Women's studies journal

N ◆ Z ◆ W ◆ S ◆ A

Vol 4 ◆ No 2 ◆ December 1988

Katherine ◆ Mansfield ◆ 1888-1923 ◆

Women's Studies Journal

Volume 4 Number 2 December 1988

Women's Studies Journal
is published by the Women's Studies Association (New Zealand) (Inc.). It appears twice yearly.

Subscriptions *(including GST)*

New Zealand:	Overseas:
Individual $27 (hardship: $20)	Individual $40 (NZ)
Institutions: $36	Institutions: $50 (NZ)
Single copy: $16	Single Copy: $20 (NZ)

Send subscription enquiries and cheques/bank drafts to:
WSA (NZ), PO Box 5067, Auckland, New Zealand.

Contributions - NOTE CHANGE OF ADDRESS
Enquiries about the *Journal* and contributions ONLY should be sent to: Anne Else, Editor, 8 Woburn Road, Northland, Wellington 5.

Cover design by Barbara Gibb
Typing, typesetting and layout by Cheryl Mayne
Printed by Thames Printers, Wellington

WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION (NZ) (Inc.)

This Association is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality and class as well as sex.
We acknowledge the Maori people as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

Full membership of the Association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members. Annual subscription: $16.50 or hardship: $5.50. (Both include GST.)

Enquiries to: PO Box 5067, Auckland, New Zealand.

Annual Conference: The Association holds an annual conference where members present the latest feminist research and discussion papers, and workshops explore issues important to women. The *Conference Papers* are published annually. Members receive a discount for the Conference and the *Conference Papers.*

Newsletter: A quarterly *Newsletter* containing local and overseas news, book reviews, conference reports etc. is sent to all members.

Editorial

Breaking from tradition, as all progressive publications may do, this issue of the *WSJ* is devoted to a single subject: Katherine Mansfield. The centenary of her birth, in October 1988, was the occasion for a year-long cultural exhumation and celebration the like of which New Zealand has never before experienced. Mansfield was exhibited, filmed, stamped, postcarded, calendared, tee-shirted, dramatised and even microwaved (a demonstration by Alison Holst of KM's favourite recipes adapted for the modern devotee). During the course of the celebratory year she was also the subject of at least three conferences. That a woman writer should command such attention is to be lauded. The nature of the recognition being accorded was something which feminists became increasingly uneasy about as the year progressed

The *Journal* is dated December 1988 in order to try and regain a schedule of two issues per calendar year.

On 9 October 1988, the Women's Studies Department at Victoria University organised a one-day seminar entitled 'The Real Katherine Mansfield Conference'. The seminar offered an alternative to the larger, international conference of the literary establishment which later gathered to discuss Mansfield across the road. This issue of the *WSJ* grew out of 'The Real Katherine Mansfield Conference'. Four of the articles were originally presented as part of this Conference programme. Three of these, plus three of the others included here, were then presented as papers at the Katherine Mansfield Centennial Conference the following week. Nine women, all but one of whom are New Zealanders or have New Zealand connections, offer new interpretations of Mansfield's life and work. Standing a little further off, Sarah Knox examines the

relationship between the '1988 memory' and Mansfield's life — a memory which she argues is dominated by commercial interest.

Questions asked by the other eight authors with regard to Mansfield's characters, and her own complex life, examine a range of subjects: female friendship, colonial identity, self presentation, lesbian relationships, female sexuality, a sense of belonging, ways of being a woman in the world. All approach Mansfield with the vigour of feminist challenges to orthodoxies in biography and literary criticism. But far from this leading to any uniformity, what emerges is a variety of new ideas. Neither Mansfield nor feminism offer a single view; the paths of exploration lead in a multitude of directions. Some of the articles deal more with Mansfield's life and others with her work, but there is a good deal of overlap between these. The significance of the pear tree in 'Bliss' (Pamela Dunbar), the nature of the relationship with Ida Baker (Alison Laurie) and the experimentation with self presentation (Isabelle Meyer) can be usefully considered together. Similarly, questions of subversion and identity (in both gender and colonial/imperial spheres) are investigates in Mansfield's New Zealand stories and in her life by Anne Else and Lydia Wevers. Belonging somewhere else and being a woman in New Zealand were themes Mansfield returned to frequently in her writing, most explicitly towards the end of her life. In her letters and in the minds of characters like Linda Burnell these were constant preoccupations. Heather Murray offers a new reading of Linda Burnell, while Gillian Boddy discusses Mansfield's relationship with her Australian-born cousin, who was also a successful expatriate writer. Mansfield's status as a colonial woman, Ruth Parkin-Gounelas argues, shaped her interpretation of the work of other women.

Feminist contributions offer a rich and refreshing approach to readings of Mansfield's stories and the various 'Lives'. Read on and partake.

Charlotte Macdonald

Note on references

No page references are given for quotations from Katherine Mansfield's stories, but the edition used is noted at the end of each article. The various Notes and References supplied by the authors have been edited to conform broadly with each other and with our house style.

How Kathleen Beauchamp Was Kidnapped

Lydia Wevers

In a letter to *Zealandia* published in October 1889, a reader asked, 'Why is colonial literature, " the formative power of true Colonialism", called an abortion ... To create a national entity we must give heed to our latent character and not what is alien.'[1]

My starting point in this paper is this description of colonial literature as the 'formative power of true Colonialism'. In representing literature as the empowering location of colonial identity, this letter indicates a complex concern amongst colonial readers and writers about what colonial literature might be, and how it might distinctively characterise itself.

On the one hand the term 'colonial' is an unacceptable expression of cultural separation, as in this letter published in 1890:

> Do not let us have a purely Colonial literature; it cannot be a good thing to fetter us to the narrow circle of the Colonies ... We do not want yet a Colonial style any more than we want a Colonial accent, and our noblest aim is to belong to English, not Colonial, literature.[2]

On the other, 'colonial' becomes the signifier of specific difference located in the 'life' and 'character' of narrative, so it is a cultural separation both necessary and positive, as in this book review:

How Katheen Beauchamp was Kidnapped

> This book is described on the title page as a colonial tale. The scene, it is true, is laid in the colonies — first in Oamaru and Dunedin, and afterwards in Melbourne —and to this extent it is a colonial tale; but there is nothing distinctively colonial in either the characters or the incidents. It seems a pity to use thus indiscriminately the term 'colonial' which should only be applied to tales that illustrate some phase of colonial life or character.[3]

In this paper I want to consider the colonial short story as a signifier of colonial discourse, and as one of the places where the term 'colonial' is intended to represent a distinctive cultural identity defined by difference and separation from the originating culture. I want also to suggest the ways in which this discourse is expressed in the 'colonial' stories of Katherine Mansfield, most particularly 'The Woman at the Store', but also 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped' and 'Millie'. My title, 'How Kathleen Beauchamp was Kidnapped' can serve as a signifier to the writer KM might have been had she stayed in her colonial dress, and resisted appropriation by Europe.

Colonial writing is a discourse of exteriority. In order to suggest the distinctiveness of their representation of the colonial, colonial writers rely heavily on a visible external expression of difference, typically that of clothing, landscape and stereotype, and on a narrative structure authorised by the inclusion of or dependence on incidents which derive from documented or anecdotal history. In New Zealand these range from goldmining and tribal conflict to the conditions of material existence in a still wild and unEnglish landscape. The writer wishing to register 'colonial' as a distinctive term typically concentrates on external characteristics as a sign of the successfully separated colonial self, identified with and by the context of otherness, by appearing in colonial dress both literally and metaphorically. Association of dress and place is explicit. 'Teddy had worn pinafores in Australia, wide collars in England, and dungarees from one end of New Zealand to the other.'[4]

In the story by G.B. Lancaster, Teddy is not, however, confined simply to wearing dungarees as the expression of true colonialism; he is also 'strong in the knowledge gained as indubitable owner of a nine-by-fourteen sod *whare*, and a two thousand acre run many miles down the river'.[5] Teddy's dungarees dress him for his possession of land, and his specifically colonial identification is associated both with his ownership of a sod whare and a large piece of land, and with his occupation — he works on his land, this is what legitimates his possession of it, and why the knowledge of his property gives him strength. Teddy's ownership of land is represented not as appropriation by Teddy, but as the

assimilation of Teddy to his context; his sod whare and his run by the river dress him as distinctively colonial, just as his dungarees do. Property as knowledge and ownership as strength are characteristic tropes in colonial fiction. By emphasising a visible external characterisation associating work and identity, the colonial writer is able to represent appropriation as assimilation, and economic dominance as legitimated ownership.

If 'colonial' comes to mean a cultural identity externally recognisable by its work and the place in which that work is done, then what is frequently distinguished as 'alien' in colonial fiction is not the other, the subject people who define colonial as a racial and racist identification, but the culturally separated self represented for example as the New Chum, in whom the boundary of difference is constructed as a difference in *knowledge* — the knowledge of place and of the work associated with it that allows the colonial to become overtly assimilated to the place which colonial work is appropriating and 'civilising'.

'Colonial' identity therefore, as fiction writes it, is suggested by characteristics expressed as external — clothing, context, landscape — which represent a form of knowledge that separates the colonial subject from his or her self of origin. Colonialism is thus the recognition of a selfhood distinctive from, but still within, a culture that defines it. However, too great a cultural separation in colonial identity becomes problematic. Colonial writers are, on the whole, anxious to claim an essential unity of human nature at the same time as they mark off the visible distinctiveness of the colonial as local colour. The judge of a 1900 Prize Story Competition held by the *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* remarked that:

> there is one great danger however, in applying this canon of art (that essentials and externals must be distinctly local) into which writers much greater than competitors fall, and that is the constant tendency to sacrifice to it all genuine human interest and to stifle the appeal that their works should make to human nature generally; the writer of a New Zealand story must not ignore that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.[6]

Making the whole world kin is a very useful way of removing problems in colonial identity. As long as the non-essential difference which constitutes local colour is simply external variation which defines colonialism as a form of knowledge, problematic differences such as race or gender are absorbed into the kinship of human nature, and the boundary of knowledge that distinguishes the colonial from his self of origin need not argue any essential transformation. So colonial fictive

modes prefer to suggest essential human unities, while emphasising the specific cultural differences expressed in the colonial subject. A review of Blanche Baughan's collection of verse *Shingle Short* praises it for being essentially "colonial in conception and in inspiration', which means that it employs 'rugged' language, and the life depicted is 'true in every detail' but the tone is 'clean and lofty'.[7] But if 'colonial' writing illustrates too wide a gap between the colonial subject and acceptable convention in the originating culture, then colonial writing, in attempting realism and a specific characterisation of difference, is at fault. Clara Cheeseman, author of an article titled 'Colonials in Fiction', published in the *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* in 1903, expressed concern that the literary representation of colonial life was so extreme as to devalue the colonial in his place of origin:

> The saddest and most unflattering accounts of colonial life are to be found in the books written by those who ought to know it best. A lecturer or literary man — I forget the name — went Home after a lengthened tour of the colonies, and spoke with severity of the drunkenness and profanity of Australians; their gambling and horse-racing habits, the vulgarity of ordinary conversation and so forth. A storm of indignation burst about his ears. To justify himself he points to their own novels. 'Read these,' he said, in effect, ' and see if I am mistaken.'
>
> And, indeed, there are few colonial stories which are quite free from this taint. The same might be said of many which have been written by New Zealanders. Altogether, colonial people have much need to pray that they may not be taken at their own valuation.[8]

This problem is particulary acute in the case of woman writers, for whom the terms 'woman' and 'writer' already suggest a cultural gap, which is only increased by the addition of 'colonial':

> Many women invent situations which they ought to be ashamed of, and write down language which surely they would not have the hardihood to read aloud. Sometimes this is done through ignorance, or under the mistaken impression that they are making their writings forcible. And so they are in one sense— too forcible. Everyone admires strength but we do not want to be struck with a sledgehammer.[9]

This sledgehammering colonial woman may be seen in the bush, but must not appear on the page. However, these anxieties about literary decorum indicate a real problem inherent in the colonial self and what

it represents. If the true depiction of colonial scenes requires that the colonial adopt not just the visible differentiation of dress, work location and rugged language, but also an essential transformation of morality, a moral otherness, identity becomes problematic. To be culturally distinctive, the term 'colonial' must indicate some separation from the culture from which the colonial derives. Colonial fiction suggests this separation in the location of external difference; but narrative structures increasingly suggest the difficulty of containing change and separation as exterior. The ways in which the predominant types of narrative fiction work at defining colonial identity suggest its developing complication.

Colonial short fiction falls characteristically into particular narrative forms. First, and least troublesome, is the yarn or tale which authenticates its distinctiveness by dependence on historical event. It typically asserts cultural dominance either as labour and administration, the civilising work of clearing the land, in which the signifying other is the landscape; or by reference to events which characterise the locality as other, such as goldmining, or sometimes war; or, less problematically, by humorous incidents arising from the exigencies of material life in a recently built settlement. The 'voice' of the yarn is always male; in its language and anecdotal narrative structure it is the least problematic representation of colonial identity as visible, stereotypic, and non-essential difference. Here is Bill the bullock-driver from 'A Yarn from our Township' (1901) dressed in the speech and garments of cultural identity, discovering his woodpile has been stolen:

> He was a square-set, obstinate-looking man dressed in dungaree pants, crimson shirt and leggings. His coat was tied around his neck by the sleeves, and from his blucher boots to his flabby felt hat he was coated with mud and steaming with moisture — a hairy man with a beard that looked as if it would turn grey with the shock, if it happened to meet by accident with a comb or a brush.
>
> 'Not a bit. Not a-coruscated ebullition of adjectives-bit! Not even enough to light a fire with! Well I'm blowed!'[10]

Yarns and tales represent their origin as 'real' experience; but another preferred colonial mode, the ghost or mystery story, represents its origin in experience that is explicitly other — outside empirical knowledge, located outside conventional social structures. Indeed, in a story called 'The Mystery of Black Grange' (1900), in which a beautiful woman is imprisoned in a remote building in the Kaipara, the place of her imprisonment is described as being outside British law: 'Look at country, mister, British law 'ud get lost an' starved in it.'[11]

How Katheen Beauchamp was Kidnapped

Colonial ghost stories typically represent the presence of otherness which positions the culturally separated colonial self not as place or work, but as supernatural and Maori. The Maori as other is the object in a fantasy about inexplicable primitive power, seen from a culture stressing empirical knowledge and rationality. Close association with this power by the colonial subject is usually destructive; rather, the power of colonial knowledge is asserted by dramatising an ambivalent desire for the other which is then denied. It is not overt colonial identity which is problematic in ghost stories, but the nature of the other, a racial stereotype which is, in Homi Bhabha's terms, both phobia and fetish.[12] In expressing ambivalent desire as part of the colonial experience of other, rejection of the object becomes a cultural assertion of superior rationality. A characteristic example is the end of 'The Disappearance of Letham Crouch' (1901):

> McCrea hesitated a moment, and then put down his pipe very deliberately.
>
> 'If he was mad,' he said slowly, 'it was a queer case. The Maori part of him was sane enough. It seemed to me as if the personality of the Maori, who had died in the whare, had eaten its way into him through his environment in some way.'
>
> 'Bosh' said McShane, and I got no further information of any value out of either of them. [13]

Of the 86 stories submitted for the *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine's* Prize Story Competition in 1900, 90 percent were love stories. If short fiction has a predominant colonial mode it is romance melodrama, a fictional form of pronounced conventionality in which the surface narrative structure becomes a kind of dressing — the superimposing of a familiar pattern on an unfamiliar environment. There may be distinctive externally recognisable colonial figures in the love story; but in its articulation of desire, and its formulation of the object of desire as ultimately, after trial, attainable, it reiterates and affirms the colonial preference for the essential unities of human nature; it quite literally makes the whole world kin.

But the love story can also be read as a signifier of colonial preoccupations. Its fictional nexus is typically the interaction of love and money, or less often the interaction of love and race, so the subject/object relationship in a love story articulates the successful satisfaction/completion of desire as the appropriation or rightful possession of wealth or land, or, conversely, the subject's frustrated desire for wealth or land. When the object of desire is also Maori, as is not infrequent, the fictional model of the love story is able to absorb or rewrite racial difference as

though it is a natural appropriation; the subject's successful desiring of the object legitimates possession. When both subject and object are Maori, as is also often the case, then the love story becomes a cultural appropriation, rewriting the other as a familiar narrative of essentialism. 'The Last of the Ngatiahutus' by Roderick MacDonald (1900) is an example: 'A conflict between love and duty — such a one as is experienced by men and women, both brown and white, savage and civilised, all the world over — was taking place in the mind of the stern young warrior.'[14] In this way colonial love stories are a model for the legitimate appropriation of the object of desire, and the writing out of racial, cultural, and gender difference (men and women, brown and white, savage and civilised) in favour of essentialist unities here expressed as love and duty.

However, colonial romances also typically express an uneasiness about cultural separation in the subject, indicated either through the eruption of violence into the story, or by the frequent discovery that the colonial lover's self-representation is duplicitous, that he is not the man he claims to be — he is not single, but married, or his claim to fortune is misrepresented. The visible distinctiveness of the colonial may misrepresent the social and cultural identity left behind in England, and so the external clues by which identity announces itself become liable to misrepresentation. Or, as in the following example, a ludicrous mismatch of self-representation and social convention re-invents identity and its representation, and so begins to destabilise social convention. In a story by Clara Cheeseman first published in 1878, 'Married for his Money', the object of desire — in this case a young man who has inherited a fortune — is dressed for the part:

> Mr Simpelson had, since the arrival of his fortune, indulged in a style of dress resembling that often affected by lucky diggers, and other suddenly-enriched mortals. Although it was only eleven in the forenoon, he was in full evening costume; his black suit was of superfine cloth, his new boots creaked with every step he took. The jewelry that the misguided young man wore would have realised a small fortune; coral and gold studs, and sleeve links, a gold watch with a guard that was nearly thick and strong enough to be used as a dog chain, and from which were suspended various ornaments, while six rings, studded with enormous gems, adorned his fingers.[15]

Mr Simpelson quite literally clanks with the external announcement of identity; it is one thing to represent yourself as the successful coloniser of wealth, another to wear it all on your person.

How Katheen Beauchamp was Kidnapped

In colonial love stories the surface narrative of events frequently signals anxiety about the uncontrollable gap between the colonial and the self from which he has separated in order to become distinctively identified as colonial. It is a cultural separation which the colonising subject always implies, and which includes the difficulty of containing both subject and colonised object unambiguously within the conventions of the appropriating culture. Colonial romance, dressing itself distinctively in the externals of cultural identity, employs a narrative structure which locates that identity as itself problematic; as existing within a colonial discourse of appropriation and possession, and as part of a subject/object relationship which often suggests that the experience of the other is morally transforming and destabilising.

'The Woman at the Store', the first of Mansfield's 'colonial' stories submitted to *Rhythm* in 1912 and 1913, announces its distinctive colonial location in characteristically external terms — the heat, the wind, the tussock grass, pumice dust, horses, physical discomfort, manuka bushes.

Jo and Hin are seen, are recognised, by their clothing which announces visible identity: a blue galatea shirt, corduroy trousers and riding boots, a wideawake, blue duck trousers. What they wear and what they eat — fly biscuits and apricots by the side of a swampy creek— represent them as colonial, assimilated, identified with place and occupation. They have in view a conventional object which reaffirms the gender and fictional identity of the subjects — a woman with blue eyes and yellow hair 'who'll promise you something else before she shakes hands with you'.

But as soon as Mansfield has established the recognisable conventions of colonial self-representation, she begins at once to subvert them, drawing explicit attention to the unease and anxiety about cultural identity which the colonial romance/melodrama attempts to contain. The woman at the whare greets the travellers (Jo bursts into song at seeing her) with a rifle; her welcome is ambivalent and her representation as an object of desire is ludicrous, a 'figure of fun':

> I smiled at the thought of how Hin had pulled Jo's leg about her. Certainly her eyes were blue, and what hair she had was yellow, but ugly. She was a figure of fun. Looking at her, you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore — her front teeth were knocked out, she had red, pulpy hands and she wore on her feet a pair of dirty Bluchers.
>
> 'I'll go and turn out the horses,' said Jim. 'Got any embrocation? Poi's rubbed herself to hell!'
>
> 'Arf a mo!' The woman stood silent a moment, her

> nostrils expanding as she breathed. Then she shouted violently, 'T'd rather you didn't stop... you *can't* and there's the end of it. I don't let out that paddock any more. You'll have to go on; I ain't got nothing!'

