



Katherine Mansfield and the Material World

An international conference to be held at the

University of Bologna, Italy

12–14 July 2027

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Professor Emeritus Andrew Thacker, Nottingham Trent University, UK

Professor Anna Snaith, King's College London, UK

The study of objects and material culture in Katherine Mansfield's world offers a rich field of inquiry. Mansfield's fiction, letters and notebooks continually return to the tangible: lamps that glow with symbolic and affective force, domestic furnishings, clothing, food, flowers and the everyday detritus of modern life. These objects never remain inert. They function as symbols: as markers of class and consumer culture, triggers of memory and desire, and as points of intense sensory and emotional contact.

Mansfield's genius is grounded in her gift for selecting the significant detail. Through carefully chosen material elements she creates what Roland Barthes later termed the *punctum*: a detail that pierces the reader with unexpected personal force and produces an effect of lived reality. Her letters and private writings reveal the same alertness to ambience and atmosphere that animates her stories; she sketches settings through a handful of impressed images rather than exhaustive description.

Yet in Mansfield's work the material rarely stays purely material. The levity and precision of her prose can render objects almost immaterial, while at other moments their sheer materiality acquires unprecedented intensity, reminding us of our vulnerable bodily presence in the here and now. Conversely, the contemplation of the material world – gardens, rooms, weather, ordinary *things* – frequently becomes the occasion for prose-poem-like celebrations.

This conference invites scholars to explore the multiple – often paradoxical – relations between Katherine Mansfield and the material world. We welcome papers that examine objects, spaces, bodies, and sensory experience in her writing, as well as those that place her work in dialogue with broader theories of material culture, modernism, consumer society and phenomenology.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Symbolic and affective objects (lamps, dolls' houses, pearls, mirrors, flowers, food, clothing)
- Material culture and the critique of consumerism
- The significant detail, the *punctum*, and the creation of atmosphere

- Domestic interiors, furnishings, and the politics of space
- Sensory experience, impressionism, and Paterian aesthetics
- The material body: illness, vulnerability, embodiment, and mortality
- Colonial and postcolonial materialities (New Zealand objects, imperial commodities, travel goods)
- Fashion, textiles, and the performance of gender and class
- Ephemera, transience, and the aesthetics of the everyday
- Material texts: manuscripts, letters, notebooks, and the physicality of writing
- Technology, modernity, and new material forms in the early twentieth century
- Mansfield's writing and the visual or decorative arts
- Eco-materialist readings of Mansfield's environments

Please send abstracts of c. 200 words, together with a brief biographical note (approx. 50 words), to kmsconference2027@unibo.it by **28 FEBRUARY 2027**.

We look forward to rich conversations on the luminous, critical and deeply felt material worlds of Katherine Mansfield.