

Gerardo Rodríguez Salas 2009: *Katherine Mansfield: El Posmodernismo incipiente de una modernista renegada*. Madrid: Verbum. 280 pp. ISBN 978-84-7962-456-9

Eva Gómez Jiménez
Universidad de Granada
emgomez@ugr.es

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is considered one of the best and most representative British writers of short fiction. Historically speaking, it is acknowledged that she belonged to the modernist era, and, consequently, to my knowledge, every study that has been published on her work has been carried out from a modernist approach. Gerardo Rodríguez Salas is the first scholar to develop a monographic study in which Mansfield is analyzed from a new perspective; he claims that Mansfield is a modernist writer who anticipated the postmodernist movement. This he does on the strength of certain features that prominently belong to this later literary period.

The structure of the book follows a clear pattern. It consists of four chapters, each corresponding to one or several postmodernist features that Rodríguez Salas finds in Katherine Mansfield's work. The chapters are preceded by an introduction and followed by Conclusions, an extensive Bibliography and an Index. Each chapter is related to the rest, since although they make reference to different features and are self-contained, there is interdependence between one concept and the others.

In the introductory chapter of *Katherine Mansfield: El posmodernismo incipiente de una modernista renegada*, Gerardo Rodríguez Salas focuses his attention on the distinction between Modernism, Postmodernism and Post-Postmodernism, both in terms of chronology and ontology. Although Katherine Mansfield belongs to Modernism according to time, the intention of the author is to dissociate her from this movement. He also introduces the term *marginality* in Postmodernism, an aspect that will undoubtedly determine the whole book. Taking the option that politics is one of the main concerns of this movement, Postmodernism has an important social scope related to 'dedoxification'. Finally, the author takes the nine postmodernist features defined by Hassan in 1987 and brings them together into four groups which correspond to the next four chapters in the book and which are found in Mansfield's stories: characters as split subjects, language as a key to dismantling oppression, intertextuality and parody.

Chapter one is devoted to the split subject. In order to explain this concept, the author starts by introducing the term *indeterminacy*, closely related to Postmodernism and its impossibility to be defined. The split subject, the central aspect of this chapter, is better understood thanks to the clear explanation of the differences between *subject* and *individual* and the concept of the *sublime*. Here, Rodríguez Salas illustrates the different perspectives of Modernism and Postmodernism in relation to the subject: while the former seeks the truth, the latter accepts the idea of chaos, although it does not offer any solution; this is a crucial criterion for placing Katherine Mansfield in the second movement. After giving the opinions of several scholars, the author justifies his

preference for Wilde's theory (1981). Finally, Rodríguez Salas explains the three attitudes towards essence in Postmodernism: apocalypse, optimism and conciliation. He adopts a conciliatory position, suggesting a fragmented, split subject whose inner world is always an interrogation. This first part of the chapter provides the theoretical background, in places somewhat densely, that underpins the thesis proposed throughout this book. Subsequently, he applies this theoretical background to Mansfield's texts. Starting with the autobiographical material, the author shows that, while the letters give an optimistic vision (they show the social projection of the subject), the diary is the perfect example of the conciliatory position (Mansfield uses this material to defend artificiality and fragmentation, and admits the concept of the *sublime*). The textual analysis involving 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', 'The Garden Party', '*Je ne parle pas français*' and 'A Married Man's Story' provides many examples to justify the author's position.

Chapter two, 'Lenguaje, dogmatismo y estrategias subversivas', is similar in structure. It starts by presenting language as a powerful tool for society, together with the concept of *mask*. This part calls attention to ideology, the concept of *catathresis*, denotation and pronouns, while also introducing silence and paraliterature. In this way, Rodríguez Salas attempts to define Katherine Mansfield's type of metafiction and her use of silence and paraliterature as subversive strategies, although the latter is not used as an incipient feature of her work. As regards silence, Rodríguez Salas analyses 'Weak Heart', 'The Doll's House', 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' and 'The Garden Party': in all of them, the position of Katherine Mansfield towards silence is systematized and there are two levels of significance, which Rodríguez Salas justifies with a profusion of examples. Regarding paraliterature, having analysed 'Miss Brill', '*Je ne parle pas français*' and 'A Married Man's Story', Rodríguez Salas finds common features, such as the references to theatre, the artificiality of language, or even the consciousness of the literary process.