The woman's external representation of gender, her pinafore, her yellow hair, her child, seems to be nothing but external: as an object of desire she exists only in fantasy, under her pinafore 'you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires'. Metaphorically and descriptively the woman is identified externally with her territory; she is the woman at the store, like Teddy with his two thousand acre run; but *as* a woman, and the desired object in a romance, she is little more than an animated pinafore who's 'gone a bit off 'er dot'.

The place inhabited by the woman at the store is distinctively and externally characterised. Visible within it are the signs of cultural separation; English periodicals are plastered to the walls, but the inside of the whare is a place of work, of material discomfort, of flies and smells, and a coloured print of Richard Seddon. This large room, papered with the out-of-date pages of another self, is filled with the utensils and broken down objects of working existence, the work of the coloniser by which she is identified and which entitles her to possession — but significantly, as a wife, possession limited to the occupation of this room. Like the pinafore, it is a form of dressing that represents her as colonial woman, an exterior identity. The narrator, sitting on the table waiting for the embrocation for Hin's horse, becomes conscious of a quality of the landscape, 'a curious half-hour when everything appears grotesque — it frightens — as though the savage spirit of the country walked abroad and sneered at what it saw. Sitting alone in the hideous room, I grew afraid.'

It is in the 'hideous' room that the narrator becomes conscious of the other who is not the woman with the yellow hair, though she is still the ambivalent object of desire, but the savage spirit that inhabits the countryside which the colonial subjects of the story are passing through, and which the woman at the store is occupying with her work, her scone-baking and her ironing. And as the narrative events of the story proceed, the visible cultural identity of the woman at the store is seen to have as much substance as her pinafore; it is a kind of dressing concealing her transformation into other, unknown, phobia; her appropriation by the savage spirit of the country.

The barmaid, pretty as a wax doll, who knew 125 different ways of kissing, isn't the same woman any more; the coloniser has been colonised; and woman as object has been doubly displaced from her conventional identification as an object of desire, a wax doll, to sticks and

wires and to murderer. She is identified by her action as other, savage, no longer object but subject, no longer woman but unwoman, whose identification as other is confirmed by her child representing herself in her drawings which are the 'creation of a lunatic with a lunatic's cleverness'.

'The Woman at the Store' represents itself as a distinctively colonial melodrama, and then subverts the discourse signified by its fictional model. Not only does Mansfield subvert romance by representing the object of desire as a fantasy of purely external gender identity, of dress. Romance as a conventional structure of the attainment and possession of desire, and thus as a colonial discourse of legitimate appropriation and possession, is subverted by the transformation of the object into other, into savage; from 125 ways of kissing she has learned one way to kill. But in the story, it is only Hin and the narrator who become, through the child's drawings, aware of the gap between the woman who has murdered her husband, the secret the child must never tell, and the woman dressed in her best, her white calico dressing jacket and her black skirt, who plays kissing feet under the table. Fictionally, the reader is positioned with the narrator and Hin in the store room, sitting on two sacks of potatoes, as it were, behind the dressing up, behind the pinafore, behind the room with its door shut where Jo and the woman with yellow hair have gone for the night, seeing, not in speech or act, but in the child's drawing the sticks and wires of the other. Meanwhile, in the shut room, the social and fictional conventions of romance continue. Jo, at any rate, attains the object of desire.

Mansfield positions her narrative exactly at the point at which the separations of colonial identity are most evident. Here the double view, of the woman who is both object and other, destabilises and inverts the cultural identity of the colonial subject, and the gender stereotype of the woman. The woman at the store has become someone, or something, that Hin and the narrator are not expecting; the cultural separation of her selfhood which is represented as the wax doll barmaid who has become the woman in the bush with a rifle has resulted in an identity that is distinctive in its colonialism, but also distinctive in its moral otherness. She is herself colonised/appropriated, become savage, undesirable.

Mansfield further complicates this by destabilising the assumption of narrative type that opens the story. Jo and Hin are identified conventionally as visibly and externally colonial men, but the narrative voice, it is suggested, is that of a woman. The child watches 'her' bathing, but apart from the pronoun, other clues to the narrator's gender are marginal.[16] She is not asserted as a woman; rather the pronoun 'her' shatters the assumption that it is three men who ride into the story, and so it

functions as a separation of the reader's understanding of the colonial subject. Mansfield subverts the gender difference implied in the structure of subject/object, and places the narrator outside the identification of type which is writing the story within a distinct colonial mode. She successfully deconstructs all her narrative categories, and the text becomes the site of uncertainty and questioning. The narrator is effectively placed outside the categories of cultural identity, subject and gender which allow us to 'read' the story; thus she acts as a subversive commentary on the kind of colonial discourse her narrative signifies. If the narrator cannot be constructed, can the narrative?

Mansfield's subversion of convention, structure and discourse acts in her colonial stories generally to rewrite the preoccupations of colonial self-representation. As in 'The Woman at the Store', 'Millie' establishes colonial distinctiveness in external location; Millie is the woman alone in a hot dry landscape, the sun 'like a burning mirror', the boys gone to hound down the young English johnny who'd been on the station learning farming. The young English johnny is a New Chum. Like the picture on Millie's bedroom wall, 'Garden Party at Windsor Castle', he is foreign. Millie, looking at the towers of Windsor Castle, flying three Union Jacks, and in the middle of the picture the old Queen, 'like a tea cosy with a head on top of it', rejects it in favour of a large photograph of her and Sid taken on their wedding day, fern trees and a waterfall behind them and Mount Cook in the distance. To Millie, Windsor Castle with its social structures is foreign, other, it has too much side. She rejects what she is culturally separated from, and justifiably so; for the rejected other, in the person of the young English johnny, is also morally other, a murderer, representing an extreme.

> As Sid said, if he wasn't strung up where would they all be? A man like that doesn't stop at one go. There was blood all over the barn. And Willie Cox said he was that knocked out he picked a cigarette up out of the blood and smoke it.

When Millie realises the murderer is in her wood pile, stops seeing him as the representative of all that she is opposed to and thus defined by, and recognises in him a sick child, she determines to save him from the men who are now beasts, until he escapes later in the night and in becoming the object of the hunt, positions Millie with the hunters.

It is tempting to see in 'Millie' Mansfield playing with a recurrent colonial narrative like 'The Drover's Wife': the woman alone in the landscape, threatened by the other to whom she is object, the other who represents an extreme of social and moral opposition. 'Millie' plays with and shifts the notions of otherness which constitute the narrative location of the story by reversing and complicating the social and human

relationship of the woman and the boy who threatens her: he arouses painful motherly feeling in Millie, and, though a murderer, is clearly of a higher social class, more obviously 'civilised' than she. Yet at the same time the story affirms their cultural separation which finally determines how Millie reacts to him. Her colonial identity is established by her opposition to Windsor Castle and the Union Jacks and the young English johnny, human and child though he is. Essential human unity is abandoned. 'She rushed into the road — she laughed and shrieked and danced in the dust, jigging the lantern. "A-ah! Arter' im Sid! A-a-ah! ketch him Willie. Go it! Go it! A-ah Sid! Shoot 'im down. Shoot 'im!"'

In 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped', Mansfield plays with racial otherness in what is also a preoccupying motif of colonial fiction, the lost or kidnapped chld. If colonial romance signifies a discourse of racial and territorial appropriation, then the colonial fear of being in turn appropriated is typically represented in a displacement onto women, the women who go mad in the bush, or children, the children appropriated by the other, either as landscape or as human. But when Pearl Button with her yellow curls goes with the two fat Maori women to a meeting house, and then to the beach, imprisoned in her clothes and in her social conventions, her narrative movement out into landscape and into a knowledge of racial and cultural difference is a liberation from the constriction of being the colonial subject, caught in a House of Boxes.

Mansfield's colonial stories show her ability to adapt colonial dress and then subvert it, so that the anxieties expressed in colonial narrative modes and structures — about identity, about cultural separation, and about appropriation both by and of the colonial subject — become the location of her texts. As always, Mansfield's stories are where questions are asked, where what it is to be colonial is re-invented, re-written and re-understood.

Lydia Wevers teaches English at Victoria University and is researching the history of the short story in New Zealand. She has edited several anthologies of women's writing.

Notes

1. John C. Thomson, Letter to *Zealandia* No. 4, October 1889: 236.
2. W.R. Haselden, 'Novel Reading' *Zealandia* No. 6, December 1890:387.
3. W.A. Sim, Review of *The Mystery of the Forecastle* by R.V. McPherson. *Zealandia* No. 3, September 1889:151.
4. G.B. Lancaster 'God Keep Ye Merrie Gentlemen', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* December 1901:168.
5. G.B. Lancaster ibid.

6. Some Remarks on the Recent Prize Story Competition' by One of the Judges, *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* February 1901:344.
7. Anonymous review of B.E. Baughan, *Shingle Short and Other Verses, Current Thought* Vo. 1 No. 1, September 1908:18-19.
8. Clara Cheeseman, 'Colonials in Fiction', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* January 1903: 275-6.
9. Clara Cheeseman ibid.
10. Colin C. Biernacki, 'A Yarn from our Township', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* May 1901:595.
11. Elma Vronberg, 'The Mystery of Black Grange', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* October 1900: 18.
12. Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism', in *Literature Poetics and Theory*, ed. Barker *et al.*, Methuen 1986:148-172.
13. Chas. Owen, 'The Disappearance of Letham Crouch', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* July 1901:781.
14. Roderick McDonald, 'The Last of the Ngatiahutus', *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* August 1900:824.
15. Clara Cheeseman, 'Married for His Money', reprinted in *Happy Endings*, ed. E. Webby and L. Wevers, Allen and Unwin 1987:59.
16. In the text of this story published in *Rhythm* Vol. I No. 4 1912, the child avoids a pronoun and uses 'that one' (p. 16); but in the version of the story printed in *Something Childish and Other Stories*, 1924, the pronoun 'her' is used, in a sentence previously attributed to the narrator, but in the later version to the child (p. 68).

References

Katherine Mansfield. 1912. 'The Woman at the Store'. *Rhythm* I, 4.
_____ 1924. *Something Childish and Other Stories*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

What Does Bertha Want?

A Re-reading of Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss'

Pamela Dunbar

'Bliss' (1918) is Katherine Mansfield's most controversial story. Criticism of it was first voiced by the writer's friends and contemporaries. John Middleton Murry found its 'mix' of satire and lyricism unsatisfactory; Virginia Woolf condemned it as the superficial product of an uninteresting mind; and T.S. Eliot, though affecting tolerance, damned it as being '[without] moral and social ramification', as 'handl[ing] perfectly [its] *minimum* material', and as being what he would call 'feminine'. Later critics have found the work incoherent, usually because of its employment of an 'unreliable' narrator, or cruel, on account of the fate that it metes out to the heroine.[1]

It seems to me that these criticisms arise in large part from a failure to perceive the radical nature of the narrative with which they are dealing. For 'Bliss', besides being a fairly conventional tale of a love-triangle, also constitutes a daringly experimental evocation of the nature of female sexuality. It is with this radical and subversive aspect of 'Bliss' that I intend to deal.[2]

'Bliss' opens with the heroine Bertha walking down the street in the

grip of a near-hysterical mood of ecstasy. There is no apparent cause nor, it would appear, any ready outlet for her condition:

> Although Bertha Young was thirty she still had moments like this when she wanted to run instead of walk, to take dancing steps on and off the pavement, to bowl a hoop, to throw something up in the air and catch it again, or to stand still and laugh at — nothing — at nothing, simply... She hardly dared to look into the cold mirror — but she did look, and it gave her back a woman, radiant, with smiling, trembling lips, with big, dark eyes, and an air of listening, waiting for something...divine to happen...that she knew must happen...infallibly.

When the maid finally lets her into the house Bertha goes straight to the dining-room to arrange some fruit. Her ecstatic mood transforms the result of her labours into an emblem of radiant beauty:

> When she had finished with them and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect — and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful.... She began to laugh.
>
> 'No, no. I'm getting hysterical.' And she seized her bag and coat and ran upstairs to the nursery.

In the nursery Bertha trains her still undirected ecstasies upon her baby daughter, Little B:

> she loved Little B so much — her neck as she bent forward, her exquisite toes as they shone transparent in the firelight — that all her feeling of bliss came back again, and again she didn't know how to express it — what to do with it.

Moving next to the drawing-room our heroine finds her attention caught by the view from the windows:

> At the far end, against the wall, there was a tall, slender pear tree in fullest, richest bloom; it stood perfect, as though becalmed against the jade-green sky. Bertha couldn't help feeling, even from this distance, that it had not a single bud or a faded petal. Down below, in the garden beds, the red and yellow tulips, heavy with flowers, seemed to lean upon the dusk. A grey cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow, trailed after. The sight of them, so intent and so quick, gave Bertha a curious shiver.

Bertha's reaction to this scene is a divided one: she is deeply moved by the beauty of the pear tree, and a moment later lays claim to the tree as 'a symbol of her own life'. She also sees it — like herself, perhaps — as 'tall' and 'slender'. And she dresses for dinner in white, green, and jade — colours that mimic the tree's own. (Her explicit denial here of any such connection — 'She had thought of this scheme hours before she stood at the drawing-room window' — is of course to be read as a sign of unconscious intent.) On the other hand she withdraws instinctively from the sight of the cats — slinky, and sexually engaged.

Bertha and her husband Harry are hosting a dinner-party that evening. Three of the guests turn out to be members of a smart 'arty' set; the fourth is an enigmatic young woman called Pearl Fulton, described in the story as a 'find' of Bertha's. Their chatter, which is smart and superficial, counterpoints Bertha's 'moments' of flaring intensity.

After dinner Bertha and Miss Fulton go together to gaze out of the windows, as Bertha had earlier done on her own. The scene is now lit by a full moon. Bertha experiences a moment of what she believes to be perfect communion with her friend:

> The two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed — almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.

Bertha then switches her attention to an imaginary conversation which she plans to hold later with Harry about this moment of intimacy but now her ecstatic pulsations suddenly shift from Miss Fulton to the possibility of a first-time satisfying sexual engagement with Harry himself — for, as the text has by now made plain, Bertha Young is still sexually unawakened. And her little fantasy of engagement with Harry anticipates a coming-together far more dramatic and dangerous than that which has (perhaps) already taken place with Miss Fulton in front of the tree:

> something strange and almost terrifying darted into Bertha's mind. And this something blind and smiling whispered to her: 'Soon these people will go. The house will be quiet — quiet. The lights will be out. And you and he will be alone together in the dark room — the warm bed...'
>
> She jumped up from her chair and ran over to the piano.
>
> 'What a pity someone does not play!' she cried. 'What a pity somebody does not play.'
>
> For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband.

The evening ends however with the shattering of Bertha's dual fantasy. Overhearing Harry arrange an assignation with Miss Fulton she realises that she has, in her own terms, been betrayed by both of them: her 'lovely pear tree' is all she has to turn to.

At the beginning of the story Bertha's 'ecstasy' is entirely unfocussed. It is registered by the heroine herself as superfluous (and unaccustomed) energy and exultation, and imaged as fire that 'burned in [her] bosom, sending out a little shower of sparks into every particle, into every finger and toe'. But, though the mood demands expression, its subject is uncertain about how she can express it without offending against 'civilisation':

> Oh, is there no way you can express it without being 'drunk and disorderly'? How idiotic civilisation is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?

And as the detail of the forgotten key — a typically Mansfield touch — suggests, she knows nothing of the origin or nature of these feelings.

From the outset — even before she settles down to arrange her tray of fruit — Bertha's reaction to this 'blissful' mood is complex: she both fears it and endeavours to precipitate an increase in its power. Her attitude is also consonant with the expectation of a trajectory of culmination and subsequent release:

> in her bosom there was still that bright glowing place — that shower of little sparks coming from it. It was almost unbearable. She hardly dared to breathe for fear of fanning it higher, and yet she breathed deeply, deeply.

Bertha now sets about arranging the fruit on a glass bowl and a blue dish (or a glass dish and a blue bowl — the adjectives are, I suggest, interchangeable because the precise nature of the vessels is immaterial) so that it forms two pyramidal shapes. These shapes appear to her to float in the air, lustrous and dematerialised — like symbols of some abstract and archetypal beauty.

Bertha interprets this vision as a confirmation of what she herself half-jokingly dismisses as her 'hysterical' condition. It is a parody not only of her extravagance of feeling, but also of the excesses of the contemporary aesthetic movement, with its preoccupation with perceptual intensity and the detachment of the art-object from 'real life'. But within the story it functions positively on the whole — as a 'normal' and 'natural' alternative to the absurdly corrupt and sterile artistic pretensions of Harry's dinner-guests, who concern themselves with plays like *Love in False Teeth* and 'Stomach Trouble', and poems beginning with '*incredibly* beautiful lines like 'Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?'[3]

Obtaining no release from her 'ecstasy' through this act of artistic devotion, Bertha rushes off to visit her baby daughter in the nursery. But it is supper-time there, and Little B is firmly in the clutches of her nanny. Like the 'poor little girl in front of the rich little girl with the doll', Bertha feels herself excluded. However, she does finally manage to snatch up the baby and feed her — with a spoon — while Nanny is out of the room.

One or two critics have tentatively suggested that the two pyramid-shapes into which Bertha arranged her fruit might be intended to symbolise breasts. But if this episode is considered in relation to the succeeding one, in which Bertha laments the way her child has ended up in another woman's charge — and in which she clasps and feeds her eagerly when she gets the chance — then the implication seems clear: Bertha would have done better to have followed her maternal instinct rather than social convention, and to have nursed and taken care of her child herself. Certainly her 'charge' of ecstasy is only renewed after she has fed Little B and while she is still holding her. It would appear then that it is an unconscious desire to nurture her child which Bertha expresses through the shapes into which she arranges the fruit — and moreover that it is this desire which sends her dashing off to the nursery.

Bertha's devotion to her daughter serves not only to indicate her mothering impulses: it is also a hint — another hint, if we bear in mind the likely significance of the pear-shapes — of her tendency to concern herself with the female principle rather than the male. The tendency is associated with a certain predisposition towards self-preoccupation, which also reveals itself in the name, Little B, of her daughter.

As we have seen, Bertha identifies with the pear tree — even to the extent of dressing herself in its colours. But Pearl Fulton — clothed from head to toe in silver, the colour of the moon — is also dressed with an eye to symbolic significance. In addition she is making an outré gesture which would have appealed to her 'arty' companions.

After dinner, as Pearl and Bertha stand side by side in contemplation of the scene which features their respective symbols, Bertha suddenly comes to envisage the pear tree in the shape of a candle-flame that stretches upwards — this detail is repeated several times — towards the rim of the moon:

> And the two women stood side by side looking at the slender, flowering tree. Although it was so still it seemed, like the flame of a candle, to stretch up, to point, to quiver in the bright air, to grow taller and taller as they gazed — almost to touch the rim of the round, silver moon.

Here the symbolism is clear. The tree, taking on the ardent nature of flame, and striving to reach (and, presumably, to penetrate) the chilly

and indifferent moon, both expresses and encodes the sexual attraction which Bertha feels for her friend. (Most critics now accept that the episode centres around lesbian desire.) The sexual positioning of the entities within this little fantasy are governed by the 'normal' biological/cultural sexual polarities: the tree (Bertha) takes on the male role in response to the rounded moon (Pearl Fulton), culturally associated with virginity and with the female principle. (In the next paragraph however Bertha appears to revert to the female position: she sees both herself and Pearl Fulton 'caught in that circle of unearthly light', and envisages the two of them being showered with silver flowers.)

As we have seen, our heroine permits herself to believe that she has enjoyed a moment of true intimacy with Miss Fulton. Yet there are clear indications, even within the frame of her fantasy, that this belief is false: the flame representing her ardour only 'almost' touches the moon's rim, and both women are described as 'creatures of another world...*wondering what they were to do in this one*' (my italics). And a second later Bertha, whose subconscious musings find frequent access to the narrative, admits to herself that she may well have imagined Miss Fulton's murmur of affirmation.

