

Representation of Modernism in Mansfield's Short Stories

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Abstract

The modernist thought itself has a very complex background. Strictly speaking, modernism is not a genre, but a literary trend that is revealed in many modernist creative fictions. Kathrine Mansfield's works have this unique feature. She uses modernist techniques in her short stories very skillfully and tactfully. The aim of the thesis is to explore representative modernist techniques in Mansfield's short stories. Through the research, I want to prove that she is an innovator of English short stories. The thesis mainly discusses stream of consciousness in Mansfield's short stories which includes association, time and space montage and illusion. The thesis also analyses symbols in her representative short stories and different perspectives of narration in her works. I sincerely hope that readers can understand her works better through my efforts. Undoubtedly, Mansfield opens up a path to a higher literary standard.

Keywords

Mansfield; modernism; stream of consciousness; symbolism; perspectives of narration.

1. Introduction

Katherine Mansfield(1888-1923) is a splendid English short story writer in the early 20th century. In order to get a better development, Mansfield gave up her pleasant and affluent life. Surprisingly, she chose to travel to London by herself. From the moment she set foot in London, she has become a wandering soul who didn't have a complete home. Mansfield had complex personality, at the same time, she went through the same intricate life journey. She was always roaming--New Zealand, France, Germany, the United Kingdom. During her wandering life, the only invariable thing is her love of literature.

Mansfield is a writer who has special contribution in the history of British literature. She not only uses modernist skills and techniques distinctly in her short story creation with careful attitudes, but also is the promoter of the modernist trend in the beginning of the 20th century. Especially the short stories "Prelude", "At the Bay", "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" written by her which sets the "Prelude Style" as the basic literary form. This is a very important event in the history of British short stories. Among these works, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" was known as "The milestone of British short stories history" (Antony, 1984:138) by Thomas Hardy. These short stories are not compact in plot or structure. However, Mansfield attaches great significance to details, slice of life, consciousness and so on. In the new literary form, Mansfield uses a new narrative technique, adopts multiple narrative points of view to replace the single and omniscient type of narrative perspective in traditional short stories. This greatly enriches the narrative techniques of short stories.

Mansfield's literary career is not very long. However, it has come into great discussion through the whole century. In addition, her 93 works have left great research value. Her short stories can be divided into three periods in writing form, writing style, writing theme and techniques of expression. The three periods are the imitation stage, the exploration stage and the maturity stage.

At the beginning of her writing, she mainly imitates Chekhov in art, which shows her straightaway style of writing and somber keynote. Mansfield published four works between 1907 and 1908. These four works are "In a Café", "Edey", "The Dream of Rosa Bell" and "Lerneil". Then comes an important period which Mansfield changes her writing style from imitation to exploration. The more significant is that she finds the most suitable writing theme and writing form for herself. She publishes

10 short stories in *New Times* between 1911 and 1917, such as “The Baby was Born This Day”, “Modern Mather and Daughter”, “Swing” and so on. The third writing period of Mansfield is from 1917 to 1922, which is also the maturity and peak period of her writing career. An excellent short story “Prelude” which brings great value and significance to British short story history is published in 1917. Its success shows that Mansfield finally finds the writing theme and form which suit her best. “Bliss”, “The Garden Party”, “At the Bay”, “A Cup of Tea”, “Mr and Mrs Dove”, “Her First Ball” and “The Doll’s House” are also the most famous works of hers during that period. On the whole, although Mansfield’s short stories’ themes are not wide, her unique artistic method and technique of expression attract readers and thesisists.

Modernism has very complicated background. Strictly speaking, modernism is not a genre, but a trend of thought in literature which consists of many modernist techniques of expression, including art, drama, literature, architecture, etc. Modernist literature emphasizes the focus on expressing oneself. The writing techniques are very subtle. There is no obvious reason for the beginning and the end of the story. Moreover, the background of the story is ambiguous and the casual relationship is unknown. The language style is also contrary to tradition.

Mansfield’s short stories are not difficult to understand. Her short stories resemble Chekhov’s works, which often appear with unexpected turning points and changes in time and space. At the same time, she also strives to be simplify her words and tries to cut out the optional words. She uses a lot of modernist techniques of expression. She manifests vivid trend of modernism with the language of downplaying the plot and poeticizing the female perspective, the application of impressionism and symbolism. Mansfield, who contributes all her life to producing short stories, uses the pen in her hand to blend her own life experience into her works. Then she describes those who experience the same obstacles with her in her works.

