

Citation information. *in esse: English Studies in Albania*. Volume 10, Issue 1, Page 18-30. ISSN 2078 – 7413.

“Eating the banks away”: The Conflict between the Traditional and the Modernist in Katherine Mansfield’s New Zealand Stories

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Abstract

Although, apart from some juvenilia, none of Katherine Mansfield’s works were written for children, they are nevertheless present in some form throughout most of her stories. But while the stories with European setting feature them mostly in the background, the New Zealand ones give the child characters importance equal to that of adults. The most famous child character is arguably Mansfield’s alter-ego Kezia Burnell, a creative and very artistic little girl, who is, however, often misunderstood and pushed aside by her family. The most antagonistic towards her is her aunt Beryl to whom she seems to serve as a scapegoat.

This paper discusses possible reasons for Beryl’s hostility towards Kezia and proposes to read their relationship also on a symbolical level, as that between the older generation of writers and the emerging modernists.

Keywords: *Katherine Mansfield, Kezia, Prelude, At the Bay, children, play*