Reading through some of the short stories in David Leavitt’s collection *Family Dancing* (1984) – “Territory”, “Counting Months”, “Radiation” or “Dedicated”, to mention just a few – is not a very different experience from reading his novel *Equal Affections* (1989). Themes related to sickness, gay relations, and infidelity populate all examples of his short and long fiction, and the anguish and malaise they convey is comparable in substance and intensity. It is in fact quite reasonable to say that, with very few exceptions, practically all of the subjects tackled in the stories are re-created and combined into one single narration in the novel in a way that allows us to state with Friedman that “the difference is more of degree than of kind: the novel advances and develops its theme, while the story just shows it”.¹ What happens in Leavitt’s case, however, is not confined to a one-to-one relation between story and novel, since a succession of themes that seem independently constructed in each individual story are suddenly perceived as a fragmentary kaleidoscopic decomposition when they are re-encountered as semantically interrelated parts of a whole in the longer narrative.

A classic example of these thematically interactive exchanges between genres in literary creations is Katherine Mansfield’s “Prelude”, an exquisite story that often serves as a paradigmatic example of the intricacies shared by the shorter and longer versions of a single narrative work. As is widely known, this short story was a rewriting of Mansfield’s longest narration, *The Aloe*, a piece which

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she started in 1915 and which, according to O’Sullivan, was “her one successful attempt at something she believed was more or less of novel length”. Unfortunately for readers, and unlike Leavitt’s novel Equal Affections, Mansfield’s The Aloe never achieved the status of completeness, although a month after she had started what she called her “book”, she already spoke of conclusion (“My work is finished … it’s already accompli”), as O’Sullivan points out. It is impossible, therefore, for the theoretician to trace with precision the distance a fully developed novel might have imposed on its shorter narrative counterpart, although the opposite approach – that is, analyzing the process of conversion of the longer work into a short story – is a perfectly viable and rewarding course of action that has often been undertaken by biographers and critics alike.

In consonance with Tomalin, Ferguson considers not only “Prelude” but also “At the Bay” sequences of the family chronicle initiated in The Aloe. She believes that those portions of text that Mansfield decided to suppress from The Aloe when reshaping it as “Prelude” represent “all the material [that] would have ‘fit’ perfectly well into a novel, had Mansfield ever chosen to or been able to finish it”. The conversion of the novel scheme into a more feasible story (creatively more manageable and easier to publish) was done practically on demand, as Alpers, one of Mansfield’s biographers, reports:

It was in April, soon after a printing press had been unpacked on the dining-room table at Hogarth House, that Virginia Woolf had told her

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3 Ibid., ix.
6 Ferguson, “Genre and the Work of Reading in Mansfield’s ‘Prelude’ and ‘At the Bay’”, 32.