Chapter three is the longest, and also the one which contains a deeper textual analysis. This section focuses on intertextuality and, just as in the previous chapters, the author starts by clarifying the meaning of this term, stating the relation between it and *paraliterature*. For the sake of better understanding, the author selects Genette (1989) and Bakhtin (1994), taking from the first one the clarification of the main concept as the relation of coexistence between two or more texts. The relevant aspect in Bakhtin is the 'ludicrous', an aspect that, according to the author, is always present in Mansfield's production. As Bakhtin points out, there is a clear union between the former and Postmodernism, for both are subordinated to the dominant canon. As before, the remarkable point of this section is the presence of clear explanations of all the terms that are to be used in the textual analysis, for example, *dialogism*, *polyphony*, *heteroglossia*, or the role of the reader. Once everything has been explained, fairytales are selected by the author to represent this postmodernist feature in Mansfield. Rodríguez Salas then proceeds to focus his attention on the conscious use of intertextuality made by Mansfield. He completes his theoretical frame by citing Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1985) as the starting point for the deepest textual analysis in the book. This analysis distinguishes the early fairytales from those written in adulthood. The first, written when Mansfield was a teenager, follow the traditional fairytale structure,

although, as Rodríguez Salas emphasises, their themes are usually those of death, darkness or sex. 'In Summer', 'A Fairy Tale', 'The Green Tree: A Fairy Tale', 'His Ideal' and '*Les deux étrangères*' are the analyzed texts. The author reveals their structure according to Propp's theory, and draws our attention to those elements that make these intentionally subversive. Katherine Mansfield uses the structure of the classic fairy tale in order to question the dominant social values, though in most we can infer a magical atmosphere. Things become different in Mansfield's fairytales about adulthood: realism, the absence of a magic element, a modernist approach and a new treatment for the themes that were already used before are the features of these texts. Rodríguez Salas discusses intertextuality in 'Sun and Moon', 'A Suburban Fairy Tale' and 'The Tiredness of Rosabel', in particular the influence of 'Hansel and Gretel', 'The Bible' or 'Cinderella'.

The last chapter in the book is devoted to irony, parody and pastiche. Here again, Rodríguez Salas starts the section by explaining the differences between these three subversive strategies and their relation to paraliterature and intertextuality. His intention is to clarify the situation of irony in Postmodernism, since traditionally it has been placed as a typical feature in Modernism. Different types of irony are also used to distinguish this aspect. Subsequently, he summarises the debate for parody and its comic effect, ending this first section by distinguishing the differences between both concepts. Textual analysis in this last chapter is exemplified, in this case, in 'Taking the Veil', 'Violet' and 'Picture'. The sentimental novel and Katherine Mansfield's inversion of its features are the central elements of this analysis. Rodríguez Salas explains how the author uses such features as women's passivity, sentimentality or extreme passion in order to show how we should infer the need for change in society. Irony, of course, is Mansfield's tool; immaturity and sacrifice are the result of women's reading sentimental novels. A summary of the structure important aspects of the chapters serves as a conclusion and justification of Salas' postmodernist claim, defending the constant idea that she anticipated this new movement.

Rodríguez Salas offers in this book a consistent, clear account of bibliographical references on Mansfield and Postmodernism. "[w]hat we need to develop now with Mansfield criticism and scholarship is what might be called a postmodern view" (Morrow 1990: 42). This statement encapsulates the starting point of this study, and transforms this book into the first volume that defines Mansfield's works by means of a new critical perspective. At the same time he makes use of the recent modernist approaches that were developed, providing the reader with an excellent, recent bibliographical background.

Theoretically speaking, the book by Rodríguez Salas is deep and clarifying. Almost the same length is devoted to theoretical discussion as to textual analysis. This is helpful, since it provides a complete framework for readers to understand the author's analysis. The length of the book also helps to deal with the matter in depth, which can be increased if the other monographic study, *Hijas de la diosa Blanca: ginocrítica y feminismo restaurador en la narrativa de Katherine Mansfield* (2007), is taken in consideration.