Finally Bertha comes to fix her emotional intensities upon her husband. However, it should be noted that she comes to do this only by way of a reference to her 'moment' of communion with Pearl Fulton. This she recalls a little later when, believing Harry to dislike Pearl, she rehearses the pleading of her friend's case with him:

> 'Oh, Harry, don't dislike her. You are quite wrong about her. She's wonderful, wonderful. And, besides, how can you feel so differently about someone who means so much to me. I shall try to tell you when we are in bed to-night what has been happening. What she and I have shared.'
>
> As those last words something strange and almost terrifying darted into Bertha's mind. And this something blind and smiling whispered to her: 'Soon these people will go. The house will be quiet — quiet. The lights will be out. And you and he will be alone together in the dark room — the warm bed...'
>
> She jumped up from her chair and ran over to the piano.
>
> 'What a pity someone does not play!' she cried. 'What a pity somebody does not play.'
>
> For the first time in her life Bertha Young desired her husband.

Bertha's evocation of a strange and terrifying Cupid-figure, even though one that is only partially articulated, suggests her anticipation of a

communion with Harry far more mysterious, and more disturbing, that any which may already have taken place with Miss Fulton. And that which was identified at the beginning of the story as 'bliss' — a spiritual condition implying a sense of absolute contentment which is its own end — is finally revealed here to be repressed sexual desire, fervently (if like the Cupid-figure, blindly) seeking its own satisfaction. It will be observed too that this desire exists in close association with fear. (In Bertha's confused psyche the qualifier 'almost' in 'almost terrifying' acts, as in other passages, as an intensifier.) Herein of course lies one reason for its repression. It is only through an inarticulate, and only half-acknowledged, passion for the apparently virginal Miss Fulton that Bertha for the first time becomes able to contemplate a fully-committed sexual relationship with Harry.[4] The gap in the text in the extract quoted above indicates, as do similar gaps in other Mansfield stories, a subconscious connection in the perceiver's mind between the two subjects.

Bertha's shift of focus from Miss Fulton to her husband is dramatic. It also marks the final stage in that sequence of events which corresponds to the unfolding of Bertha's desire There is a final twist in the plot, however, when Bertha realises a few moments later that her husband and her friend are already lovers; and that she, far from achieving an intimate relationship with each of them — as she had hoped to do — is being excluded by them from their relationship with each other.

The story ends with a brief return to that other 'couple' — Bertha and her pear tree. The topic of the pear tree is broached once more in Miss Fulton's ironical farewell to her hostess: '"Your lovely pear tree!"' (the words were originally Bertha's own) before she departs, the poetaster Eddie slinking along in her wake. With Miss Fulton's words resounding in her ears, Bertha rushes over to the windows again — to find that 'the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still.'

To register the full significance of this complex conclusion we must turn once more to Bertha's initial vision of her garden. The diagrammatic nature of this vision, coupled with the emphatic and intensely personal way in which Bertha reacts to at least one element of it, indicates that it may serve as a kind of objective correlative for her state of mind.

The lone pear tree seen in 'fullest, richest bloom' is unquestionably the dominant element in the scene. It is also the element with which Bertha herself identifies. Why does she do so? The tree's lovely white flowers — 'not a single bud or a faded petal' — may at first appear to suggest a kind of bridal, or nubile, openness. But as self-pollination does

not normally take place in the case of the pear, and as Bertha has in her garden only a single tree, a different (and opposed) interpretation — that of sterility — may well be more appropriate.[5]

The other features of this scene — the tulips 'heavy with flowers, [that] seemed to lean upon the dusk', and the cats, to which the departing Pearl Fulton and her pursuer Eddie are compared — appear to represent, respectively, generative fulfilment and a crudely instinctual sexuality. Though both are present in the scene, thereby indicating that each has a certain relevance to the heroine's own psyche, neither compels her attention in the way that the tree does. Bertha does however bestow a fleeting shudder upon the cats — something which, in the complex psychical organisation with which the story deals, no doubt indicates deep seated fascination on her part for them.

In sum, the garden forms an emblem of Bertha's sexual proclivities.[6] However, mediated as it is by Bertha herself, it represents, not these proclivities in themselves, but these proclivities subtly influenced by the heroine's own idealised image of herself. The pear tree, beautiful and inviolate, stands for her own desired self-image; the tulips (presumably) for that aspect of 'sexual' fulfilment which she has in some sense achieved, but largely ignored, in Little B; the cats for an instinctual sexuality which Bertha herself perceives as bestial, and emphatically rejects. One might add that this little emblem of Bertha's garden marks the transition in the text from (or break between) the fruit and child scenes, in which sex is not directly involved, to the two later encounters in which sexual engagement with another — with all its attendant risks and complexities — is at issue.

The episodic narrative which flanks this emblematic scene, and through which Bertha herself moves, does not actually conflict with the image of her which the emblem presents. But it does reveal the full extent of the split in her sexual identity — between that which is approved and acknowledged, and that which is repressed. It also gives some indication of the consequences of this repression.

Unable to engage readily in a fulfilling sexual relationship with her husband, Bertha is overcome by strong feelings of sexual desire. She does not realise, or else refuses to acknowledge, the significance of these feelings. Nevertheless they are imperious, dictating her mood and her responses to those objects and persons she encounters during the evening — and eventually even guiding her towards Harry, their apparent ultimate object.

Mansfield's description of the manner in which the heroine comes to focus attention first on the fruit-arrangement, then on her daughter, then on Pearl Fulton and finally on Harry himself, does appear to suggest a

dedicated and reasonably consistent — if subconscious — attempt on Bertha's part to find an outlet for her feelings.

This is not, however, the case. Any desire on Bertha's part for a renewed sexual engagement with Harry is mingled both with fear and with a sense of potential disillusion: 'Was this what that feeling of bliss had been leading up to? But then, then —' The notion of a climax (in both senses of the word) has been held out to us, yet no climax has been achieved. We are presented in 'Bliss' neither with the conventional happy ending of romance, nor with the sense of illumination which ought to conclude an 'education' story.

The plot of the story, then, fails to resolve itself into a conventional narrative progression. But its subversion of convention and of its attendant expectations indicates no cruelty on the part of the author, nor indeed any incompetence. They are a direct reflection both of the non-goal-directed nature of Bertha's sexuality and the way in which the alien 'climate' within which she is located causes her to repress her own desires. (I will return to this point a little later.) And far from being evidence of Mansfield's 'cruelty', Bertha's turning at the end of the story to the solitary pear tree for consolation is the logical consequence both of the character as it has been constructed, and of the position in which society has placed her.

Bertha's anxieties, and the repressions which they have given rise to, are not envisaged by Mansfield — nor indeed by Bertha herself — as a purely private malaise. They have their being within a social context — that of the arty metropolitan upper middle class. And within the story it is the Youngs' dinner-guests, together with Harry himself, who serve as a microcosm of that context.

Though Mansfield's manner of narration excludes us from these characters' inner lives, their social chatter, threaded through as it is with images of rape, mutilation, and sexual predation, reveals their obsessions. Some of the characters also appear to be fixated upon food — in Mansfield's writings a frequent indicator of an aggressive and overbearing attitude towards sex.[7] As Hanson and Gurr point out in their monograph on Mansfield, Bertha appears to have considerable natural sexual vitality.[8] Her inhibitions are presented as a reaction to the sadistic and crudely salacious attitudes that characterise the social milieu of which she is a part.

Sex, then, has become for Bertha a matter on the one hand of innocence and spirituality in which bodily impulses play no part; on the other an affair of crude lust that denies the 'higher' aspects of the personality.[9] Her emblematic garden reveals with stark clarity this schizophrenic attitude. The attitude is also written into the story's

opposing metaphors of stillness (associated with the pear tree) and extravagant motion, with its implications of a fast lifestyle. It is perhaps worth noting that the latter finds its most striking, and parodic, expression in Eddie Warren's nightmare taxi ride:

> 'I have had such a *dreadful* experience with a taxi-man; he was *most* sinister. I couldn't get him to *stop*. The *more* I knocked and called the *faster* he went. And *in* the moonlight this *bizarre* figure with the *flattened* head *crouching* over the *lit-tle* wheel...I saw myself *driving* through Eternity in a *timeless* taxi.'

And indeed, in what becomes a sort of 'in-joke', the story throughout associates taxis with basic, physical sex. Both Harry and Pearl arrive for the evening in taxis (it is implied that they have been together before the dinner begins), and when Bertha observes that her friend lives in taxis, Harry outragously replies '"She'll run to fat if she does... Frightful danger for blonde women."'

The consequences of the schizophrenic attitude towards sex which we have been discussing bear of course most heavily upon women. For instance, Mrs Norman Knight, alone of the dinner guests, finds it necessary to advertise her degraded attitudes through the clothes that she is wearing — in her case, her 'monkey' dress. The only way for a woman in particular to survive within such a culture may be to behave like the enigmatic seductress Pearl — acting publicly as a devotee of the goddess of chastity, carrying on an assignation in secret.

In 'Bliss', then, Mansfield devotes herself to rendering female sexual desire. The satirical sections of the story are directly relevant to its central preoccupation, in that they reveal the 'ground' within which Bertha's sexuality has developed, and been repressed. Mansfield renders Bertha's desire as originating with the heroine and her own needs rather than, as was the case with literature in the Petrarchan romance tradition, with a highly specific attachment on the part of a male lover to an object of desire which both focussed and rendered coherent that desire. In transferring woman from object to subject position, and in focussing upon this subject rather than upon the single, unifying object of male attraction, Mansfield has deconstructed both her subject and that subject's desire.

This desire is rendered, not as goal-directed, but as fluid and tentative. Giving the appearance of randomness, yet conveying a strong sense of inner compulsion, it moves from fruit-arrangement to child, from woman to man. Nominally portraying a consciousness at the mercy of an impoverished social vision, Mansfield has also depicted in her heroine a sexual passion that gains in strength and richness through

its association with artistic sensitivity and maternal affection; and one that connects heightened emotion with a wider range of experience than the simple act of sexual gratification. Desire and sexuality come then to relate to the whole field of female experience — in contrast to the single focus and goal-directed pursuit of the (male) courtly lover.

Furthermore, in presenting us with a subject who aims to dissolve the conventional division between the Self and the Other by seeking identification with the Other rather than absorption, or conquest, by it, Mansfield is also interrogating the conventional Self-Other duality.

Attempts had of course been made in the English fiction of the nineteenth century to convey the distinctive nature of woman's sexual desire — usually as part of an attempt to render female aspiration in general. Perhaps the most notable achievement of this endeavour is to be found in the novels of Charlotte Brontë.

But with the advent of the Modernist period and its new faith in the supremacy of inner experience, there was increased interest in conveying the nature of desire itself. A number of early twentieth-century writers devoted themselves to suggesting, and rendering, the nature of distinctively female sexuality. (Relevant here is the Modernist tendency to go against long-established tradition by associating the human consciousness in general not with the male psyche, but with qualities which our culture has traditionally defined as female, or feminine—passivity, fluidity, receptivity, acute sensibility, irrationality.) Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is the most celebrated of these attempts to foreground woman's desire; Mansfield's 'Bliss', published in 1918, is one of the first, and in some ways the most radical.

Of critical significance in establishing the new climate of opinion associated with the Modernist movement were the early works of Freud. Mansfield herself made no direct reference to him in any of her writings.[10] But A.R. Orage, editor of the *New Age*, a radical magazine which published some of her early stories, was an early Freud enthusiast.[11] He and his lover Beatrice Hastings were for a time close friends of Mansfield. It is inconceivable that Mansfield should not at least have been present at discussions of Freud's earlier works in her avant-garde Bohemian coterie. Her knowledge of German would also have given her access to the original, German-language versions of them — generally published five years or so before the first English translations — had she wished.

In 'Bliss' Bertha's several references to herself as 'hysterical' are clearly popular uses of the word. But her language is treacherously double throughout her story, and these references no doubt serve as a clue to the story's probable subtextual engagement with the subject of

hysteria in something approaching its clinical sense — the study of which placed Freud on the path to the development of the science and techniques of psychoanalysis.

Freud's *Studies in Hysteria* was published jointly with Dr Josef Freuer in 1895. It offers a tentative early version of his theory of repression. This is presented in association with the phenomenon of hysteria: 'hysterical symptoms are the expression of [the patients'] most secret and repressed wishes'.[12] In analysing Dora's case, Freud also associated hysteria with 'a disturbance in the sphere of sexuality' and by implication with a tendency towards homosexuality.[13] His *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, published five years after *Studies in Hysteria*, develops some of these ideas — notably by associating hysteria with sexual repression. It also suggests that the sexuality of women — like that of children — tends to be, in the celebrated Freudian phrase, polymorphous and perverse (i.e., departing from the 'normal').

In 'Bliss' we have a fairly close correspondence with these ideas in Bertha's free-flowing desires and their ready movement across the sexual divide, as well as in the story's emphasis on the power of the repressed impulse. Like some of Freud's later works, 'Bliss' also appears to link hysterical neurosis with arrested development, with narcissism, and with bisexuality. But Mansfield, like Freud, was prepared to identify the neurotic case as a model for the norm: her Bertha is both a sadly maladjusted figure and (by implication) a representative of her times, of her sex, and of humanity in general. It is also worth emphasising, particularly in view of recent feminist criticisms of Freud's role in the Dora case,[14] that in 'Bliss' we have a very early rendering of a 'case' of hysteria in which no analyst (generally as in the Dora case, a man) appears to put his own perhaps inevitably misleading construction on events: the narrative is expounded wholly from the subject's point of view. The author has, in all except the most necessary sense, been banished; and any partisan interpretations must, within the conventions of the fiction, be taken to be Bertha's own.

'Bliss', then, is preoccupied with Katherine Mansfield's vision of the complex, and distinctive, nature of female desire, and the way in which this has been conditioned by the prevailing cultural context. It challenges the sole sway of the notion of sexual polarity and attraction, and it makes clear the differing character of the woman/woman relationship (hesitant, 'mystical', beautiful) from the woman/man connection (mysterious, terrifying, 'sublime'). It is best regarded as offering an ironic subversion of traditional narrative patterns rather than a kind of failed enactment of them. And, though it offers no solutions, it — like *Anna Karenina*, another popular subject of contemporary debate — asserts the

problem it engages with in a courageous and radically innovative manner.

Pamela Dunbar lived in New Zealand for many years. She lectures at the University of Warwick, and is working on a book, *The Undiscovered Katherine Mansfield.*

Notes

1. 'I threw down *Bliss* with the exclamation, "She's done for!" Indeed I don't see how much faith in her as a woman or writer can survive that sort of story. I shall have to accept the fact, I'm afraid, that her mind is a very thin soil, laid an inch or two deep upon very barren rock. For *Bliss* is long enough to give her the chance of going deeper. Instead she is content with superficial smartness; and the whole conception is poor, cheap, not the vision, however imperfect, of an interesting mind'. Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, London 1959:21. 'In Bliss the moral implication is negligible: the centre of interest is the wife's feeling, first of ecstatic happiness, and then at the moment of revelation. We are given neither comment nor suggestion of any moral issue of good and evil, and within the setting this is quite right. The story is limited to this sudden change of feeling, and the moral and social ramifications are outside of the terms of reference. As the material is limited in this way—and indeed our satisfaction recognises the skill with which the author has handled perfectly the *minimum* material — it is what I believe would be called feminine.' T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, London 1934:35-36. On the charge of incoherence, see e.g. Walter Allen, *The Short Story in English*, Oxford 1981:169-70, and Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, London 1987:170; on that of cruelty, Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own*, London, 1982 (new revised edn):246; and Margaret Drabble, 'The New Woman of the Twenties: Fifty Years On', *Harpers & Queen*, June 1973:106-7, 135.
2. See Elizabeth Abel, 'Narrative Structure[s] and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs Dalloway*' in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, London 1983:163, for the contention that women's narratives typically contain two plots—one 'that is shaped to confirm expectations and a subplot at odds with this accommodation.'
3. See Susan Gubar, 'The Birth of the Artist as Heroine' in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, ed. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet, Baltimore and London 1983, especially pp. 27 and 39, for a discussion of how Mansfield redefines creativity in order to include, and valorise, woman's domestic crafts.
4. A somewhat similar episode occurs towards the end of 'Psychology', another story in the *Bliss* volume, when a brief encounter with an adoring 'elderly virgin' serves to unblock the heroine's formerly diminished passion

for her (heterosexual) lover. An alternative, though similar, explanation for Bertha's switch of attention from Pearl Fulton to Harry is offered by Saralyn R. Daly, *Katherine Mansfield*, New York 1965:85-86, who argues that Bertha is subconsciously aware of her husband's relationship with Miss Fulton. So Pearl Fulton's attraction to Harry provokes Bertha's desire for him. This interpretation follows the theory of imitative, or 'mediated' desire (see Rene Girard, *Mensonge romantique et verite romanesque*, Paris 1961; translated as *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, Baltimore 1965).

5. See Helen E. Nebeker, 'The Pear Tree: Sexual Implications in Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, XVIII, 1972-73:545-51.
6. There are also resonances in it of the Genesis myth of the Fall — another tale of innocence and sexual knowledge pertaining to a garden. In Mansfield's modernist, and more socialised, version of the story, however, the heroine's sexuality is more circumspect,and her fate is harsher: in her case the hero is in alliance with the Serpent.
7. See e.g. Mary Brugan, 'Childbirth Trauma in Katherine Mansfield's Early Stories', *Modern Fiction Studies*, XXIV, 1978:399, for a discussion of this subject.
8. Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, *Katherine Mansfield*, London 1981:62 ' Her suppressed but real sexual force is indicated in the fire and sun imagery which dominates the first half of the story'.
9. Mansfield's attitude towards rampant sexuality is evident from her comment on D.H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl:* 'His hero and heroine are non-human. They are animals on the prowl... They submit to the physical response and for the rest go veiled — blind —*faceless — mindless.* This is the doctrine of mindlessness.' *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry 1913-1922*, ed. John Middleton Murry, London 1951:620 (letter dated December 1920).
10. Though see for example her short story 'Psychology', in which the hero observes, '"I think it's because this generation is just wise enough to know that it is sick and to realise that its only chance of recovery is by going into its symptoms — making an exhaustive study of them — tracking them down — trying to get at the root of the trouble."'
11. See Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, Oxford 1980: 369 'Orage had been fond of saying that Freud was the greatest analyst of the age'.
12. Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories I: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans'*, Penguin Freud Library, vol. 8, p.36.
13 Ibid, p.54.
14. See e.g. *In Dora's Case*, ed. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, New York and London 1985.

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1945. *Collected Short Stories.* Constable (reprinted Penguin, 1981).

Linda Burnell, Housewife:
A Life Sentence for Cowardice?

Heather Murray

'In a steamer chair, under a manuka tree that grew in the middle of the front grass patch, Linda Burnell dreamed the morning away. She did nothing' ('Prelude'). I doubt there has ever been a better portrait of a woman not coping with marriage and child-rearing. Three 'great lumps of children' ('Prelude') already, and now the fourth, a new baby lying beside her on the lawn, awaiting her attention, attention she is reluctant to give:

> It was all very well to say it was the common lot of women to bear children. It wasn't true. She, for one, could prove that wrong. She was broken, made weak, her courage was gone, through child-bearing. And what made it doubly hard to bear was, she did not love her children. ('At the Bay')

Why has she borne them? There seems to have been no choice for Linda. In *The Aloe*, we are told Linda accepted Stanley Burnell's proposal of marriage when she was only 16 years of age, in the same year that her beloved father died. The link is too obvious to need spelling out. In the bargain of their marriage, Linda accepts the comforts and security Stanley's money and reputation provide, in exchange for bearing the children — particularly the son — he needs to found his dynasty. Stanley was told by the doctor Linda's heart is weak and that she may die

at any moment, but he wants a son.

It is a very complex marriage. On the one hand, the Linda of 'Prelude' wants to shout at him, 'You're killing me', to tease him about his high seriousness, to undermine his sense of security, but on the other she needs his firm resolution and leadership, his decency and honesty, for these are things she lacks herself. And he loves her, there is no doubt of that. She knows, too, his energy in the marketplace is part of Stanley's need for security, to put down roots and become established. It puts enormous pressures on him.