Stream of consciousness and symbolism are the methods of writing which literateurs used to applying in their works. In Mansfield’s short stories, she also uses a large number of writing forms which include stream of consciousness, symbolism, downplaying the plot, perspectives of narration, etc. These techniques demonstrate the implied meanings of short stories, uncover the themes, and convey thought and attitude of the writer.

Mansfield forms the organic blending of traditional symbolism and modern symbolism. She enriches themes of her works, which makes her short stories more enduring and valuable. It’s not undetectable to find that her works are more like daily life. In regard to choices of subjects, her short stories stray from the traditional ones. She tends to write about ordinary persons and trivial matters into her short stories. She is accustomed to portraying characters and revealing themes by choosing meaningful details carefully. All of these require keen eyes to support those scattered scenes of life as the time goes by. This thesis further proves that Mansfield is the heir of British short stories by studying representation of modernism in Mansfield’s short stories. It encourages people to pay more attention to ordinary life, gives more care for civilians and more love for the motherland and nature. Mansfield opens up a path to a higher state and shows a broader vision for people.

2. Stream of Consciousness Revealed in Mansfield’s Short Stories

“Stream of consciousness” is first brought into literary circle by Mei Sinclair in 1918 when he commented on an English fiction “journey”. From that moment on, stream of consciousness in literature means, in general, focusing on portraying the stream of characters’ consciousness. This includes not only sober consciousness but also subconsciousness of illusion and language. This can be used to distinguish it from the traditional narration of mainly portraying sober consciousness. It is applied in drama and poetry, but the primary achievement is in the field of fiction.

2.1 Association

Stream of consciousness differs from interior monologue. As the famous Chinese literary critic Chen Kun says, “The emergence of stream of consciousness is not the result of quantity accumulation, but the evolution of some fundamental literature concepts.” (Chen, 1991:186) Stream of consciousness

by means of free association does not change time and space forms with restraint. It tries to express the real consciousness. Its essence is literary techniques which can get rid of time and space. This is one of the most significant methods. Meanwhile, it's also one of the most prominent artistic features of her works. It's reasonable to say these, the artistic techniques of Mansfield's short stories may be much poorer without stream of consciousness.

The main technique to control consciousness is using the principle of psychological free association. No man can focus on a certain point for a long time during the progress of conscious activities. On the contrary, consciousness has always been active. Free association affects conscious activities. There are three factors that control association. The first is memory, which is the basis of association. The second is feeling, which manipulates the process of association. And the third is imagination, which confirms the flexibility of association. Some details in "Prelude" describe the conscious activities of characters with free association. In this work, Linda sleeps against the wall and sees poppies on the wall. Linda feels that the flowers are alive, for she draws with her fingers along them(imagination). And it is the flowers, the pedicels become the other kind of flowers' stalks throughout Linda's fingers(imagination, association, memory). Then she continues to think that many things would be like this. She begins to think of the tassels on the quilt afterwards. She often notices that the tassels turn into rows of funny dancers who are accompanied by many pastors(association, imagination). Strangely, some tassels walk slowly and bend their bodies heavily instead of dancing(imagination). Isn't this the posture of praying or listening to hymns(association, imagination)?

That's Linda's stream of consciousness. The series of events reveal the influence on Linda's mind of the outer world. Every detail is connected to the previous one with Mansfield's elaborate arrangements. In a word, stream of consciousness largely depends on free association. One distinction is mainly reflected in the frequency of using free association when these techniques are applied to it. Another distinction is different ingenuity complexity when using it. The frequency of using free association is high in Mansfield's short stories. "The Wind Blows" is an typical example. The association here is different from that used in "Prelude". Linda's association is her own consciousness moving forward, which is like a line of free association. No reciprocation during this ideological activity. However, all the association in "The Wind Blows" comes as wind. In other words, it returns when an association is going to pass the range of the initial one. The conscious movements of Linda's straight-line association implicitly reflect her stark separation from real life. Real life doesn't mean anything to her. Nevertheless, the character in "The Wind Blows" implies to the readers aware of her real surroundings and messy thoughts with conscious movements started by free association.

