in British Writers. "Prelude" chronicles the doings of the fictional Burnell family of New Zealand, whose structure and members resemble the Beauchamps of Wellington quite distinctly.


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