At the end of 'Prelude', Linda views herself and her family with ironic detachment. For her sanity, she withdraws and lives in a dream-world. Stanley enjoys telling Linda about his plans for the office, and in his imagination 'He heard her saying: "My dear, I think that is most wise." ... Talking things over with Linda was a wonderful help even though they were apt to drift away from the point.' In agreeing to marry Stanley, Linda accepted a woman's traditional role as wife and mother, putting aside self for the greater good of the family: but it is not a role for which she is suited physically or temperamentally. Her strength seems to ebb as her family grows, as Stanley becomes more successful:

> Back came Stanley girt with a towel, glowing and slapping his thighs. He pitched the wet towels on top of her hat and cape, and standing firm in the exact centre of a square of sunlight he began to do his exercises. Deep breathing, bending and squatting like a frog and shooting out his legs... But this amazing vigour seemed to set him worlds away from Linda. She lay on the white tumbled bed and watched him as if from the clouds. ('Prelude')

Linda rejects food, and appears almost wilfully to be starving the body that is betraying her. But she has no idea of a better way. She cannot, or will not, plot out an alternative path for herself. The only action she contemplates is her passive response to the mysterious forces she calls THEY, who pursue her relentlessly: 'What Linda always felt was that THEY wanted something of her, and she knew that if she gave herself up and was quiet, more than quiet, silent, motionless, something would really happen' ('Prelude'). In other words, THEY might solve her problems for her.

On the first morning at the new house, Linda lies in bed staring at her purple cape and hat, her travelling clothes; they stir up a picture of escape: 'Looking at them she wished that she was going away from this house too. And she saw herself driving away from them all in a little buggy, driving away from everybody and not even waving' ('Prelude').

But the thought remains a thought only. It is in her mind that Linda

is most subversive. Standing before the aloe with her mother, she takes to heart the message of the strange-looking bush: in among the dead leaves, she sees new buds. The aloe will be her talisman, her insurance policy. Its apparent deadness parallels her own lack of flowering, but it holds the promise of future flowering if and when the time is right.

The new son is present in 'At the Bay'; Linda is 'indifferent about him'. 'Thank Heaven, mother had taken him'. 'I don't like babies', she tells the boy as he gives her 'a wide, toothless smile'.

Linda is at a turning point. Katherine Mansfield traced out the pattern of Linda's life from childhood; we follow her incipient rebellion, and see the forces struggling within her. To us in the 1980s, she appears a very modern woman. She seems about to strike a blow for women, to claim for herself a share of personal freedom beyond the family.

Yet the baby reclaims her attention and wins her heart. 'The tears danced in her eyes; she breathed in a small whisper to the boy, "Hallo, my funny!" ' The crisis seems to have passed. What do we see of Linda after this, to help us judge whether the crisis has been resolved? In 'At the Bay', we see her reject Jonathan Trout, one of the few non-philistine men in all Mansfield's fiction, after she compares his lack of resolution with Stanley's achievements. 'He is like a weed', she concludes. We meet her again in the third Burnell story, 'The Doll's House', where she appears to be in charge of the household, with some help from Beryl. Mrs Fairfield, the mainstay of family life in the preceding two stories, does not appear. Linda allows the neighbourhood children, but not the Kelveys, to come two at a time to look at the doll's house, 'Not to stay for tea, of course, or to come traipsing through the house. But just to stand quietly in the courtyard...' When Kezia asks why the Kelveys cannot come, Linda says 'Run away, Kezia; you know quite well why not.' Has there been a resolution of Linda's problems, will life perhaps improve for her now that she has learned to love her son? If there has been a resolution, one would expect an improvement.

Clearly, her right to personal flowering has been put aside; the family has won. Has it made her any happier? The answer must be no. She is still snobbish, angry, and withdrawn. The older children under her care are vicious and destructive; Kezia, the child closest to Katherine Mansfield's point of view, is kept at arm's length, anxious and uncertain.

Several critics have examined Mansfield's use in 'At the Bay' of imagery drawn from the natural world — life and regeneration, death and decay, night/day, sun/moon, the seasons, and the tides — to support their view that Linda is reconciled properly to the family by which life is perpetuated, and forgoes her own rather selfish and immature desires. Mary K. Benet compares the birth of the son to the coming

of the Christ child; he will bring love to Linda like 'the sudden coming of grace', and the knowledge that life must be accepted as a relentless pattern of birth, decay and death (Benet, 1977:100). C.A. Hankin uses the natural imagery to support this view too: the natural world, she says, is central to understanding the story, in which Katherine Mansfield explores 'the mysterious ebb and flow of life itself', in which there is a '"mysterious fitness" and unity in the natural order' (Hankin, 1983:223, 233). Mary H. Rohrberger thinks Linda's reward for her self-denial will be the joys of having a fourth baby (Rohrberger, 1977:138).

We may guess that some who share this view would like Linda now to grow more like her mother, Mrs Fairfield, who, Sylvia Berkman thinks, is 'the spirit of love, order, and control' (Berkman, 1951:17). Mrs Fairfield seems at first glance to be the paragon of all the conventional womanly virtues, loving, self-effacing, quietly efficient, resilient. There is a hint of her saintliness and purity of soul conveyed in the descriptions of her appearance, and of her mortifying the flesh: 'The old woman could bear nothing but linen next to her body and she bathed in cold water winter and summer' ('Prelude'). Certainly, her house-keeping qualities are not in question. She has the arranging of jam-pots in neat rows down to a fine art; Linda knows 'Mother has been here. Everything is in pairs' (*The Aloe*). But does she think at all? When Linda stands before the aloe thinking of weighty matters: that 'For all her love and respect and admiration [for Stanley] she hated him', that after each fresh seduction, 'how tender he always was..., how submissive, how thoughtful', even wondering, 'why this mania of hers to keep alive at all?' ('Prelude'), Mrs Fairfield, who stands there with her, reveals,

> I haven't really been thinking of anything. I wondered as we passed the orchard what the fruit trees were like and whether we should be able to make much jam this autumn. There are splendid healthy currant bushes in the vegetable garden. I noticed them today. I should like to see those pantry shelves thoroughly well stocked with our own jam.

Mrs Fairfield refuses every opportunity to discuss matters of life and death with her relatives, only increasing their anxiety. Although now beyond the sexuality that is undermining her daughter, and having given birth to a large family too, she does not show she appreciates how Linda feels, but expects her to do a mother's job in the family — a job it must be patently obvious to anyone, especially one's mother, she cannot cope with. It is worth noting Mrs Fairfield's age: although Katherine Mansfield refers to her throughout this sequence as 'the old woman', Mrs Fairfield is only in her late forties at the start of 'Prelude'. She is a busy woman in middle age, not an 'old' woman, who might show that

withdrawal and distancing from daily life which often accompanies growing old. It is not very long since she herself faced the problems now worrying Linda and Beryl.

Mrs Fairfield helps in hundreds of small, practical ways, but she is no help with the underlying condition; she puts sticking plasters over festering sores. She has no rich inner life, such as sustained Con and Jug in their battles with their father ('Daughers of the Late Colonel'). She has survived by not thinking, by burying self, by carrying out the mundane chores of life. In *The Aloe*, the original version of 'Prelude', there are some lines about Mrs Fairfield which Katherine Mansfield adapted for 'Prelude'; they allow us a brief glimpse into Mrs Fairfield's mind (and into Mansfield's original perception of her):

> When she had finished tidying everything in the kitchen had become part of a series of pattern [sic]. She stood in the middle of the room, wiping her hands on a check towel and looking about her, a tiny smile beamed on her lips; she thought it looked very nice, very satisfactory. If only servant girls could be taught to understand that it did not only matter how you put a thing away it mattered just as much where you put it — or was it the other way about...

Katherine Mansfield is questioning Mrs Fairfield's intelligence here, poking fun. The sentence about the servant girls was cut out of 'Prelude'. We will never know for sure why it was removed, but the original version does indicate that Mansfield saw Mrs Fairfield as a woman whose industry and preoccupation with order were perhaps substitutes for facing unpleasant truths about life. If she were indeed the paragon whom Linda would do well to emulate, she would show more empathy for the plight of her female relations. And like Mrs Ramsay in 'To the Lighthouse', she would think. In creating Mrs Fairfield, Katherine Mansfield is not offering us her ideal woman; she is simply examining one woman's role.

Why does Katherine Mansfield end Linda's embryonic rebellion by reuniting her with the family? First, is she being cynical? The philistines win yet another battle; Linda's right to a free and independent life is renounced for a communal role in a famly whose tone is snobbish and commercial. From now on Linda will appreciate the value of money and its comforts; fecundity, an unfortunate adjunct, must be accepted. Does Katherine Mansfield consign Linda to the risks of more child-bearing because death may solve her problems? Certainly there is a streak of cynical nihilism in Linda: in 'Prelude', as she ponders 'why this mania of hers to keep alive at all?', she breaks into mocking laughter:

> What am I guarding myself for so preciously? I shall go on

> having children and Stanley will go on making money and the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger, with whole fleets of aloes in them for me to choose from.

C.K. Stead has suggested that in Linda's mind sexual submission and death are linked and Linda knowingly embraces death (Stead, 1977:35). It is tempting to think that Katherine Mansfield cynically presents Linda as the epitome of woman's plight; death is the only solution. But in all Mansfield's writings, philistines receive short shift. Cynicism is not part of her philosophy.

Does Katherine Mansfield consign Linda to domesticity as a life sentence for her moral cowardice? Does Linda deserve no better for lacking the gumption to escape, for lacking the imagination to see an alternative course? She seems a polar opposite to her creator. Gillian Tindall writes of Katherine Mansfield:

> For one who, in her short life, actively caused things to happen to herself (had she not had this capacity, she would have stayed in her native New Zealand and married some suitable man met at a Government House ball), her stories are crowded with people who suffer because they lack confidence and are impotent to help themselves (Tindall, 1985:59).

There is no reason why characters should resemble their creators in any way, and indeed, many critics become distinctly tetchy if one looks for similarities at all. It may be critically risky, but I think it is only human, particularly in Mansfield's case, to compare a writer's life with the lives she creates for her characters. That was how my own interest in Katherine Mansfield was first kindled, and set me off to write a thesis on the theme of rebellion in her life and the lack of it in her characters' lives.

Why writers who may live radical lifestyles themselves should create more conservative characters has puzzled earlier critics. Virginia Woolf wondered why female writers fail to create women characters who experience even part of the freedom their creators have established for themselves. George Eliot's heroines, says Woolf, remain cloistered within the family; their story 'is the incomplete version of the story of George Eliot herself' (Woolf, 1957:217). Simone de Beauvoir set out to create a female character in 'The Mandarins', Anna, who would 'contain all of myself'; yet she found that she gave that freedom to a male character, Henri, while Anna 'lives the relative life a secondary being' (de Beauvoir, 1965:268). Carolyn Heilbrun (1979:71) believes women writers from Jane Austen to Iris Murdoch fail to imagine autonomous women characters. Lawrence Jones wonders why Janet Frame does a similar thing in 'Owls Do Cry': she chose for herself the dangerous way

of the imagination while allowing a surgeon to cut out the imaginative part of Daphne's brain, thus denying her 'the freedom through art that she herself found' (Jones, 1987:183).

Whatever the reason for this, it is not the one Heilbrun (1979:73) offers, namely that it stems from a failure of the writers' creative imaginations. Yet Linda is so very different from Mansfield herself. Would Mansfield have stayed married to Stanley? Not for a minute. We know from reading Mansfield's letters and journals that she loved courage, that she believed life is a risky business, and one must accept all the risks if one is to live, that she hated the idea of women being kept by men, of their taking refuge in motherhood as if that by itself excused them from ever having to amount to anything in their own right. A very young Katherine Mansfield criticised women for their lack of assertiveness: she wrote in her *Journal* in 1908 (Mansfield, 1984:36-7):

> I feel that I do now realise, dimly, what women in the future will be capable of. They truly as yet have never had their chance. Talk of our enlightened days and our emancipated country — pure nonsense! We are firmly held with the self-fashioned chains of slavery. Yes, now I see that they *are* self-fashioned, and must be self-removed.

The onus is on women to free themselves from bonds of their own making. But this was a young Katherine Mansfield, not long before leaving New Zealand for the last time, all set to remove her own bonds in the liberating climate of Europe. She was writing 'At the Bay' in August 1921, aged 32, and not far from death. She must have asked herself where that path, the polar opposite of Linda's, had taken her. Her personal life had been ruinous, her health inexorably undermined. Would Linda have succeeded as a free woman in New Zealand, when her creator was clearly not succeeding in Europe where the climate for women might be kinder? Linda may just as well stay frustrated at home, for the world beyond which Mansfield had explored was frustrating too. One set of chains had been replaced by another.

Female freedom is an illusion. The world is no place for women; this is not cynicism, but profound pessimism. 'At the Bay' is not a story which solves the problems of living for women: those problems may be insoluble. Women were asking for freedom which seemed incompatible with heterosexuality. Virginia Woolf wondered about this too: she writes again about George Eliot's heroines:

> They do not find what they seek, and we cannot wonder. The ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb, seems in them to have brimmed and overflowed and uttered a

> demand for something — they scarcely know what — for something that is perhaps incompatible with the facts of human existence' (Woolf, 1957:217).

Woman's reproductive role impedes her ability to flower herself; but while she cannot do both at the same time, one pursued without the other is destructive too. Those who try to survive beyond the family — Rosabel, Ada Moss, Miss Brill — eventually lose the battle. Fashionable women who believe they have found something better, such as Isabel and her friends in 'Marriage a la Mode', are shallow and pretentious.

The only solution Katherine Mansfield offers to the problem of how to fill in the years between birth and death is found in her chilling unfinished story, 'A Married Man's Story'. Detach yourself from people, die to the personal, survive in the imagination where you may control all, and in the non-human world. Then you are at the mercy of no one. You are safe.

Heather Murray is a doctoral student at Otago University. Her MA thesis (1987) was on 'The Theme of Rebellion in Katherine Mansfield's Fiction'.

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1984. *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Antony Alpers. Oxford University Press.

_____ 1984. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J.M. Murry (First published 1954). Hutchinson.

_____ 1985. *The Aloe*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan. Virago.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 1965. *Force of Circumstance*, tr. Richard Howard. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Benet, Mary K. 1977. *Writers in Love*. Macmillan.

Berkman, Sylvia. 1951. *Katherine Mansfield: a Critical Study*. Yale University Press.

Hankin, Cherry A. 1983. *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories*. Macmillan.

Heilbrun, Carolyn. 1979. *Reinventing Womanhood*. Gollancz.

Jones, Lawrence. 1987. 'Janet Frame: No Cowslip's Bell in Waimaru: the personal vision of *Owls do Cry*', in *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: essays on New Zealand prose*. Otago University Press.

Rohrberger, Mary H. 1977. *The Art of Katherine Mansfield*. University Microfilms International.

Stead, C.K. 1977. 'Katherine Mansfield and the Art of "Fiction".' *New Review* IV, 42, September.

Tindall, Gillian. 1985. 'From the Far Side of the World: Katherine Mansfield.' *Encounter*, November.

Woolf, Virginia, 1957. *The Common Reader* (first series). Hogarth Press.

The Insipid Doctrine:
Joining the Resistance in New Zealand

Anne Else

In 1922, the year before she died, Katherine Mansfield wrote: 'If only I can be a good enough writer to strike a blow for freedom! It is the one axe I want to grind.'[1] It was a late echo of what she had written fourteen years earlier as a young woman of twenty, soon to return to London:

> Here then is a little summary of what I need — power, wealth and freedom. It is the hopelessly insipid doctrine that love is the only thing in the world, taught, hammered into women, from generation to generation, which hampers us so cruelly. We must get rid of that bogey — and then, then comes the opportunity of happiness and freedom.[2]

I want to go on to explore some of the ways in which three of the New Zealand stories — 'Prelude', 'At the Bay', and 'The Doll's House' — can be read as resisting the insipid doctrine.

Reading a story is a complex process. Jonathan Culler notes how the elements of the text 'must be completed, reordered, brought into the realm of experience by the reader' (Culler, 1975:264). That is, the reader must make sense of the text. This can happen only because there is an underlying system of operative conventions. But fiction may play with this system and resist the reader's expectations. In doing so, says Culler, it enables the reader to understand how he, or she, makes sense of the

world.

In her book *Women, Power and Subversion,* Judith Lowder Newton looks at how women writers — in particular Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë — have found ways to resist what she sums up as those 'ideas, images and values which ensure that the situation in which one class has power over another and men have power over women is seen as natural, or not seen at all' (Newton, 1985:13). The subversive texts of these writers, she says, 'practise upon their readers, skew the angle of vision from which readers experience their relation to the real, the degree of confidence they feel in traditional social relations' (Newton, 1985:14). They do this primarily through exploring how female characters find ways to exercise power.

But the kind of female power being explored is not power over, power as dominance, nor is it the traditional female form of power as influence. Rather it is power as ability, capacity, or simply self-definition and self-knowledge. Often it can only be exercised in covert ways, through what Newton calls 'the natural tactics of the resisting weak': subversion, indirection and disguise (Newton, 1985:9). These tactics also frequently characterise the ways in which the text itself resists conventional interpretation.

Mansfield's stories contain many such strategies of resistance. The insipid doctrine has a literary counterpart, with a more accurate name than love. It is called the marriage plot, and Newton notes (1985:8) how difficult it is for novelists to solve the final problem of resisting it. Mansfield's first strategy of resistance is simple: she writes short stories in which the marriage plot can generally be avoided or subverted, though rarely ignored altogether; silence and avoidance also have meaning.

Secondly, her stories are full of women and children — so full that there is simply not much room left over for men.

Like Linda Burnell, the author has withdrawn her attention from men; she is thinking of something else. This has disconcerted male critics, who have sought in various ways to redress the balance. Perhaps the most common response is just to reposition the spotlight. Here is Robert Chapman, from his 1953 essay 'Fiction and the Social Pattern':

> Katherine Mansfield thus passed approvingly from the first version of the basic New Zealand sentimentality — that women are good and men are brutes — a first version which rendered the male as an uncouth active brute, to the next version which pictures the male as an ineffective, insufficient, unhelpful brute who has to be humoured and is really rather like a child at times (Chapman, 1953).

The word 'brute' apart, this could perhaps be read as more accurately applying to some phases of John Middleton Murry's relationship with Mansfield than to the men in Mansfield's stories. But the point is that the critical focus of the reading has been shifted away from the women.

Readers of Mansfield must beware of moving mentally back and forth along lines drawn — all too neatly — between the characters in her New Zealand stories and her own exhaustively exhumed family. Certainly she draw on the members of her family, including herself, for her dramatis personae, and placed them in recollected settings. But in the stories the whole family is literally re-membered, and the characters take on a life of their own

But to return to the women. Mansfield needs all the women in her stories. One by one, she places them centre stage, puts herself in their place, and through them explores various tactics of resistance and power. First, there is childhood itself. Kezia is a child living in a body not yet socially inscribed as female in her own consciousness. She is set against the older Isabel, already a marked little woman, forever collaborating with the grown-ups. The Kezia of 'Prelude' and 'At the Bay' can still lose herself in the sensual material world, where most objects are not yet icons, where concrete steps are dreams of ovens and emeralds are found on the beach; a world where money and class and sex and even death do not yet meaningfully exist for her.

In 'The Doll's House', the concrete step ovens and the daisy poached eggs have been replaced with an exact replica of the well-to-do middle-class house, complete to the last detail. But the children are never seen actually *playing* with the doll's house. 'It was too marvellous; it was too much for them. They had never seen anything like it in their lives.' And in any case, the smell of paint keeps it out in the yard, so that the house serves only to be marvelled at and to advance Isabel's standing in the school pecking order. Like a newly married suburban housewife in an advertisement, she boasts proudly about its contents: 'The carpet made a great sensation, but so did the beds with real bedclothes, and the stove with an oven door.'

Kezia's consciousness encompasses almost the whole story now. She knows what the doll's house means, and what the Kelveys' clothes and lunches mean. And she knows why she is not allowed to speak to the Kelveys: it is because of whose daughter she is, and whose daughters they are. It is because of the fathers: 'the Judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the storekeeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together...' But the line has to be drawn somewhere; and it is drawn at the Kelveys, the children with no visible father at all. 'They were the daughters of a spry, hard-working little washerwoman, who went

about from house to house by the day. This was awful enough. But where was Mr Kelvey? Nobody knew for certain.'