Throughout the analysis of these two, it is not hard to find the importance of association in stream of consciousness.

2.2 Time and Space Montage

Another artistic technique controlling the consciousness of characters in stream of consciousness is called "cinematography". The first used is "montage". "Montage, the most succinct statement is that a meaningful space created with the combination of lenses in succession." (Yang, 1986:182) Montage can convey extremely abundant contents and meanings. In essence, Montage is the means of comprehensiveness and multiplicity. In short, this is a way of showing multiplicity of events and consciousness. There are two methods of montage. One is the time montage, that is, the subject remains unmoved in space, but consciousness moves freely in time. The other is space montage, that is, time doesn't move but space moves.

Mansfield uses this technique to show multiplicity of human life, which is the simultaneity and existence between inner life and external life of characters. At the beginning of "Miss Brill" with exception of several paragraphs, we are always in Miss Brill's consciousness. Though the space is relatively still when Miss Brill is waling down the street, the time is passing. How amazing the changing frequency of images in themes and time is! As long as the images of Mansfield's works we record, we can find that most of cinematography has been adopted. As a result, a complex and subtle montage appears. Another short story "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" also uses montage. Time

and space both belong to conscious activities. The changes of time and space readers see throughout the works are absolutely presented by consciousness of the characters. The complexity and multiplicity of consciousness are right enough to explain the application of montage in Mansfield's short stories.

Montage makes the inner and outer worlds support each other. It also enriches contents of stories. The most important is that readers will have an illusion of what films perform.

2.3 Illusion

Mansfield notices that characters have illusions under the action between internal and external circumstances when describing their consciousness. If the characters are hallucinating, and the readers don't feel unexpected or far-fetched, then the writer's portrayal succeeds.

In "The Singing Lesson", Miss Meadows hears the willow talking. In "At the Bay", Bailey hears the tree talking about loneliness. In "Her First Ball", Lena hears a little girl in her heart crying. In "The Canary", The heroine hears the canary talking to herself. In "Miss Brill", Miss Brill obviously hears the crying from the box like a sigh while she puts her fur collar into it. In "Something Childish But Very Natural", the hero notices the moth turning into a little girl who wearing a big white skirt dancing slowly...All of these are the manifestations of illusion. Mansfield almost arranges all characters' illusions in the final part. On the one hand, Mansfield points out the tone of the whole story, on the other hand, she reveals the most realistic spiritual level of the works for readers.

Mansfield uses stream of consciousness to express the absolute separation of individuals and their selves. "The isolation of individual from self appears almost in every short stories of her." (Kate, 1986:17) Her application of consciousness is designed to express the most real and complex inner world.

The use of the stream of consciousness promotes her short story creation, and she occupies a very significant place in the English literary world. At the same time, it also proves the unique charm of modernist stream of consciousness from the perspective of the short story creation. (Kate, 1986:18)

3. Symbolism Represented in Mansfield's Short Stories

Symbolism is the most influential and the most extensive literary technique in modern Western literature. It's an item used to express some ideas and signs of the events. It can be descriptive or imaginary, perceptual or abstract. Symbolism is one of the most significant features of modernist literature, which can express not only emotions but also developments and changes of emotion. Mansfield attaches great importance to symbolism. It includes metaphors of character personalities and hints of environment in which people live. The most ingenious symbolism is the most obscure, so Mansfield calls this technique "Mask Method". She advocates hiding symbolism in words.

3.1 Symbolic Objects

The image of the subject in Mansfield's short stories and its symbolic meaning are always tactfully compiled in the structure of a short story and become the center of the work. For instance, the small oil lamp in "The Doll's House", the pear trees which appear for many times in "Bliss". "The special orientation and emphasis on the symbolic meaning of an object not only makes it become an unique and iconic feature, but also lets Mansfield express easily dissipation of emotion. Furthermore, it allows her to grasp the essence of the fleeting moment." (Gillian, 1988:168)