Leaving aside critical aspects, *Katherine Mansfield: El posmodernismo incipiente de una modernista renegada* is a well-structured book. An important aspect of the study is

its simplicity in structure, since every chapter is divided into two main parts: the theory and the analysis, thus enabling readers to find their way around when seeking a certain part. The length of the Index likewise contributes to the facility in locating discussions or analysis of the short stories. Footnotes have been judiciously employed by Rodríguez Salas to clarify certain sections, a feature for which readers will be grateful since footnotes are much more manageable than endnotes.

My only concern about this book is the absence of references to other studies and publications related to Mansfield. Apart from a brief mention of Patrick D. Morrow's four-page piece of 1990, which points to the absence of a monographic study of Mansfield in terms of Postmodernism, there is nothing of relevance.

It is true that Rodríguez Salas initiates his introduction by citing certain names and perspectives apart from his own, and throughout the whole book he makes reference to many scholars. Nevertheless, the volume does not offer the possibility for the reader to know the content of these other works in relation to that of the author. It would have been of great interest to readers if the author had included and discussed these publications, enabling the reader to form a balanced comprehension of Rodríguez Salas' contribution to the subject of Katherine Mansfield's *oeuvre*.

In this sense, it is surprising that, apart from Rodríguez Salas' dissertation, in Spain there is only one thesis on Katherine Mansfield, *Recurrencias temáticas y formales en el cuento de autoras en lengua inglesa: de Mansfield a Carter*, by Maria Isabel Carrera Suárez, defended in 1988. The subject of this thesis is unrelated to that of Rodríguez Salas, and furthermore, does not deal exclusively with Mansfield. Outside Spain, there are a number of dissertations that also deal with this author with regard to feminism, but none studies Mansfield from a postmodernist perspective. At the same time, the number of theses on Mansfield in the last decade is very low. The effort carried out by Rodríguez Salas has the merit of producing a work that is innovative, exhaustive and pioneering. Rodríguez Salas undoubtedly contributes to clarifying understanding of Mansfield, and his book can be compared to neither contemporary nor previous studies. In this respect its contribution to this field is essential reading.

This reviewer sees it as a work that will not disappoint and will, on the contrary, provide a stimulus to re-read Mansfield's short stories, this time from a postmodern perspective.

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mijaíl Mijáilovich 1981 (1965): 'From M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1965'. Pam Morris, ed. Trans. H. Iswolsky. London and New York: Edward Arnold. 89-96.
- Carrera Suárez, Maria Isabel 1988. *Recurrencias temáticas y formales en el cuento de autoras en lengua inglesa: de Mansfield a Carter*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis. Universidad de Oviedo, Spain.
- Genette, Gerard 1989 (1962): *Palimpsestos: La literatura en segundo grado*. Trans. Celia Fernández Prieto. Madrid: Altea, Taurus, Alfaguara.
- Hassan, Ihab 1987: *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Ohio: Ohio State UP.
- Jameson, Fredrick 1984: Introduction. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester UP.

- Morrow, Patrick D. 1990: 'Katherine Mansfield and World War I'. David Bevan, ed. *Literature and War*. Amsterdam and Atlanta. 39-43.
- Propp, Vladimir 1985 (1929): *Morfología del cuento*. Trans. F. Díez del Corral. Madrid: Akal.
- Rodríguez Salas, Gerardo 2003: *La marginalidad como opción en Katherine Mansfield: postmodernismo, feminismo y relato corto*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis. Universidad de Granada, Spain.
- Rodríguez Salas, Gerardo 2007: *Hijas de la diosa Blanca: ginocrítica y feminismo restaurador en la narrativa de Katherine Mansfield*. Oviedo: Septem.
- Wilde, Alan 1981: *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP.

Received 7 January 2011

Revised version accepted 9 April 2011

Eva María Gómez Jiménez (MPhil Granada) is a postgraduate researcher at the University of Granada. Her research interests centre on e.e.cummings, Modernism, experimental poetry and translation studies.

Address: Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Universidad de Granada, Campus de Cartuja s/n 18071 Granada, Spain. Tel.: +34 958243677. Fax: +34958243678.