In this story, resistance moves beyond the insipid doctrine to the social structure which it both depends on and reinforces. For most of the the story Kezia resists only through her powers of observation. She is not blind or deaf: she can both see and hear evil, though she refuses to speak it. Instead she asks her mother if she can invite the Kelveys in to see the house, and wants to know why not. But only at the end, when she has thieved out at the back, away from the visitors, and thinks she is not overseen or overheard, does she speak and act without permission, breaking the rules. Her resisting voice is quickly silenced by Aunt Beryl's, and the little rats of Kelveys are sent packing.

But the silent child of the washerwoman has the last word: 'I seen the little lamp.' Like Kezia, like Mansfield, Else resists by exercising the only power she has — the power to see what she is not supposed to see, and put it into words. Yet it was Kezia who was most drawn to the little lamp, and who thought Isabel was not making nearly enough of it. Else's words imply that she has both heard and heeded Kezia, and more: that she has in some way recognised Kezia's difference, her resistance to the cruelty of the other girls and the laws of the fathers, even before Kezia expresses it overtly by inviting the Kelveys in to see the house. So in the end Kezia's resistance serves her own interests as much as, or perhaps more than, the Kelveys'. Through the lamp, she can claim kinship with the outsiders, ranging herself with them against her conventional family.

The grandmother escapes the insipid doctrine through the other end of the spectrum of age, all passion spent. Like Kezia, she creates her own domain, drawing order and beauty from the material world she manages, and taking pleasure and strength from her own power to do so. This is power as capacity, making sense of the world as best one can within recognised and accepted limits, exercising control over what is within reach — not only plates and jampots and linen, but also her body and her self.

No one appreciated domestic order and cleanliness and beauty, and those who could bring it about, more than Mansfield. But in life, on the household scale, it was beyond her own capacity; she needed not only money, but also a grandmother, to create and maintain it for her. In life, the order and beauty brought about by women's work is daily destroyed and must be endlessly renewed. Yet in *her* work, Mansfield could recreate and celebrate it in a lasting form; and this in itself constitutes a powerful tactic of resistance, once more skewing the reader's angle of vision.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century households of the Beauchamp class, however, the bulk of what was still hard domestic work was undertaken not by grandmothers but by servants.

> ...Is that your new servant?'
>
> 'Yes, her name's Gwen. I've only had her two days. Oh, Gwen , this is my friend, Mrs Smith.'
>
> 'Good morning, Mrs Smith. Dinner won't be ready for about ten minutes.'
>
> 'I don't think you ought to introduce me to the servant. I think I ought to just begin talking to her.'

Mansfield insists on introducing the servant. When Alice appears in 'Prelude', on the surface she is as silent as Lil Kelvey; but underneath she bitterly resents Miss Beryl's way of 'handling' her by talking down to her, and in thought at least she vigorously stands up for herself.

'At the Bay' tells a different story. The first, disparaging view of Alice as she leaves the house is attributed belatedly to Beryl, but seems connected with the author too; and Beryl immediately links the servant girl's afternoon off with sex. 'She supposed Alice had picked up some horrible common larrikin and they'd go off into the bush together.'

In fact Alice has nothing to do with men, but she has nothing to do with freedom either. Faced with the widowed Mrs Stubbs's sudden, surprising assertion that 'Freedom's best', Alice immediately wants to be back in her own warm kitchen, troubled neither by men nor by frightening prospects of independence. So there is no need for the Burnells to enforce the old 'no followers' rule for servants, in order for Alice to continue to fulfil her essential functional role. In Mansfield's cosmology, Alice is set apart from the Burnell women not only by class, but by being kept at a safe distance from the insipid doctrine and the marriage plot.

Mansfield saw Alice's afternoon off as a 'black hole' in this story, and I think to some extent she was right. The claimed kinship with the Kelveys turns out to have no substance after all; Mansfield cannot put herself in Alice's place or see through Alice's eyes. Still less can she speak authentically in Alice's voice. Using the strategy of phonetic spellings for *children's* language very sparingly, she just gets away with it; but when she tries to convey what she perceives to be the difference between Alice's speech and the standard pronunciation of the Burnells, the text breaks down under the strain. The speech of the Burnells need not be marked, because it is taken as the norm; but this means that any extended attempt at conveying the difference of lower class dialect is bound to fail. Those who habitually use this deviant form are instantly and inevitably transformed into a comic turn, a lesser breed, as the

language marks the author's distance from them. In Mansfield's inability to solve the textual problem Alice's voice presents, resistance to the powers that be appears to move uncomfortably close to collaboration.

It is Beryl, the other unmarried woman of marriageable age, who is found struggling at close quarters with the insipid doctrine. Mrs Beauchamp's sister Belle Dyer did live with the family, but in the Beryl of the Burnell stories there rises up the adolescent Kathleen. Yet this is a Kathleen without plans or ambitions, forced back frighteningly on the insipid doctrine as the only imaginable means of escape from dependent female marginality.

In 'Prelude' Beryl is rotting away out in the country, too far for suitors to call; and without them to take her out, to take her away, she feels powerless, because the only power she has lies in her beauty, and beauty must have a beholder: 'How beautiful she looked, but there was nobody to see, nobody.' She constantly succumbs to the temptation of picturing herself not as the active, passionate romantic heroine, but as the passive heroine of an Edwardian Mills and Boon romance, who can emerge in her true colours only through the eyes of Mr Right. As she speaks to herself in the mirror, her voice is lost in his, and she ceases to exist in her own right: 'Yes, my dear, there is no doubt about it, you really are a lovely little thing.'

But Beryl is not quite lost. She rejects this reflected version of herself, feeling it to be as false as the faintly bitter gush of her letter to Nan Pym. 'I'm never my real self for a moment.' But who, or where, is the real Beryl? 'Faint and insubstantial she shone ... was there ever a time when I did not have a false self?' Just then Kezia comes in. 'Father is home with a man and lunch is ready.' At the sound of the magic word 'man', Beryl snaps back to attention, once more on display.

Beryl's willingness to surrender her identity is echoed in the final section of 'At the Bay'. She is again alone in her room, late at night, and finds it is suddenly dear to her: 'It's a darling funny little room. It's yours. Oh, what a joy it is to own things! Mine — my own!' But the idea of owning immediately slides into the even more joyful idea of being owned: '"My very own for ever?" "Yes." Their lips met.'

In Beryl the child Kezia's innocent delight in the sensual world has become vague sexual desire, tinged with fear and shadowed by self-disgust. Right at the end of 'At the Bay', under the insidious influence of the androgynous Mrs Harry Kember, Beryl tries briefly to get through the conventional looking glass and out into the dangerous midnight garden beyond. Harry Kember urges her on: 'What does everybody matter?' he asks. For a moment she seems about to take the risk of agreeing with him. Ironically, she almost turns into the Alice she had

earlier so contemptuously imagined, going off under the fuchsia bush with a man she has picked up.

Judith Dale has reminded me that the midnight encounter with Harry Kember has often been read as taking place only in Beryl's imagination, no more real than all those earlier romantic dialogues. This reading can be seen as enlarging Beryl's capacities, by making her more completely her own author, capable of creating a rougher, earthier fantasy woven around the material to hand. But it can also be seen as diminishing her: not only does she shy away from even imagining the consummation of her vague desires, but, more important, at no point is she then allowed the chance for meaningful action or decision.

Though Harry Kember's bright, blind, terrifying smile echoes the sexual smile Bertha Young imagines on the face of her husband, the lines that Harry Kember speaks are not the stuff of fantasy. Their power rests largely in their contrast with all Beryl's own earlier scripts for Mr Right. Harry is not interested in her beauty, but only in her compliance: he offers sex, not love, and she comes to the gate prepared to meet him on his own ground.

At the last moment terror overcomes her; she wrenches free and turns back to the safe conventional indoor world, rejecting sex for its own sake as corruption. Yet in 'The Doll's House' it seems as if she may have chosen this path after all; how else should Willie Brent's letter have such threatening power over her?

For Beryl there can be no escape; the marriage plot lies in wait, and the only alternative is the more fearful prospect of being left on the shelf. 'She couldn't be left. Other people, perhaps, but not she.' The real-life Beryl, Belle Dyer, did marry, and married well, as they say, beyond New Zealand. But for Mansfield's Beryl, the outcome is left in doubt; there is no Mr Right, no happy ending. Instead, there is only Harry Kember and Willie Brent.

Because Heather Murray's paper centres on Linda, I decided not to deal with her in depth, but I would like to discuss her briefly in this context. As I noted earlier, her major strategy of resistance is to withdraw her attention from her husband, knowing it is what he wants most from her. The result is to keep his attention anxiously focussed on her, instead of the other way round. She knows her place, her duty as a wife: it is to bear his children. So that is precisely what she does, and almost nothing more, though from time to time she consents to bear his presence too, and throws him a few crumbs of the attention and interest he craves.

Mansfield herself was also made weak, not by child-bearing, but by an even more debilitating outcome of seduction and sex. Claire Tomalin

spells out how the gonorrhoea she contracted sapped her strength and health, destroyed her fertility and left her vulnerable to tuberculosis. In Linda, Mansfield recreates and so makes bearable what seems to have been her own mother's highly ambivalent attitude towards her; but she also explores her shadow self: the loved daugher, cosseted wife, and fecund mother who never was, but who, occasionally, she still wished she had been. Linda is at once an antidote to such yearnings, and a model of how the underground resistance can remain even after the marriage plot has had its way and the woman's territory has been, it seems, completely and decisively overcome and occupied.

So where does all this leave the reader? In the end, no one has resisted to the point of escaping into freedom. But that is not quite the point. I would agree with Judith Lowder Newton (1985:22) when she concludes, 'if on the one hand subversive writing defuses the desire for power by satisfying the longing for it, on the other subversive writing is itself an action upon one's readers and one's world'.

Anne Else is currently based at the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, where she is writing a book on adoption in New Zealand.

Notes

1. Letter to Koteliansky, 17 July 1922; quoted in Boddy, 1988:110.
2. Journal entry, May 1908; quoted in Boddy, 1988:113.

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1984. *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Antony Alpers. Oxford University Press.

Boddy, Gillian. 1988. *Katherine Mansfield, The Woman and the Writer*. Penguin Books.

Chapman, Robert. 1953. 'Fiction and the Social Pattern: some implications of recent New Zealand writing.' *Landfall* VII.

Newton, Judith Lowder. 1985. *Women, Power, and Subversion: social strategies in British fiction, 1778-1860*. Methuen.

Katherine Mansfield — A Lesbian Writer?

Alison Laurie

This paper will address the question of whether Mansfield was a lesbian writer, and it is a lesbian reading of her life. It is not a lesbian reading of her stories, because that is another paper, and before it can occur authentic lesbian biography must be written.

Biography is itself a fiction. It is always a version of a life, a selection of events intended to present the subject in a predetermined manner. The truth of any life can never be written, nor every event of a life collected and presented, even in autobiography. The events selected and the interpretation placed upon those events are always the consequence of an agenda seldom made explicit.

Biography written about women almost always places us within a patriarchal framework, and interprets our lives using a selective and consistent grid through which reality and experience is changed to fit that framework. This is done particularly by enlarging and giving prominence to our relations with men who are seen as supremely relevant to our lives, whether as husbands, lovers, fathers or as friends. Where men cannot be found, a search will be made to dredge them up, as has been done with writers such as Emily Dickinson, even by feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar (1979).

Where lesbianism exists, it is usually denied, trivialised or made

invisible.[1] Mansfield is one such example. With rare exceptions, most discussions of her life have isolated her from a social and political context which permits an understanding of her life and her writings, beyond the romantic and sanitised image originated by Murry and eagerly continued by a male literary establishment. That constructed Mansfield myth did not threaten or challenge patriarchal ideologies of gender, which can easily accept an exceptional, delicate, female genius isolated from and unrelated to the complexities of social and political context.

There has as yet been no lesbian-feminist biography of Mansfield, nor any attempt to analyse her relationships with women as other than a reluctant 'bisexuality' trivialised against a backdrop of sexist and heterosexist assumption. In particular it is asserted that her lesbianism was an adolescent phase, which she outgrew once she entered 'real' heterosexual relationships.

I wish to consider Katherine Mansfield as a lesbian writer in the context of the first two decades of the twentieth century. In particular I wish to challenge the idea that her lesbianism belongs only to her so-called 'adolescence', and also to reject the popular and more socially acceptable label 'bisexual', which I consider simplistic and inaccurate.

There is considerable evidence of Mansfield's lesbianism. Some of this evidence is now accepted by her biographers, but the ongoing consequences are neither detailed nor discussed. The complexity of her multiple identities is accepted — the way in which she presented herself to different people in different ways — but the reasons behind this multiplicity have not been sufficiently explored. Mansfield's letters, notebooks and stories become accessible in new ways if they are seen as an ongoing attempt to construct an identity for herself because she could not accept her lesbian identity. Her letters, in particular, can be seen as theatrical attempts to disguise and conceal a secret and marginal self. Mansfield constructed the fiction of a heterosexual self, engaged in romantic relationships with men such as Garnett Trowell and John Middleton Murry. She then attempted unsuccessfully to translate her own romantic construction into heterosexual reality. While her letters to these men ring true to some heterosexual critics, others have found them excessive and somewhat false in tone, but have failed to analyse the underlying reasons for the pretence, as they had no context within which Mansfield's lesbianism could be understood. Many other women of her time also concealed their lesbianism — something which is apparent to readers and biographers who have a lesbian framework of analysis. Most lesbians learn to live double lives, and to deceive at least some of the people around them, because they fear the consequences of

exposure. I see Mansfield's romantic letters to men as theatrical presentations of various identities which are acceptably heterosexual, despite their flamboyant and made-up quality.

Mansfield's life is full of continuing conflict and contradiction which is not adequately explicable within a heterosexual framework. The lesbian thesis explains many aspects of her life and writings. It explains her departure from Wellington, an otherwise peculiar story of an upper-class family willing to allow a 20-year-old daughter to travel unchaperoned to London in 1908, so that she could write—a family who had considered, just two years earlier, that the three girls required a chaperone when travelling, though Vera and Chaddie were then the same age as Mansfield was in 1908 when she was allowed to go away alone.

The lesbian thesis also explains the triangular relationships apparent throughout her life, and which also appear in her writing, and it explains some of the themes — where things are never what they seem to be on the surface.

The concept of lesbian writers, lesbian writing and lesbian readings can be addressed only within the context of lesbian - feminist theory. Considerations of lesbianism outside this framework inevitably medicalise it as a pathological aberration, or try to explain it by means of banal psychological speculation about the circumstances of childhood, dismissing it as an adolescent phase or seeing it as a pornographic titillation.

All women within patriarchy are, as Adrienne Rich (1981) explains, required to be heterosexual, that is, to exist and to be seen to exist in relationships where we are economically and emotionally dependent on men. Resistance is severely punished, and lesbians, perceived to represent the extreme of women outside the control of men, are marginalised and become social outcasts. Controlling and punishing lesbians helps to keep all women under control.

A useful tool for any biographer writing about women is the work of Lilian Faderman. In *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) Faderman describes 'romantic friendships' and love relationships between a number of middle- and upper-class women in America and Europe between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nearly all of these women were married, conventionally established within the required institution of marriage, but emotionally and physically they were committed to relationships with women. Faderman is prepared to call these women lesbian whether or not they had physical sex together, unlike Carol Smith-Rosenberg (1985) who interprets their relationships as part of a 'female world of love and ritual'.

Clearly, the way in which lesbians of the past thought of themselves and understood their lesbianism is very different from the way in which modern lesbians in a late twentieth century European context do so. Questions of lesbian identity are therefore central to any discussion of Katherine Mansfield's relationships with women, the way in which she was able to understand these, and the way in which her lesbianism informed her work.

To understand Mansfield's lesbianism it is necessary to examine the social context in which she lived, the information available to her about homosexuality of any sort, and the prevailing attitudes of the dominant culture towards homosexuality. Many lesbian and gay theorists have discussed the 'sin to sickness' model of homosexuality in European culture. Prior to the nineteenth century, sexuality was the province of the Church, which condemned all sex outside of a narrow reproductive function within marriage as 'vice' and 'sin'. All people were considered capable of such sin, and the idea of particular sexual identities was unknown.

The rise of the medical profession during the nineteenth century brought with it the medicalisation of sex and sexuality. All sexual acts and behaviours were carefully scrutinised and defined, and criteria for 'normality' were established. Michel Foucault (1978), Jonathon Katz (1978, 1983), Jeffrey Weeks (1977, 1985) and Jane Rule (1975), among others, discuss these processes. Masturbation and homosexuality were particular areas of interest to the medical profession. These practices were now said to be perversions and medical abnormalities, which could result in insanity and death. The term 'homosexual' was first coined by Dr Karely Benkert in 1869, and rapidly gained popularity. By the turn of the century, a body of medical literature about homosexuality was available which promoted the idea of physical degeneracy and congenital inversion.[2]

Other writers, such as Edward Carpenter (himself homosexual), considered ideas of an 'intermediate sex', and wrote of homosexual relationships as beautiful and noble.[3] We know that Katherine Mansfield was familiar with Carpenter's work, as she mentioned him in a letter to her sister Vera in 1908. There was also a strand of thinking which linked male homosexuality with ancient Greece, art, and beauty. These ideas were most popularly known through Oscar Wilde, and we know that Mansfield was strongly influenced by his work. She was introduced to the unexpurgated version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first published in book form in 1891, by Vere Bartrick-Baker, known as Mimi at Queens College (see Alpers, 1980:35). Tomalin says that the two girls would meet in the 'school's dark lower corridor... to discuss the ideas of their

favourite writers, and were apparently suspected of "immorality" of a kind unspecified' (Tomalin, 1987:25). Many years later, in a *Journal* entry for 13 January 1922, Mansfield wrote:

> Heard from Mimi. Her letter was almost frightening. It brought back the inexplicable past. It flashed into my mind too that she must have a large number of letters of mine which don't bear thinking about. In some way I fear her... (*Journal* 1954:285).

Mansfield's knowledge of and fascination with Oscar Wilde is particularly significant. Wilde's famous trial for homosexual offences was in 1895; he was the first person convicted under the Labouchere amendment to the 1885 Crimes Act, prohibiting homosexual relations between consenting men in private. Montgomery Hyde says, 'The Wilde trials and their aftermath represented the high water mark of popular prejudice against homosexuality in Victorian England, and the anti-homosexual feeling was continued into the Edwardian and neo-Georgian period' (Hyde, 1972:12). Other gay historians have said that after the Wilde trials there was virtually a homosexual exodus from England; those homosexuals who could left the country. What had happened to Wilde deeply traumatised the whole generation of British homosexuals — women as well as men— because the highly publicised case made it difficult to remain ignorant of the labels, the public attitudes and the possible consequences.[4]

For lesbians, the publication in 1897 of Havelock Ellis' book *Sexual Inversion*, the first volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, was also very significant. This book contained case studies of female homosexuals. Ellis' wife, Edith Ellis, was a lesbian and Ellis was therefore particularly interested in female homosexuality.

Partly because of concern about the First Wave of feminism, and a reaction against the New Woman and her economic independence, and partly because of a growing awareness of female homosexuality as a consequence of the medical discourses, in Britain the first two decades of the twentieth century saw a steadily increasing official desire to deal with the problem, culminating in an unsuccessful attempt to criminalise lesbianism in 1921. This attempt was sparked off by the Maud Allen case. Noel Pemberton Billing, an Independent M.P., published an article in his newspaper *The Vigilante* on 26 January 1918, in which he claimed that the Germans possessed a 'Black Book' containing the names of 47,000 British 'sodomites and lesbians', and were preparing to blackmail them. When Maud Allen gave a private performance of Wilde's 'Salome', he wrote an article headed 'The Cult of the Clitoris'. It stated, 'If Scotland Yard were to seize the list of the members [of the Independent

Theatre Society]... they would secure the names of several thousand of the first 47,000 [from the Black Book]' (Hyde 1972:193).

Maud Allen took Pemberton Billing to court for criminal libel (as Wilde had done with Queensberry two decades earlier). The case lasted for six days and contained spectacular material about homosexuality, including homophobic evidence from Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's ex-lover. The jury found Billing not guilty — that is, what he had published was found to be in the public interest.