Flowers are one of the most common symbols in her works. Whether in her early works or middle and late works, the symbolic meanings of flowers are tactfully compiled in her works. The implied meaning of flowers changes frequently and quickly. We can know the real symbolic meanings by reading all her works. Different works involve different kinds of flowers. Violet is consistent with the sweet atmosphere of her early short stories, such as "Edey", "In the Café". Violet symbolizes the maiden and the shortest and the most beautiful young time. Another symbol of youth is chrysanthemum, whose symbolic meaning is completely different from violet. It is often associated with youthful sadness. The appearance of chrysanthemum seems like a random. However, it has a

deep meaning. Mansfield mentions chrysanthemum twice in "The Wind Blows". The first time is that in the garden, people scramble to pick up chrysanthemums in the wind. The second time is that in a music lesson, people notice a bottle of chrysanthemums in the fireplace. The chrysanthemum in "The Wind Blows" symbolizes frenzied adolescence like wind. Turbulent emotions during a puberty are hard to understand and control for the maiden. Such emotions will make her voluntarily cry out in piano lessons. More terribly, she may deem that life is really annoying. The chrysanthemum in "The Wind Blows" symbolizes turbulent emotions during a puberty. And in The "Singing Lesson", it presents disturbance during adolescence. And it symbolizes youthful sadness in "Prelude". Mansfield also uses rose, agave, hyacinth and many other flowers in her works as symbols.

Trees are common symbols in Mansfield's works. The pear tree in "Bliss" plays a very significant role: Pear tree is the symbol of Bertha's life and family harmony. The first appearance of the pear tree is at the beginning of the story. It symbolizes Bertha's happy life--no flower buds, no emarcid petals, everything makes her "blessed". The pear tree appears before the family gathering for the second time. This indicates that Bertha is affected by the people and events around her. She doesn't own that happy life any more. The third is at the family gathering. The pear tree here symbolizes the affected bliss of Bertha's family. The last time is in the final part of the story. The pear tree still symbolizes life, which hides merciless truth. As a result, the pear tree has been away from Bertha's heart. The famous critic Helen Nebeker deems that the pear tree is not only the symbol of herself, but also a symbol of sex. He points out in his paper, "Although many literature critics realize the importance of Bliss when they analyze it, they are generally unable to understand the symbolic meaning of the pear tree correctly. They prefer the tree to Bertha's personality and therefore don't notice the secret and subtle sex." (Helen, 1972:18)

Wind always appears in Mansfield's works, sometimes only to contrast the atmosphere of the work, but sometimes it contains a rich symbolic meaning. Critics pay much attention to wind in "The Day That Baby Born". "The wind, particular and common in New Zealand, achieves the respected results in "The Wind Blows". It not only brings out uneasiness of the characters, but also strengthen the uneasy mood of the characters." (Saralyn, 1965:24) In "The Day That Baby Born", on the one hand, the wind creates a tense atmosphere, on the other hand, the wind symbolizes the characters' true feelings. However, the wind in "The Wind Blows" shows a different meaning--youth.

Some ordinary items, in some of Mansfield's short stories, for having the special symbolic meaning, become the focus of literature critics. For instance, in "The Doll's House" there appears a common item--a small oil lamp, which symbolizes the love of mankind. The light of the small oil lamp in "The Doll's House" is a very clear symbol. A reader, may doesn't know the literary term of symbolism, but he can realize that the profound meaning of this oil lamp when he is reading the story. In Mansfield's works, the most ordinary things show some of the meanings of life.

3.2 Symbolic Scenes

In Mansfield's early works, such as "In A German Pension", there is always caricature at the time of publication. However, her works not just contain the irony of rude behavior of the Germans. She also adds some other symbolic meaning in her works. For example, she uses a scene of eating cherries to stand for the love between men and women. All of scenes in her works represent the special meaning. (Gillian, 1988:167)

Party, whose symbolic meaning is more subtle, is used much in Mansfield's short stories. It is applied in "Sun and Moon", "Her First Ball" and "The Garden Party". Theses works have such a similarity: the psychological consciousness of characters has undergone tremendous changes after a party, which is completely different from that before the party. The symbolic meaning of party is full of originality. It comes as a form of a ball, a family banquet or a friend's party. No matter in what form it appears, its meanings are roughly similar: the hearts of characters are subject to a great shock after the party, laughing in the beginning and crying in the end. Party is the most frequent and tactfully symbol of Mansfield's usage, which is usually used to present the transition between happiness and sadness.