Mansfield mentions this case in letters to Middleton Murry:

> What about this Billingsgate trial? Is it going to topsy-turvy England into the sea — What Ultimate Cinema is this. It is very nauseating — I feel a great sympathy for Maud Allen... (*Collected Letters*:6 June 1918)
>
> Nice lookout for Art when Billing is pelted with flowers and Lord A.D. our conquering Hero. I feel very very sorry for poor Maud Allen... (*Collected Letters*: 6 June 1918)

Shortly after the trial, Frederick Macquisten, a colleague of Billing's, attempted to add a clause criminalising female homosexuality to the 1921 Criminal Law Amendment Act, under the heading 'Acts of Indecency by Females'. The House of Commons passed this amendment by 148 votes to 53; however, it was later defeated in the House of Lords and not re-introduced (Hyde, 1972; Weeks, 1977).

Through the entire period of Mansfield's adult life, all of the sources of information available to her from the English-speaking world about lesbianism were negative and destructive. Female homosexuality was presented by the medical profession as a pathological condition associated with insanity or depravity, and the legal consequences of suspected lesbianism, if not criminal, were clearly unpleasant (as in Allen's case), being associated with treason, blackmail and immorality. The way in which Mansfield learned to interpret her lesbianism was within this negative context — and this was how she came to see herself.

As is so far documented, Mansfield began falling in love with other girls from the age of about fourteen. She learned to understand these feelings as best she could according to the social environment of her time.

In June 1900 the Beauchamp girls were transferred to Miss Swainson's school (now Marsden), and here Mansfield met Maata Mahupuku, who was probably her first lover. Ruth Mantz (1931) says that 'By 1903, when she was thirteen, Katherine Mansfield was developing emotionally with almost terrifying rapidity. Perhaps her friendship with Maata had begun her awakening.'

Maata Mahupuku was known at the school as Martha Grace. Ac-

cording to Pat Lawlor she was the daughter of a Miss Sexton of Gladstone North, and a brother to tribal chief Tamahau Mahupuku. Tamahau died childless, and Maata became his heir. When her husband died, Maata's mother married Nathaniel Grace. Lawlor comments, 'Their kindred and individual spirits gave no little concern to their teacher, also... Sir Harold and Lady Beauchamp did not favour the friendship' (Lawlor 1946:33-34).

On 29 January 1903 the Beauchamp family sailed for London. The three older girls were to attend Queen's College, with their Aunt Belle Dyer remaining in London with them as chaperone. The central relationship of Mansfield's life began at Queen's College. She met Ida Baker there in 1903, and their friendship continued until Mansfield's death in 1923. I discuss this relationship later in this paper.

During 1906 Katherine met Maata again. Maata had been sent to finishing school in Paris by her wealthy family. A sexual relationship seems to have occurred at this time, and it continued back in Wellington after the Beauchamp girls returned to New Zealand late in 1906. A diary entry is quite explicit about the relationship. In June 1907 Katherine wrote:

> I alone in this silent clockfilled room have become powerfully — I want Maata — I want her as I have had her — terribly. Ths is unclean I know but true. What an extraordinary thing — I feel savagely crude — and almost powerfully enamoured of the child. I had thought that a thing of the Past — Heigh Ho!!!!! My mind is like a Russian novel. (Alpers 1980:49)

In April 1907 Maata wrote in her own diary:

> Dearest K. writes 'ducky letters'. I like this bit: 'What do you mean by being so superlatively beautiful as you went away? You witch: you are beauty incarnate'. (Crone 1985:43)

Maata gave this portion of her diary to Katherine, who retained it among her own papers. Katherine referred to Maata in her own *Journal* as Carlotta. Pat Lawlor interviewed Maata in the 1940s, and comments:

> Maata then told me some unpublished incidents about Katherine's life. I shall not mention all the things she spoke of, for it would not be wise to do so at this stage. She did say however, that KM left NZ because of a flirtation. Earlier in this little love affair, said Maata, Sir Harold Beauchamp locked his daughter in her room as punishment. To console her friend, Maata climbed up to her room and it was then that Katherine told her the whole story.

> Maata went on to refer to other rather sensational aspects of her alleged knowledge of KM, and concluded with the brief statement that she last met her in London early in the century and had corresponded with her until she died (Lawlor 1946:17).

Lawlor's descriptions of Maata are both sexist and racist. It seems therefore unlikely that she would have disclosed the details of her lesbian relationship with Mansfield to such a person. Like others of her generation, she would have concealed her lesbianism from anyone except close friends and perhaps other lesbians. Whether Maata had later lesbian relationships is at this stage unknown — her subsequent marriage is not evidence that she was heterosexual. Biographers must become sensitive to the fact that in this period most lesbians did marry, and that they were afraid of disclosure, often telling direct lies in order to disguise the truth.

The incident of climbing up the fire-escape at 47 Fitzherbert Terrace is undoubtedly true, though the purpose of the visit, given KM's own *Journal* entry of 1907, is unlikely to have been the exchange of confidences. Maata visited Wellington from Wanganui on 17 July 1907. A newspaper item for that date records that 'Martha Grace of Wanganui was paying a visit to friends in town' (Crone 1985:49). She was a guest at Chaddie Beauchamp's birthday ball, but is unlikely to have been invited to stay as a house-guest, given the fact that the Beauchamps disapproved of the friendship between Katherine and Maata.

Later that year Mansfield wrote a lesbian story called 'Leves Amores' which she asked her father's secretary Matty Putnam to type in December. According to Tomalin, she apologised for the story in advance, saying, 'I can't think how I wrote it — it's partly a sort of dream' (Tomalin 1987:42). Tomalin suggests that Putnam may well have shown this story to Harold Beauchamp, and it would certainly have suggested to him that his daughter was a practising lesbian. Tomalin reproduces the story in her book, from a copy Mansfield had sent to Mimi, who kept it among her papers until her death. This is interesting, in view of Mansfield's expressed fear of Mimi and the letters she might possess.

I believe that the story is based upon a real incident involving Maata. The woman in the story is staying at a Wellington hotel, and this fits with Maata's documented visit to the city from Wanganui to attend the birthday ball — she probably did stay at a hotel. The story starts and ends as follows:

> I can never forget the Thistle Hotel. I can never forget that strange winter night.
>
> I had asked her to dine with me, and then go to the Opera.

> My room was opposite hers. She said she would come but — could I lace up her evening bodice, it was hooks at the back. Very well.
>
> She told me as we walked along the corridor to her room that she was glad the night had come. I did not ask why. I was glad, too. It seemed a secret between us. So I went with her into her room to undo those troublesome hooks. She lit a little candle on an enamel bracket. The light filled the room with darkness. Like a sleepy child she slipped out of her frock and then, suddenly, turned to me and flung her arms around my neck. Every bird upon the bulging frieze broke into song. Every rose upon the tattered paper budded and formed into blossom. Yes, even the green vine upon the bed curtains wreathed itself into strange chaplets and garlands, twined round us in a leafy embrace, held us with a thousand clinging tendrils. And Youth was not dead.

Katherine had another important lesbian relationship in Wellington between 1906 and 1908. This relationship was with Edith Kathleen Bendall, referred to in the *Journal* as EKB, a Wellington artist nine years older than Katherine. In her *Journal* entry for 1 June 1907, Mansfield describes an incident at the Days Bay cottage with EKB:

> Last night I spent in her arms — and tonight I hate her — which being interpreted, means that I adore her: that I cannot lie in my bed and not feel the magic of her body: which means that sex seems as nothing to me. I feel more powerfully all those so-termed sexual impulses with her than I have with any man. She enthrals, enslaves me — and her personal self - her body absolute — is my worship. I feel that to lie with my head on her breast is to feel what life can hold.... In my life — so much Love in imagination: in reality 18 barren years... and now she comes — and pillowed against her, clinging to her hands, her face against mine, I am a child, a woman, and more than half man (*Journal* 1954:12-13).
>
> Once again I must bear this changing of the tide —my life is a Rosary of Fierce combats for Two —each bound together with the powerful magnetic chain of sex — and at the end — does the emblem of the crucified hang — surely... (Meyers 1978:31).[5]
>
> ...What an experience! And when we returned to town,

> small wonder that I could not sleep, but tossed to and fro, and yearned, and realised a thousand things which had been obscure... O Oscar! Am I peculiarly susceptible to sexual impulse? I must be I suppose — but I rejoice. Now, each time I see her to put her arms round me and hold me against her. I think she wanted to, too, but she is afraid and custom hedges her in, I feel... (*Journal* 1954:12-13).

After Mansfield left New Zealand, EKB married Gerald Robison. She died in 1986 at the age of 107. I interviewed her in the early 1960s when she was in her eighties, and again in 1985 when she was 106. I felt unable to ask her directly about the passages from the *Journal*. But she told me that Mansfield used to write to her 'every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings... Although she lived very near, she always used to post the letters, she always wrote in this violet ink, too, very strange, but it's kept all these years.' Here she showed me some letters; where are they now? Only one has been reproduced. EKB later claimed that a maid had destroyed all Mansfield's letters to her (Tomalin 1987:36).

EKB also told me, 'I was devoted to her at one stage. But I had some pride. I wasn't like that other poor fool of a woman, to be tossed here and there.' (She meant LM.) 'She wanted me to go to England with her, but of course my people couldn't afford such a thing. She always seemed to want somebody with her. She used to beckon me like that too, but although I went, because I knew she was unhappy, I always had some pride... She never wrote to me after she left New Zealand.'

During my interviews with her in 1985, EKB was not as detailed. She was, however, more explicit. 'I loved her and she loved me', she said over and over again when asked about Mansfield. When questioned about her marriage, she was unable to recall anything about it, though she remembered Katherine Mansfield vividly.

During her two years back in New Zealand, Mansfield was in regular correspondence with Ida Baker, though these letters were later destroyed by Ida on Katherine's instructions (Baker 1971:127). Her parents agreed that she could go, and then rescinded this decision Alpers mentions a recollection to him by Ida of a letter she received at that time:

> It said she had been to a ball and had sat out one of the dances 'with a sailor'. An adventure followed, of which she afterwards wrote a description on some loose sheets of paper which she left in her room. The wind swung round; her mother went to close the open window, she gathered up the scattered pages, and couldn't put them down. It

> isn't hard to imagine Mrs Beauchamp's mounting horror as she read — and her husband's, when he came home. A terrible enquiry followed.

'Was the 'sailor' an invention for Ida's benefit?' asks Alpers. 'Did the sheets describe an adventure with a man or with Maata? Were the parents concerned with their daughter's chastity or was the ugly word "pervert" in their anxious minds?' (Alpers 1980:61). He suggests that this incident was the reason for delaying Mansfield's previously announced return to London, from April until July 1908. I believe, however, that this incident, and others like it, were the reason that Mansfield was allowed to leave at all. It was unusual for upper-class parents to allow a 20-year-old daughter to go to live in London unchaperoned. One of the original plans was that all three girls would return, but the older two elected to remain here.

I believe that the 'papers' concerned a lesbian incident. The reason the Beauchamps allowed Mansfield to go was that they were afraid that if she remained here, she would eventually prove a source of dreadful scandal to them, especially give Harold's ambitions and his recent appointment as a director of the Bank of New Zealand. In a sense she became a 'remittance woman': like so many other lesbians and gay men from New Zealand she went into exile in Europe.

Her parents' discovery of her lesbianism may have been part of the cause for her own growing anxieties about it. By 1908 she was making various entries in her *Journal*, between February and May:

> I shall end — of course — by killing myself ...I purchase my brilliance with my life — it were better that I were dead really ...I am unlike others because I have experienced all there is to experience. But there is no-one to help me. Of course Oscar — Dorian Gray has brought this s.s. to pass... I am now much worse than ever. Madness must lie this way. Pull yourself up!

Katherine was allowed to leave for London in July 1908. She was met by Ida, and went to live at Beauchamp Lodge, a hostel for music students. She soon became involved with Garnet Trowell, in what I see as a desperate attempt to become 'normal'.

She wrote to Garnet: 'I feel as tho' Nature said to me — Now that you have found your true self — now that you are at peace with the world accepting instead of doubting — now that you love — you can see'. However, 'The conflict left — or something left — this troubling sense of an unknown fear. As the Kass-figure tells her lover in a novel "You know sometimes I feel I'm possessed by a sort of Fate — you know — by an impending disaster that spreads its wings over my heart, or maybe

only the shadow of its wings — but it is black and terrible... I cant describe it" ' (Alpers 1980:70). Margaret Wishart, a fellow lodger at Beauchamp Hall, with whom KM may also have had an affair, described Garnet as 'very tall and slender, dreamy, cultured' and Alpers comments that he did not have a markedly masculine temperament, but was much more the sort of man Mansfield was likely to marry, as she was never attracted to the 'bull-male form' (Alpers 1980:68).[6]

Katherine's heterosexual relationships with Arnold and Garnet Trowell began in Wellington in 1903 and she continued contact with them for a number of years. Her letters to Garnet, as well as her *Journal* entries and her subsequent pregnancy to him in 1908-09, have been a subject of fascination to many of her biographers.

Also described by Alpers, Tomalin and others is the visit Mansfield made to Brussels at Easter 1906, when Aunt Belle took the girls on holiday and visited the Trowell boys who were studying music there. They are described as young Bohemians, wearing big black hats and smoking cigarettes in long holders. During this visit Katherine met Rudolph, a fellow student who made a vivid impression upon her. Shortly after Katherine's visit to Brussels Rudolf shot himself. Apparently he was homosexual, and this was the reason for his suicide (see below). The question is therefore raised as to whether Garnet Trowell, too, was homosexual or at least bisexual. This possibility has not been discussed by the biographers, but to a lesbian researcher it is an obvious question.

Mansfield wanted to marry Garnet, but his parents intervened and the relationship ended. Suddenly, on 2 March 1909, she married George Bowden, a singing teacher. She had met him at a dinner party in February. He was a 31-year-old bachelor who lived with a male friend called Lamont Shand and a manservant called Charles (Alpers 1980:87-88). Bowden may also have been homosexual, or Katherine may have believed that he was.

Bowden said in 1949 that when he first met Katherine, she looked like Oscar Wilde. Ida Baker writes that for her wedding to Bowden, Mansfield was dressed entirely in black with a 'dreadful shiny black straw hat on her head'. Together they met Mr Bowden in a 'horrible little place', 'a dirty bare room with an uncleaned window' and a 'fussy little man'. And there, she writes, 'my beloved friend was married' (Baker 1971:46). The newly-weds then went to a hotel, where Mansfield left Bowden that night. She remained married to him for ten years, however, until he finally asked for a divorce because he wanted to re-marry. At that time Bowden wrote to his prospective father-in-law — presumably in order to explain his very brief marriage to Mansfield — as follows:

> The lady I married, though of excellent and well-to-do people, and herself of some literary reputation, was sexually unbalanced and at times was irresponsible, although at others perfectly normal. While her people in New Zealand were aware of this, her guardian in London was not, and as we married after a short acquaintance, it was only then conditions became known to me.

He then wrote that he had 'taken no steps towards divorce on the grounds of this perversion' (Alpers 1980:94).

C.K. Stead, in a review of Tomalin's book, says that Mansfield gave Bowden the impression that she was a lesbian in order to escape from him.[7] This is a typical trivialising heterosexist device. I do not believe that she discussed her lesbianism with Bowden, and I base this conclusion on the letter which was left in his flat and which I believe to have been intended for him. O'Sullivan and Scott suggest (1984:89-90) that this letter was intended for Ida Baker, which I consider to be most unlikely under the circumstances. I think that she wrote the letter to Bowden by way of explanation after leaving him, and that she did so because she believed that he was, like her, homosexual.

On either side of the paper wrapped around the letter, Mansfield wrote, 'Never to be read, on your honour as my friend, while I am still alive. K. Mansfield.' The letter reads:

> Did you ever read the life of Oscar Wilde — not only read it but think of Wilde — picture his exact decadence? And wherein lay his extraordinary weakness and failure? In New Zealand Wilde acted so strongly and terribly upon me that I was constantly subject to exactly the same fits of madness as those which caused his ruin and his mental decay. When I am miserable now — these recur. Sometimes I forget all about it — then with awful recurrence it bursts upon me again and I am quite powerless to prevent it — This is my secret from the world and from you — Another shares it with me — and that other is Kitty McKenzie for she, too is afflicted with the same terror —We used to talk of it knowing that it wd eventually kill us, render us insane or paralytic — all to no purpose —
>
> It's funny that you and I have never shared this — and I know you will understand why. Nobody can help — it has been going on now since I was 18 and it was the reason for Rudolf's death.
>
> I read it in his face today.

> I think my mind is morally unhinged and that is the reason — I know it is a degradation so unspeakable that — one perceives the dignity in pistols.
> Your
> Katie Mansfield, 09 (*Collected Letters* 1984:89-90).

This letter clearly shows the context within which Mansfield saw her lesbianism. It was that of Oscar Wilde and other male homosexuals; she saw her feelings as an abnormal and shameful perversion which would lead to insanity, as the medical textbooks of the time suggested.

More difficulties were to follow. When the Beauchamps heard of Katherine's hasty marriage and hastier desertion of her new husband, Mrs Beauchamp set sail for England. She sailed on 8 April, arriving in London on 27 May. She stayed in London for two weeks, leaving on 10 June for another seven week voyage.

Mrs Beauchamp met with George Bowden, and also with Ida Baker's father. Then she took Katherine to Germany and left her alone at the Bavarian spa resort of Bad Worishofen. Ida's father sent his daughter to the Canary Islands for a holiday, together with her sister. She considered that the lesbian relationship between Ida and Katherine was the cause of the scandal. Mrs Beauchamp's choice of a German spa for Mansfield also indicates that she considered some form of 'treatment' was required; water treatments were at that time believed to be useful for 'nervous' and mental problems.

On returning to New Zealand, Mrs Beauchamp cut Mansfield out of her will, and also amended an earlier trust relating to some Dyer property (Alpers 1980:93-96). Some version of the scandal reached Wellington, says Alpers, and he reports that Vera's fiance was warned against marrying the sister of someone like Katherine.

The cause of the rift between Katherine and her family was her lesbianism, as has been the case for many gay men and lesbians. Katherine stayed in Germany until the end of 1909, miscarried a pregnancy, and , according to Tomalin, had an affair with Floryan Sobieniowski, a Polish writer, who infected her with gonorrhoea. She then returned to London and to Ida Baker (Tomalin 1987:75-78).

Alpers implies that in the relationship between Mansfield and Ida Baker, LM was the 'real' lesbian. He depicts LM as a devoted friend in a one-way relationship, in which KM is the 'cruel companion'.[8] Alpers calls the relationship a 'nitric friendship', and says that LM was a 'tabula rasa' who awaited 'imprinting' when she met Mansfield. He claims that LM 'had a lifelong need of a certain kind of friendship, one that would let her share vicariously the ambitions and achievements of another' (Alpers 1980:27-29). In a lesbian context, this claim suggests that LM was

a 'femme' to Mansfield as 'butch' — a conclusion certainly suggested by Mansfield's references to Baker as her 'wife'.

Mansfield wrote to Baker just six months before she died: 'I feel I cannot live without you... Try and believe and keep on believing without signs from me that I do love you and want you for my wife' (Baker 1971:201-203).

An entry in 1914, headed 'Toothache Sunday' (Toothache was Mansfield's code for 'emotional trouble'), says:

> I think quite seriously that LM and I are so extraordinarily interesting. It is not while *the thing* is happening that I think that, but the significance is near enough to bite its heels and make me start, too. Have I ruined her happy life? Am I to blame?

How consciously lesbian was the relationship between Ida Baker and Katherine Mansfield? In *The Memories of LM*, Baker writes of the events following Mansfield's short-lived marriage to George Bowden: 'I did not know *then* that George Bowden thought I was KM's lesbian friend, and the cause of her leaving him in the first place. I did not know *then* what a lesbian friend meant (Baker 1971:54) [my italics]. Baker repeated her denial on a television interview in 1974. I believe it to be the literal truth. She did not know of or use the term 'lesbian' at that period of her life, and her phrasing is deliberately chosen in order to avoid a direct lie. She does not discuss what the nature of her relationship with Mansfield was, or what terms she may have used at the time to describe same-sex relationships; but the absence of such information does not provide evidence that a lesbian relationship did not exist.

Ida Baker certainly knew what a lesbian friend was when I saw her in 1964 at a meeting of the Minorities Research Group in London. MRG, as it was usually referred to, was the first lesbian organisation in Britain. Founded in 1963 by lesbian activitist Esme Langley, it attracted large numbers of middle-class lesbians. Ida Baker, then in her seventies, attended the meeting with a younger woman friend; they had come to London from the New Forest, where they lived together.

Why anyone would think that a woman of Ida Baker's generation would be prepared to disclose her lesbianism on nationwide television, or otherwise publicly, I cannot imagine. To her credit, however, Baker carefully avoided either a denial or a direct lie. This is often the situation of women in similar positions, and it is one which biographers must learn to appreciate.

Mansfield also had a number of other passionate relationships with women, particularly up until the age of twenty, after which systemic gonorrhoea and later tuberculosis undoubtedly meant that active sexual

relations became increasingly less of a possibility. C.K. Stead, in his review of Tomalin's biography, admits that Mansfield's failing health 'restrained' her relationships with men, but fails to relate this to her lesbianism. He naively says, 'Once her sexual orientation is established there is, as far as I know, not a signal deviation from it'.[9] As well as the odd idea that women who enter sexual relationships with men must therefore have established a lasting heterosexual orientation, Stead dismisses and obliterates Baker's continuing presence in Mansfield's life as not even a 'deviation'.

Obviously Mansfield was a difficult woman to have a relationship with, a fact not taken sufficiently into account by her heterosexual biographers when discussing her lesbianism. As a writer she needed space and time for her work, she was upper- middle-class and used to particular standards of comfort and attention, and she was ill, dying of a painful disease and confronting an early death. There were many problems in her relationship with Ida Baker — problems which should be contextualised within a framework of our improved knowledge about death and dying, through for example the work of Kubler Ross. Dying people often experience hatred and resentment towards their well, healthy friends and lovers. The closer the relationship, the more likely the dying person is to express these feelings. In Mansfield's case, she particularly hated her physical dependence on Ida at these times. The negative comments about Ida recorded in the *Journal* and various letters must be seen in this context, not used to re-interpret the relationship, or to depict Baker in a trivial and condescending manner intended to marginalise her central presence in Mansfield's life.

One of Mansfield's last letters to Baker reads:

> I had better end this quickly for the old feeling is coming back — an ache — a longing, a feeling that I can't be satisfied unless I know you are near. Not on my account, not because I need you — but because in my horrid, odious intolerable way I love you and am yours ever (Baker 1971:197).

This twenty year relationship was Mansfield's most important, but most conflicted.

Mansfield was familiar with lesbian meeting-places in London. Rebecca West says she saw Mansfield working at The *Cave of the Golden Calf*, a 'bohemian' nightclub patronised by lesbians (and run by Freda Strindberg, lesbian wife of the misogynist Swedish playwright August Strindberg). Vera Brittain, in *The Trials of Radclyffe Hall*, also mentions that KM performed at this nightclub. It is unlikely, however, that such lesbian meeting-places would have improved Mansfield's view of lesbi-

anism; even Radclyffe Hall, writing in 1928, described them and the people who frequented them negatively.[10]

Mansfield also had knowledge of another aspect of lesbian life — that of the demi-monde of Colette's Paris. During her first visit of any length to Paris, in December 1913, Mansfield became familiar with this world when Carco took her round the cafe-concerts, theatres and circuses of Montmartre and Montparnasse. Writing to Murry from Bandol on 15 December 1915, Mansfield says:

> I should like to be at a large circus tonight, in a box — very luxurious, you know, very warm, very gay with a smell of sawdust & elephants. A superb clown called Pistachio — white poneys, little blue monkeys drinking tea out of Chinese cups — I should like to be dressed beautifully, beautifully, down [to] the last fragment of my chemise, and I should like Colette Willy to be dressed just exactly like me and to be in the same box. And during the entr'actes while the orchestra blared Pot Pourri from The Toreador we would eat tiny little jujubes out of a much too big bag and tell each other all about our childhood (*Collected Letters* 1984:212-3).

This letter is connected to the story, circulated by Willy, Colette's first husband, that the actress Polaire and Colette were lesbian lovers. Willy made them dress identically and 'paraded them in Paris salon society', (Benstock 1987:84). He said (untruthfully) that they had been lovers in their youth and were still lovers as adults.

Mansfield's reference to 'telling each other all about our childhood' becomes very significant when placed in this context. Mansfield's 'childhood' or adolescence is rich with lesbian relationships. When Colette really became a lesbian between 1906 and 1911, Willy was furious.

Mansfield's use of imagery in her letter is best explained within a lesbian framework. The demi-monde of Colette's *The Pure and the Impure* (1966) is connected with the circus imagery of Mansfield's letter, a world in which lesbians of the theatre, the brothel and the cafe intermingle. Benstock says the lesbian culture of Paris, as described by Colette, was 'a refuge from the dominant heterosexual culture in which women served men's needs'. She says that this world was 'defined less by its depravity than by its enforced secrecy, the need to play doubled roles' — inside and outside the lesbian community (Benstock 1987:56).

Paris was the centre for a large number of women writers in exile at that time, most of them American or British — for example Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Natalie Barney, Renee Vivian, Janet Flanner

and Djuna Barnes, all of them lesbian. This lesbian culture was literary, artistic, wealthy, and committed to a lesbian identity associated with Sappho and Lesbos, largely rejecting the medical model of homosexuality in favour of a sensual celebration of lesbianism as a source of creative inspiration. Colette was associated with this lesbian culture until her second marriage in 1911. It is unlikely that Mansfield would have been ignorant of these Paris circles, because some interchange between lesbians in Paris and in London did occur, as evidenced by Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge, and Hall's descriptions of Paris lesbian salons in *The Well of Loneliness*. At *The Cave of the Golden Calf* in 1913, she would certainly have heard of the Paris lesbians from ordinary lesbian gossip. She does not appear ever to have made contact with these circles, however.[11] In 1915, this would have in fact been very difficult, as many of the women had left Paris during the war years. She would also have needed direct introductions, particularly to the influential Barney or to Stein. Her presence in Paris on her own at this time is not conclusive evidence that she wanted lesbian contact, but it does raise questions which deserve further investigation. It is likely that she revisited some of the places Carco had taken her to, and she may well have made lesbian contacts there.

In 1912 she became involved with John Middleton Murry. He was a dependent man whom I see as latently homosexual. In his entry for 1 November 1953, Murry says that he had experienced a 'homosexual assault' at the age of fourteen (Crone 1985:107). This may particularly account for his later homophobia, and his fear of close involvement with, among others, D.H. Lawrence. James Moore (1980:75) refers to the 'Dostoyevskian current between them', and how Murry bargained with Lawrence, saying 'if I love you, and you know I love you, isn't that enough'. It was not, because Lawrence demanded 'some inviolable sacrament between us', though he too was deeply conflicted over his homosexual feelings and was probably incapable of acting upon them physically. Katherine explained her relationship with Murry quite simply: 'You see we are both abnormal: I have too much vitality — and you not enough' (Letters to JMM, 1951:532).

In an entry for 15 December 1919 (*Journal* 1954:183) KM wrote about how she and JMM had been:

> ....*children* to each other, openly confessed children, telling each other everything, each depending equally upon the other. Before I had been the man and he had been the woman and he had been called upon to make no real efforts. He'd never really 'supported me'. When we first met, in fact, it was I who kept him, and afterwards we'd

> always acted (more or less) like men-friends. Then this illness — getting worse and worse, and turning me into a woman and asking him to put himself away and to bear things for me. He stood it marvelously. It helped very much because it was a romantic disease (his love of a 'romantic' appearance is immensely real) and also being 'children' together gave us a practically unlimited chance to play at life, not to live...

She referred to him as 'Betsy' and also as 'Bogey', the family pet name for her brother Leslie, when he was a child.

Mansfield's relationshiip with Murry has an unreal and artificial quality throughout the eleven year period it lasted. It was constructed from romantic novels and poetry and essentially quite unreal to either of them. Tomalin reports that after Mansfield's famous request to him to 'make me your mistress':

> By his account, their relations remained very childlike; although both had had sexual experience, she was wholly reticent about hers, and his had been slight and nervous; Murry adds that he found no real sexual fulfilment until his fourth marriage, when he was in his late fifties, and that it came as a revelation to him (Tomalin 1987:104).

Mansfield had selected a male lover well. Here was one as keen on playing at love as she was, who would make no real or intimate demands upon her, who wanted to create a public charade and to write extravagant and sentimental love letters to a woman who was a figment of his own active imagination.

Helen McNeish, in her book *Passionate Pilgrimage*, which is otherwise a monument to an artificially constructed heterosexual love, reports: 'Ma'am Allegre is dead many years but her son is still alive... When they walked out together, Ma'am Allegre said, Monsieur with his cigarette and his stick, and Madame with her cigarette and her stick, it was "impossible to tell which was which, they were so alike" (McNeish 1976:10).

McNeish comments:

> The world was unendurable? *Tant pis*; she fashioned her own world. Murry let her down? She created a Murry of her own... I am not concerned here with the real Murry. Nor, on paper, was Katherine... She was, let us again remember, a writer. Above all a writer. Anthony Alpers... says that in her stories KM vanquished death by a creative act. In her letters, it seems to me, she vanquished life (McNeish 1976:7).

However, when Mansfield became ill, the unreal nature of the relationship was exposed. It could not be sustained under this pressure; it was not made of the stuff which could cope with serious illness or crisis. Murry played with the romantic notions of tubercular genius, unable to provide the kind of support that a real friendship would have generated. After her death, Murry was better able to possess his created image of Mansfield as a sweet, delicate genius who had died a romantic and tragic death before her time, than had been possible while the real woman was alive. For Mansfield, facing a real and painful death, the loneliness of her position vis-a-vis Murry became apparent. Her solid and totally real relationship with LM continued.

Tomalin says:

> Although Katherine and Murry often presented their relationship as the most important element in both their lives... there is a sense in which neither sought true understanding of the other. For each of them, the other became a symbolic figure very early on: She the good, suffering, spontaneous genius, he the ideally beautiful scholar-lover without whom neither life nor death could be properly contemplated. Each settled to a dream-version of the other. Murry... was entirely content to live with a woman whose history he ignored and whose inner life he denied; and she, with her desperate desire for secrecy, was in some degree satisfied by this, even though... it left her isolated and frightened in her perfectly protected privacy (Tomalin 1987:242).

Three months before she died, and before entering the Gurdjieff Institute Mansfield wrote, 'One of the KMs is so sorry. But of course she is. She has to die. *Dont* feed her' (*Journal* 1954:331). We have no way of knowing which KM Mansfield intended to kill; but she may have decided that the continued construction of a sham heterosexual self could not go on. Had she lived, she may well have begun to live more openly as a lesbian.

Murry suppressed from his 1927 version of her *Journal* those entries which dealt with her relationship with EKB. Her early biographers, such as Mantz, Lawlor, Isobel Clarke, Guy Morris, and Antony Alpers in his 1953 biography, ignored or were unable to recognise the significance of her lesbian relationships. Subsequently biographers have included some discussion of these relationships; but to a lesbian reader, all of these are unsatisfactory. Cherry Hankin suggests that lesbianism is an immature substitute for heterosexual love, and tries to provide psychological 'causes' for Mansfield's honosexuality in her early family life.

Gillian Boddy largely excises lesbianism from her account; Tomalin includes it without providing an analysis or a context.

Since the publication of the letter to Bowden admitting her lesbianism, biographers have attempted to find acceptable explanations for it. Tomalin says that she finds the letter inauthentic, and like others, believes that it was written deliberately by Mansfield to deceive Bowden. I find the whole of Mansfield's correspondence to Middleton Murry unbelievable and contrived; but I consider the lesbian letter to have a ring of truth about it, precisely because of its agony. To a lesbian reader, the letter sounds familar, in that it is similar to many suicide notes written by young lesbians and gay men who cannot accept their homosexuality.

Describing Mansfield's lesbianism as an adolescent phase not only denies the continuing presence of Ida Baker; it denies Mansfield's continuing preoccupation with lesbianism as a source of conflict in her life.

Completing a lesbian biography of Mansfield and providing lesbian readings of her texts is a vital task for modern lesbian-feminist critics, if she is to be understood as the writer and woman she was, within a real social and political context.

Alison Laurie is a lecturer in Women's Studies at Victoria University of Wellington.

Notes

1. Doris Faber, for example, admitted in *The Life of Lorena Hickock, ER's Friend* (William Morrow, 1980) that she tried to have Eleanor Roosevelt's letters to her lesbian lover, Hickok, suppressed by the National Archives, on the grounds that Roosevelt was a 'great woman' and information about her lesbianism should not therefore come out.
2. See, e.g., Lauritsen and Thorstad 1974, Katz 1983, Adam 1987.
3. See Edward Carpenter, 'Homogenic love and its place in a free society', essay, 1895; *Love's Coming of Age*, 1902; *Iolaus: An Anthology of Friendship*, 1902; *The Intermediate Sex*, 1908.
4. See, e.g., Weeks 1977:21, Adam 1987:32.
5. This paragraph was deleted from the 1954 edition of Mansfield's *Journal* by Murry, who appended a note saying it was 'indecipherable'.
6. 'In her sixties, Margaret said that she had never, at any period of her life,

known such intimacy as she had known with Kassie at Beauchamp Lodge' (Alpers (180:72).

7. C.K. Stead, *London Review of Books*, 26 November 1987.
8. Gordon MacLauchlan (ed.), *New Zealand Encyclopaedia*, Bateman (NZ), 1984:347.
9. See note 7.
10. See Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, Hammond, 1956.
11. Mansfield's comment on a postcard to Baker in 1922 is interesting in this context: 'I do not want to hear about Miss Beach' (Baker 1981:216). Sylvia Beach ran the Paris bookshop, Shakespeare and Co., and was part of the Paris lesbian community.

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1951. *Letters of Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1954. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1984. *Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, Vol.I: 1903-1917, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott. Clarendon Press.

_____ 1987. *Collected Letters* Vol.II: 1918-1919.

Adam, Barry D. 1987. *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*. Twayne Publishers.

Alpers, Anthony. 1980. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. Viking.

Baker, Ida. 1971. *Katherine Mansfield: The Memories of LM*. Michael Joseph.

Benstock, Shari. 1987. *Women of the Left Bank*. Virago.

Clarke, Isabel C. 1944. *Katherine Mansfield: a Biography*. Beltane Book Bureau.

Colette, Sidonie Gabrielle. 1966. *The Pure and the Impure*. Farrar Straus and Giroux.

Crone, Nora. 1985. *A Portrait of Katherine Mansfield*. Arthur H. Stockwell.

Faderman, Lillian. 1981. *Surpassing the Love of Men*. William Morrow.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1*. Allen Lane.

Gilbert, Sandra M.and Susan Gubar. 1979. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Yale University Press.

Hankin, C.A. 1983. *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories*. MacMillan.

Hyde, Montgomery. 1972. *The Other Love: An historical and contemporary survey of homosexual love in Britain*.

Katz, Jonathon. 1978. *Gay American History*. Thomas Crowell.

Katz, Jonathon. 1983. *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*. Harper and Row.

Lauritsen, John and D. Thorstad. 1974. *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*. Times Change Press.

Lawlor, P.A. 1946. *The Mystery of Maata*. Beltane Book Bureau.

McNeish, Helen. 1976. *Passionate Pilgrimage - Katherine Mansfield: a love affair in letters*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Meyers, Jeffrey. 1978. *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography*. Hamish Hamilton.

Moore, James. 1980. *Gurdjieff and Mansfield*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Rich, Adrienne. 1981. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence". *Signs* V 4: 631-660.

Rule, Jane. 1975. *Lesbian Images.* Crossing Press.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. 1985. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America.* Oxford University Press.

Tomalin, Claire. 1987. *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life.* Viking.

Weeks, Jeffrey. 1977. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present.* Quartet Books.

Weeks, Jeffrey. 1985. *Sexuality and Its Discontents.* Routledge and Kegan Paul.

A Dinner from Scraps (letters and stories)

Your *'flounder and orange'* was hardly enough
to go round so I've planned something
more substantial. Not just black bread
and sauerkraut. We're having a birthday
and even bananas might chuckle
with delight. We won't have duck
(Prelude) for obvious reasons, besides we haven't
got a groom with golden ear-rings,
but we'll use the *'new blue china'*
and the *'Mappin and Webb tea-service'*
or would you rather make that 'coffee
from a silver pot with Grand Marnier
1920 and a small bunch of violets'. *'Figs I have*
for you and nougat du pays', vin blanc
and geraniums on my jacket. There must be
grapes in a blue dish *'to bring the carpet*
(Bliss) *up to the table'* but no Tinakori Road in Hampstead
fare. No mushroom ketch-up, lamb and roast
potatoes in their jackets. After all
it's spring and we don't want you
pre-occupied with life
passing out of your hands.

Riemke Ensing

A Masque of Masks:

Self Presentation in the Writings of Katherine Mansfield

Isabelle Meyer

> A chinaman of the T'ang Dynasty — and by which definition, a philospher — dreamed he was a butterfly, and from that moment he was never sure that he was not a butterfly dreaming it was a chinese philospher.[1]
>
> For what with complexes and supressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections — there are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests.[2]

On this excursion to the Hotel du KM, I am not pursuing any of the wilful guests — Kathleen, Katherine, Katy, Kathie, Kass, Beauchamp/Bowden/Murry — I am here to look at the visitors' book, to look at the presentations the clerk has made of those hundreds of selves. From the beginning of her writing career until its end, Mansfield explored the means and motives of human self-presentation. Like the experimental writers before her — Egerton, Wilde, Mallarmé — and her modernist contemporaries — Eliot, Woolf, H.D. — Mansfield was obsessed with the notion of self, as a problem as well as an entity. For her, human life

was a series of roles; each person, a series of masks and disguises.

I want to trace a small part of the development and ramifications of that idea of multiple selves, or of a hidden, perhaps unreachable self with many masks, through a brief look at three of her stories — 'The Tiredness of Rosabel', 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', and 'Miss Brill' — which, chronologically speaking, mark the span of her career. Throughout that career, there was a tension between these two expository propositions concerning a definition of self. They appear to have a simultaneous validity in Mansfield's fiction, largely as a result of multilinear temporality.

Her concern with representation extends itself into an exploration of ideas of reality and fantasy, and has been a shaping force in the structure of her work. Her choice of the short story itself, a form ably suited to the expression of fragmented units of time and place, certainly adds to the portrayal of human experience as also fragmentary, and yet, at each moment, complete.

The multiformity of self, self-presentation as performance, were nascent ideas at the turn of the century. Mansfield's exposition of them was part of the evolution of thinking about identity and the female subject that has occupied writers and theoreticians since then. Her philosophy of the presentation of self, extant in her writing, can be seen as a bridge or link in the development of the modern concept of the self, especially for women.

In her early writing she followed the models of the symbolist writers. Her search to have evocation, not description, as the ethos of writing, to make meaning experiential, led her to develop a very particular narrative style which she used for the first time in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel'. She portrays Rosabel, the milliner's shop assistant, indirectly, effacing the author at the point of intersection between external signification and internal experience. The minimal plot of the story is grounded in a tight symbolic framework. The presentation of Rosabel's sensibility is enmeshed with the 'action' so that the reader's immersion in both interior and exterior worlds is simultaneous.

T.E. Beachcroft, Anthony Alpers and others have pointed to Mansfield's use of Theocritus as a model,[3] but reinforcement for her coup d'etat against the obtrusive author came from *The Yellow Book*; not Wilde, whose association with Mansfield's *Journal*[4] has been much exaggerated, but instead from one of Lane's 'petticoats', George Egerton. Egerton was one of the pioneers of an indirect, highly stylised method of narration she labelled 'the psychological moment'. Patterns of imagery are used to emphasise thematic concerns, and so tightly are the two woven together, content and form so inextricably bound, that

they have no existence without one another.

Mansfield's thematic concern with the self-presentation of women has had enormous structural implications for her writing. Like Egerton, her use of autobiography as the starting place for some of her fiction was not a new phenomenon — C.A. Hankin's study of Mansfield's confessional stories places her in a long line of confessional writers (C. Hankin 1983:ix); and, like Egerton, Mansfield's use of her own life as subject matter for her writing has had several repercussions. It has infused her investigations of the feminine psyche with a sense of felt emotion and sensation that shifts her work from abstraction and romanticism toward realism. Rendering her experiences in fiction also, perhaps paradoxically, creates a symbolic plane in her writing. Whether or not the reader knows anything of Mansfield's life, implicit in her fiction is the sense of making a pattern of one's life. This idea of patterning alters the shape of the fictional genre by instituting a different temporal order. Stories no longer have a beginning, a middle and an end. They can no longer span a whole human life from birth until death. They are focussed on a single moment or series of moments, and are self-consciously aware of the selection of these moments. No external assessment of the importance or worth of such moments is possible; systems of valuation thus become transient, in flux.