Happiness is often gloss, and misfortune is truth of life. "Marriage a la Mode" and "An Ideal Family" also show the tactful application of party.

Natural scenes, of course, are an important scene that exists in her works. Like Lawrence, Mansfield gives natural scenes with rich symbolic meanings, that is, the spirit of natural symbolism. The natural beauty of "At the Bay", "Prelude" and many other works symbolize the spirit of the people who have not hurt the world peace and steady mentality. The natural scene in these short stories is always beautiful and pleasant. The bay is a symbol of human mind that has not been hurt by the so-called civilization. In other short stories, she uses the strange growth of some natural scene as a symbol of the human spirit with vulnerable and deformed statement. In "The Woman At The Store", she shows the damaged natural scene as a metaphor of the metamorphic human spirit that has been hurt.

3.3 Symbolic Titles

Mansfield's application of symbolic techniques embodies not only in the creation of items' symbolic meanings, but also in her short stories' titles. For instance, in such works as "The Wind Blows", "At the Bay" and "Prelude", their titles have a certain symbolic significance. Critics have noticed that symbolism in Mansfield's works is inconspicuous but high-impact, even sometimes hidden in the title of the short story. The titles of "The Agave" and "The Fly" themselves have a prominent symbolic meanings.

The title of "At the Bay" shows a distinctive meaning, which is inseparable from the tone of the whole work. It always embodies a peaceful beauty. The title just symbolizes the people who are living near this bay without receiving any traumatic spiritual world although this bay sometimes has small waves. For example, the father is unhappy in that he is disturbed by his neighbors when he is swimming in the morning. Or that the aunt Bailey hates marriage because she doesn't get married to the age. In any case, their unhappiness and uneasiness also have the same atmosphere which are consistent with the rhythm. There is no repression or hostility at this bay. The children can play with each other At the Bay happily and freely. Also, this bay symbolizes the human mind that has not been traumatized.

4. Perspectives of Narration in Mansfield's Short Stories

To talk about modernism in Mansfield's short stories, we cannot but mention the narrative technique of her short stories. Her unique narrative technique is one of the important reasons why her short stories are classified as modernist literary works. "Narration" is a kind of behavior, referring to the narrative subject using language as a special medium to express some of the context. "The narrator is the most central concept in narrative text analysis." (Mieke, 1997:19) This part will talk about the Mansfield's short stories from the perspective of narrator.

4.1 The First-person Narrative

In the first-person narrative model, there is only one narrator--I. I am both the protagonist and the narrator of the short story. This narrative model occupies about one-third of her works. We can find that in Mansfield's short stories, especially early and middle-term short stories, those which use the first-person narrator "I", the reader is more or less able to relate some descriptions to the author's experiences. The protagonist "I" in several short stories of "In A German Pension" shows the similar experience with the author. Mansfield herself does go to an pension to recuperate in Germany for a period of time. In the narrative of the first-person narrator, it can be seen that the narrator directly refers to the author's own diminutive when quoting some direct conversations, such as the name of "Cathay" or "Cather". "Aunt Fan" and "Prelude" are the classical examples. Even in such circumstances, it is necessary to distinguish the narrator from the author in that the work is not the diary but a short story.

The first-person narrator occupies a large number of Mansfield's short stories. It can be divided into two categories. One is similar with the first-person narrator in the traditional short stories. The first-person narrator is merely a narrator, an observer and a spectator of a story or event, but he or she isn't involved, such as "The Woman At The Store", "About Pat", "Aunt Fan" and many other works. The other is the first-person narrator which acts as a connotation. The narrator is no longer the author's

spokesperson or narrator, but a living individual, a character in the work. The characterization cannot be separated from the setting and manifestation of the narrator's narrative perspective. This feature is reflected in Mansfield's early, middle and late creative periods. Mansfield is influenced by the trend of modernist literature and deliberately explores new narrative techniques. In a word, it's a new perspective of narration.

The first-person narrative model in Mansfield's short stories is no longer a simple narrator, but a determination of self identity.

4.2 The Third-person Narrative

In Mansfield's works, in addition to the first-person described above, the third-person narrative appears most of the time. The third-person narrative often appears in traditional short stories, but there are clearly some new changes in Mansfield's short stories. These changes first manifests in Mansfield's "omniscient narrator" which no longer has a "privileged perspective". (Kobler, 1990:3)

To talk about the "privileged perspective", it is necessary to discuss the narrator. The narrator is an important creative technique of short stories and a significant part of narrative aesthetics. In her works, the narrator is as important as characters, plots, structures and so on. "Narrator" embodies two meanings: one is "Narrator", that is the people telling stories: the other is "Point of view", that is perspectives. In other words, it means the perspective, site and location that the observer chooses. Pan Weixin divides narrators into five categories in *Narrators of English Short Stories*. The first is All-knowing or Omniscient, the second is Limited Omniscient Third-person Central or Dramatic, or Objective, the third is Omni Present, or Dramatic, or Objective, the fourth is First-person Major, the fifth is First-person Minor. (Pan, 1992:4)

I will give an detailed example. "Limited Omniscient Narrator" fully agrees that limited perspective of the narrator is the main narrative model which "Life of Ma Parker", "Miss Brill", "The Man Without A Temperament" and some other works use. One paragraph of "Life of Ma Parker" embodies the narrative skills in which Mansfield tries to communicate the voice of characters and all-knowing narrators:

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 broked down, if at last, after all the several years, she were to cry, she'd find herself in the lock up as like as not.

From the narrative process of the narrator, we can feel the narrator's agreement and sympathy for those who participate in some part of the work. From the above-cited paragraph, for the first three sentences, we can see that the latter two are a supplement and sympathy for the characters' psychological feelings. And the narrator's voice in the text strengthens at the last part of the work.

4.3 Narration of Multiple Perspectives

Narration of multiple perspectives refers to letting those of the different individual finish the structure of the text in the same work and then making use of different narrative perspectives of characters which form a three-dimensional "narrative group". This technique is used by modernist writers frequently.

In Mansfield's three long short stories, many of the character of the works can be seen as an event, a scene and a dialogue of the narrators. The three works are divided into twelve parts. The narrative perspective of each part shows different narrative rhythms and voices for bearing the narrator's personality and different mentality. At the same time, the omniscient narrator which appears to be restricted in the third-person narrative model recedes. Especially in later short stories, it will become difficult to distinguish one consciousness from another. Mansfield uses a multi-perspective narrative to make her short stories closer to drama, so that the people speak on their own. There is no privileged perspective of the omniscient narrator. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel", "At the Bay" and "Prelude" are the most typical examples.

"Prelude" and "At the Bay" are usually used to be compared with "Waves" of Woolf by critics. The commonality of the two lies in the narration of "multiple perspectives". In "Waves", "Woolf opposes

the single perspective of traditional short storyists. Using multiple perspectives can portray characters systematically and comprehensively. The objective world can also penetrate through the feeling of characters and combine with the subjective world. At last, they can constitute a three-dimensional picture.” (Yuan, 2002:282)

The multiple narrative technique of “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” used is obviously more mature and complex than that of “Prelude”. This requires readers to have superb artistic appreciation. “To read this work, the readers not only need the ability to balance joys and sorrows, but also need the ability of superb artistic appreciation. Only in this way, can the readers grasp the characters’ mind that shows in different times and space.” (Koberl, 1990:66) To some extent, this is indeed a fantastic eye game. Then the readers can understand her works profoundly.

5. Conclusion

On the whole, the writing style of Mansfield’s short stories is unique and excellent. She creates new writing skills by inheriting the fine traditional techniques of British literature and break through the old frame of short stories.

The thesis discusses Mansfield’s representative modernist skills in the creation of short stories from three aspects. Mansfield is good at using stream of consciousness to describe the psychology of her characters, which expresses characters’ feelings implicitly. Symbolism is also her favorite technique, which involves many items and scenes. Another important technique is her perspectives of narration. Through these typical techniques, her works become more meaningful and valuable.

As one of the most important writers of British modernism, Mansfield’s short stories display modernist characteristics vividly. Her adept application of stream of consciousness and symbolism and frequent use of perspectives of narration in short stories show the influence and transformation of English modernist short stories in the rising period. Mansfield is undoubtedly the advocator and promoter of modernist literature. She is one of the significant writers of modernism in the 20th century in England. Her short stories have contributed a lot to British literature and world literature.

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