'The Tiredness of Rosabel' is constructed around the play between Rosabel's daily life and her dreams. Dreams are the most frequent and accessible challenge to everyday reality, and Mansfield's use of them in this story raises the possibility of dreams creating new models of reality. Rosabel's dream world is as substantial and as 'real' as her everyday one. In this other world, she is another Rosabel; tired from happiness, not overwork. In her portrayal of Rosabel's double worlds, double selves, Mansfield implicitly suggests that costume creates identity. What is worn is not merely an expression of wealth and position; somehow, we are what we wear. There is no differentiation between costume or mask, and self. The elision between identity and mask is brought into focus by the lines Mansfield draws between 'real' (the real Rosabel), and fantasy, lines which invite us to question that very division.

Rosabel's fantasy is constructed out of her reality. The scene from the romance novel she reads over the shoulder of the girl beside her on the bus becomes part of the climax of her fantasy day; the bunch of violets she buys is transformed into the great sprays of parma violets presented to her by her dream beau. Throughout her dream day the cold aching of her working day appears in parenthesis; Rosabel's dream has become larger than her life, and her capacity to dream has become her defence against it. Reality becomes a question — who is the real Rosabel? In spite

of the closing picture of her in an external frame, the real Rosabel seems engaged in being the dream Rosabel after she wakes. At this point Mansfield seems to lose control of the oblique narrative voice she has employed, marring the technical perfection of the story with the moralising of the last few lines. The techniques, themes and imagistic framework she used in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' were ones she returned to, however, polishing and refining them with varying success throughout the rest of her writing life.

In one of the *In a German Pension* stories, 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', she again explores the tensions between self and external circumstances that necessitate the wearing of a mask. At the heart of much of Mansfield's writing is a pervasive disbelief in the ability of human beings to shape their own identities and control their own fate. This is particularly the case for the women she portrays. The experiences of being male and being female are polarised in almost all her writing, and these gendered sets of experiences are presented as being rarely communicable in any meaningful way. Society, Mansfield suggests, forces us all to wear masks, to play roles, insisting that identity is a construct of many (false) selves.

The possibility of blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy has been left aside in 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding'. The frau is trapped inside a reality she finds painful and numbing. Perhaps the difference between her and Rosabel is that she is older; her dreams no longer offer her any comfort or escape, and there are parts of her interior world that are too painful to touch. Masks are not only a defence against the world, they can also be a defence against oneself.

'Frau Brechenmacher' and the other stories of this *German Pension* collection were written during the period of Mansfield's close friendship with Beatrice Hastings (see Hanson and Gurr, 1981; Alpers, 1980). She was undoubtedly taken up with Hasting's radical feminism and, although feminism was never a political cause or even for the most part a very active concern for Mansfield, it presented her with another facet of the problem of self-presentation. Many of her early stories demonstrate the destructive belittling elements of various roles, especially those of conventional femininity. It is Rosabel's dream world — the 'tragic optimism which is all too often the only inheritance of Youth' — that keeps her 'half-asleep' and not retorting to arrogant or lecherous customers who tyrannise her. The romantic fiction of white-shouldered girls and tall dark-haired lovers distracts the shopgirls from their grimy subsistence life long enough for them not to rebel against it.

When a more politically aware Mansfield comes to write of Frau Brechenmacher's excursion to her neighbour's wedding, no escapism is

allowable. This does not mean, however, that Mansfield had put aside her earlier experiments with symbolist writing to turn toward realism. Frau Brechenmacher does explore some of the factors, economic and social, that may pressure women into marriages they would rather avoid, and also touches on the widespread ignorance of female sexuality that caused so much physical and mental distress for so many women.

As Kate Fullbrook (1986:35) has pointed out, 'the fiction repeatedly circles around a number of questions relating to women. What does it mean to be defined as female?' Gender itself becomes visible as a mask, an unavoidable, socially constructed role, which functions as a definition of self. These social contexts and realities are held, though, within the frame of a symbolic fable. The movement or play of the narrative is held, doubled and extended by parallelism and leitmotif.

Herr Brechenmacher is referred to by his role: he is 'the father', the objective pronoun removing him from a position of any real contact except as an authority figure for his children and his wife. Mansfield subtly emphasises this disembodied masculine position by clothing him in a uniform, only to undercut this symbol of patriarchal supremacy: Herr Brechenmacher is, after all, only a postman, and a fat one, who relishes a role of importance and authority even though he overflows his costume.

> 'Here, come and fasten this buckle', called Herr Brechenmacher. He stood in the kitchen puffing himself out, the buttons on his blue uniform shining with an enthusiasm which nothing but official buttons could possibly possess.

The frau, the little frau dresses in the dark and upon entering the hall assumes 'the air of dignity becoming to the wife of the postman and the mother of five children'. The juxtaposition of the frau's life as a married woman and the celebration of the wedding is a particularly chilling one — and very revealing. Again, costume is an important image for the formation and denial of female self-hood.

Images of clothing occur repeatedly in Mansfield's prose. Her juxtaposition of states of dress and undress functions overtly as a symbol for her theory of self-presentation. The layers of clothing we use to cover our nakedness create as well present statements about ourselves — clothes maketh the woman. But a woman's clothes may also distort our view of her, while designating her position in relation to economic, moral and social institutions. The vagaries of fashion aside, there is a semiotics of dress in Mansfield's writing that raises questions about the relationship between women and their bodies, self-expression, and self-containment.

At the head of the centre table sat the bride and bride-

> groom, she in a white dress trimmed with stripes and bows of coloured ribbon, giving her the appearance of an iced cake all ready to be cut and served in neat little pieces to the bridegroom beside her...

Costume thus becomes the symbolic referent for a theory of self-presentation. It also implies a textual structure in Mansfield's writing, one that has its most important precedent in the work of George Egerton. Like Egerton, Mansfield constructs her prose as a form of dress, a form of enclosure, containment and exposure. She thus employs a very distinctive version of the structural experimentation that occurred at the turn of the century.

Certain patterns of imagery recur constantly throughout Mansfield's fiction. One of the most striking is her use of food and eating to mark a gender difference in response to sex. In Rosabel's fantasy she and her lover go out for a lavish meal. The mouth-watering descriptions that occupy Rosabel are not put there merely to convey her bodily hunger because she has missed so many good dinners. Eating is associated with an act of love, in both a nurturing and a sexual sense. Frau Brechenmacher's evening is taken up with watching others, particularly her husband, eat and drink. She is repulsed by this, reinforcing the idea of feminine otherness that stands in opposition to masculine brutality and aggression. Men are portrayed as cannibals, devouring women; the emotional and spiritual vampirism suggested by the bullying behaviour of Herr Brechenmacher is coupled with the physical wear and tear of constant child-bearing. The women in this story are swallowed up by being wives and mothers. The distance between Frau Brechenmacher's inner world and the masks she wears for her husband and neighbours is dramatically conveyed by her dislike of and refusal to participate in the consumption of food. Eating in this story is suggestive of sexuality at its most destructive. Mansfield implicitly ties eating to male abuse of women, and in the closing scene of the story makes a powerful and disturbing connection between woman and child as object for male domination: 'She lay down on the bed and put her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt as Herr Brechenmacher lurched in.'

Events of importance to the moment Mansfield conveys often take place outside the boundaries of the story and are presented in an emblematic way, using a device that mirrors the obliqueness of her narrative technique. Frequently she uses memory to suggest linkage and distinction between this particular moment and others. Time is a narrative participant; levels of time interact in order to make unity out of the simultaneous juxtaposition of past, future and present. This conveys not only a sense of time as a parallel sequence, but also of the self

existing as selves in parallel sequence. Frau Brechenmacher's memories of the girl she was mark the difference of her life in the now of the story; but it is because she still *is* that person, if only in memory, that she feels the lack in her present existence. She is also aware of the inappropriateness of being that version of herself, in the circumstances in which she finds herself.

> 'Na, what is it all for?' she muttered, and not until she had reached home, and prepared a little supper of meat and bread for her man did she stop asking herself that silly question.

Elisions in the temporal order to point to the disjunction between past and present, fantasy and reality, as in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' and 'Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding', are used in many other stories, including one of the latest — 'Miss Brill'. This is one of Mansfield's most finely wrought symbolist stories. She herself felt that it had attained the tightness of formation of a musical composition. It employs the most explicit use of clothing imagery as presentation of identity — Miss Brill *is* her ragged fur, just as the lady in the ermine has become the same colour as her dingy coat. Both of these women, in their attempts at wearing the costume of 'the lady', are rejected by the members of a social group that no longer allows them participation or place. There is no role for them — they are treated as if they do not exist. Mansfield deftly portrays the necessity of fantasy as a comfort, as an escape, and also the terrible isolation it obscures.

Miss Brill is portrayed through a series of shadow portraits as well as her own interior monologue. She is watching others, claiming participation in a community, unable to recognise that she herself is one of the discarded outsiders she observes.

Language is again an important referent for self-presentation. From the outset Miss Brill's observations are described in terms of performance. Miss Brill's way of seeing and making patterns out of what she sees is presented in terms of a play, in which she is both audience and participant. She herself recognises this towards the end of the story: her fantasy has transmuted reality, and she can no longer see herself outside her imagined role — she is her mask

> It was like a play. It was exactly like a play ... They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday.

But Miss Brill's community is false; she believes — or wants to — that the others in the park share it with her. Mansfield is playing with the idea that there is one universally applicable and understood meaning. Miss

Brill's sense of the meaning of her life is not shared; it is only illusory. The young couple destroy her creative attempt at self-inscription, and inscription into society. What they say about her in her hearing, but as if she wasn't there, forces her to abandon not only her fur stole, but also her sense of who she is, and her sense of placement in the scheme of things.

> 'But why? Because of that silly old thing at the end there?' asked the boy. 'Why does she come here at all — who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?'

The description of the fur as a fried whiting is grotesquely funny, and a devastating contrast to Miss Brill's over-rosy perspective. It is also loaded with many associations — with death, age and — like the other food imagery in Mansfield's writing — sexuality. This fussy old spinster, with her romantic story plots for the place she thinks she's in, has been reduced, by contrast with passionate, sexually animated youth, to a slab of flaccid dead fish. Closed in its box, is it the stole that cries, or the tatters of Miss Brill's destroyed sense of herself?

Throughout Katherine Mansfield's writing career she explored many facets of the problem of identity and self-presentation. She portrayed the ways in which one becomes one's mask, the ways in which the wearing of masks is necessary to preserve the inner self, and is often socially enforced. The use of masks, that is to say roles or personalities, is conveyed as being both a deliberate strategy and an inevitable one, especially for women. Mansfield's thematic concern with self-presentation shaped her writing in a formal way, leading her to refine a symbolist, imagistic method and an oblique third person narrative to render her sense of life, and self, as a masque of masks.

Isabelle Meyer teaches English at the Australian National University. She will soon publish on 'The Garden Party'.

Notes

1 Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature.* Methuen, 1984:126.
2. Katherine Mansfield, Notes for a book review, 119/71 Alexander Turnbull Library.
3. See T.O. Beachcroft, 'Katherine Mansfield's Encounter with Theocritus', *English* xxiii 15, Spring 1974, 13-19; also Alpers, 1980:125.
4. The compilation of extracts from scrapbooks, diaries, notebooks and fragments which John Middleton Murry published as Mansfield's *Journal.*

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1984. *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield,* ed. Antony Alpers. Oxford University Press.

_____ 1984. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield,* ed. J.M. Murry (first published 1954). Hutchinson.

Alpers, Antony. 1982. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (first published 1980). Oxford University Press.

Fullbrook, Kate. 1986. *Katherine Mansfield.* Harvester Press.

Hankin, C.A. 1983. *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories.* Macmillan.

Hanson, Clare and Gurr, Andrew. 1981. *Katherine Mansfield.* Macmillan.

'Finding the Treasure':

Some Less Discussed Aspects of Katherine Mansfield's Life and Work

Gillian Boddy

In 1922, in Paris, less than a year before her death, Katherine Mansfield wrote a letter which was not included in the two volumes edited by John Middleton Murry. This letter was to the South African writer, Sarah Gertrude Millin, whose novel *The Dark River* she had reviewed in 1920.

> Let met tell you my experience. I am a 'colonial'. I was born in New Zealand. I came to Europe to 'complete my education' and when my parents thought that tremendous task was over I went back to New Zealand. I hated it. It seemed to me a small petty world, I longed for 'my' kind of people and 'larger' interests and so on. And after a struggle I did get out of the nest finally and came to London, at eighteen, *never* to return, said my disgusted heart. Since then I've lived in England, France, Italy, Bavaria. I've known literary society in plenty. But for the last four-five years I have lived either in the S.[outh] of France or in a remote little chalet in Switzerland, always remote, always cut-off, seeing hardly anybody, for months... Its only in these years I've really been able to work and always my thoughts and feelings go back to New Zealand — rediscovering it, finding beauty in

> it, re-living it. It's about my Aunt Fan who lives up the road I really want to write, and the man who sold goldfinches, and about a wet night on the wharf and Tarana Street in the Spring...I think the only way to live as a writer is to draw upon one's real *familiar* life — to find the treasure in that as Olive Schreiner did. Our secret life. The life we return to over and over again, the 'do you remember' life is always the past. And the curious thing is that if we describe that which seems to us so intensely personal; other people take it to themselves and understand it as if it were their own. (Letters to Millin: 22 March 1922).

This paper is about certain aspects of those last few years of Katherine Mansfield's life, in particular her time in Switzerland which began in 1921 and finished at the Chateau Belle Vue in Sierre where she wrote her last story 'The Canary'.

As so often in her restless life, the perfection Katherine Mansfield had first found in the little Villa Isola Bella in Menton faded. In May 1921, wearied by difficulties in her relationship with Murry, irritated by LM yet inevitably dependent on her, and troubled by her rapidly deteriorating health, Katherine Mansfield left her beloved South of France for Switzerland, hoping desperately for a new cure. 'All our flags are pinned on Switzerland. Meadows, trees, mountings, and kind air. I hope we shall get there in time' (*Letters* 1928:20 April 1921).

Anxious not to repeat the humiliating experience of Italy when her hotel room had been fumigated and her bed linen burned at her expense, she stayed in Swiss hotels posing 'as a lady with a weak heart and lungs of Spanish leather' (*Letters* 1951:7 May 1921). Her letters to Murry recorded her impressions: 'the cleanliness of Switzerland! It is frightening. The chastity of my lily white bed!... The very bird droppings are dazzling'. A little later, in a more serious mood, she wrote to him, 'Yes I *do* believe one ought to face facts. If you dont, they get behind you and they become terrors, nightmares, giants, horrors. As long as one faces them one is top-dog... I think nearly all my falsity has come from not facing facts as I should have done, and its only now that I am beginning to learn to face them' (*Letters* 1951:7 May 1921). And that is the key to much of what was to follow in the next 18 months — in her life, and in her work.

By mid June, Mansfield had reached Sierre. Then, joined by Murry, she travelled, in perfect weather, by funicular up to the village of Montana-sur-Sierre, to rent the Chalet des Sapins from Colonel and Mrs Maxwell. Their intention was to stay for two years.

It was a comfortable, three-storeyed chalet. Balconies with beautiful

views of the mountains opened off the bedrooms on the top storey; the living rooms were below. The household was managed by a gentle if rather erratic Swiss, Ernestine, whose family own the property today — and the desk at which Mansfield wrote. Ernestine, like so many of the servants of the Beauchamp/Murry households, found her place in fiction in 'Father and the Girls', set in Sierre. Although much of the ensuing period was spent returning to the 'do you remember life', it was also to be a time of new directions.

One of these new directions was in a new relationship. Katherine Mansfield's relationships with women were always very important to her, as indeed they are for so many of the central women characters in her fiction. In her early abandoned novel 'Juliet', 1906-07, she wrote of the advantages of such relationships: 'Our friendship is unique... All the comforts of matrimony with none of its encumbrances... we are both individuals. We both ask from the other personal privacy, and we can be silent for hours.... Think of a man always with you. A woman cannot be wholly natural with a man — there is always a feeling that she must take care that she doesn't let him go.'

Katherine Mansfield's relationships with women were inevitably complex. Some of the early relationships, such as those with Edie Bendall and Maata Mahupuku, of whom there is no mention after 1916, seem almost to have been deliberately removed from her consciousness, to be replaced by others: the indispensable LM, Anne Estelle Rice, Virginia Woolf, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Dorothy Brett. Some, like Woolf, felt that the relationship was 'founded on quicksand' (Woolf 1977:1919). But others provided the kind of intimacy and collusion that was so necessary in what was, in so many ways, an alien society. She had a gift for friendship — what Frieda Lawrence called the 'terrible gift of nearness'; she also had a deep need for the love, affection, support and nurturing that such friendship provided. So it is interesting to see how quickly a new, vitally important relationship began at the time of this move to Switzerland.

When, in 1908, Kathleen Beauchamp had persuaded her father to allow her to return to London to write, she was able to provide him with a family precedent, May Annette Beauchamp, or Countess Elizabeth Russell as she had since become. Born in Australia on 31 August 1866, she was the fifth child of Henry Herron Beauchamp, Harold Beauchamp's brother. In 1870 the family had returned to England. Her adult life was a dramatic one; married first to a Prussian Junker turned experimental farmer, she had published her first novel, *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, anonymously in September 1898. Although a small novel it was immediately popular; it went into 11 reprints by the end of

that year.

The two cousins had apparently met only briefly during Mansfield's early time in England. In 1920 Elizabeth was invited to tea at Portland Villas. She was by now a very successful novelist, one of several former lovers of H.G. Wells, and the ex-wife of Francis, Earl Russell, Bertrand Russell's brother. (Whether Elizabeth ever knew of her younger cousin's relationship with Bertrand Russell in late 1916 and early 1917, so well depicted in *Jones and Jones*, neither of the women's diaries reveals.) Soon after their meeting, dismayed at Katherine Mansfield's departure for France, Elizabeth wrote: 'I'm grievously disappointed that you should have had to go away again... Does it at all console you that your friends hate it on their account, quite apart from what they feel on yours... It's splendid the way your work goes on and you snap your fingers at what your body is choosing to do' (Letters to Russell: 27 October 1920). Her next comment shows an early perception of what critics have since confirmed, and which Mansfield herself appears to have felt: 'As you're not here I shall try to get to know Virginia Woolf who is bracketed in my mind with you.'

In Switzerland, Elizabeth was only a short distance away, staying at her Chalet Soleil at Randogne. It is intriguing to think of these two women, both from the other side of the world, now living half an hour away from each other on a mountainside in Switzerland. A comparative study of their letters and journals adds a further dimension. They were, as Mansfield noted with some satisfaction, 'Both women... and both Beauchamps' (notebook, Newberry). Despite some obvious differences, there are striking parallels. Both had succeeded as writers, despite their sex — no mean feat, considering the contemporary attitudes revealed in an article in Wellington's *New Zealand Mail* (29 September 1907), which had advised its readers:

> The so called new woman is an utter failure... the sort of woman that people call intelligent is the most awful nuisance in the world...she combines the respectful dullness of a Church meeting with the mental fatigue of a mathematical problem... *Moral*: bear in mind men like to be amused and *never* instructed.

Although their writing was very dissimilar, an early reviewer of *In a German Pension* had in fact compared it rather unfavourably to *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Both were also drawn to writing about children, though in very different ways. They shared a love of music, especially Chopin, and of reading, flowers, sunshine and family anecdotes and jokes. The lives of both had been personally chaotic and destructive. The death of Elizabeth's beloved brother in December 1921 gave them

another sombre link. Murry may have been 'the most hated man in English letters', but clearly Elizabeth was able to see what attracted her cousin to him. He visited her frequently to walk, talk, and play chess, and her diary gives us glimpses of him as 'sensitive', 'charming', 'delightful'. There is, however, a note of wry envy in Mansfield's remark to her friend Dorothy Brett, the painter, that Elizabeth 'is happy. She has a perfect love, a man. They have loved each other for eight years and it is still so radiant, as exquisite as ever. I must say it is nice to gaze at people who are in love. Murry has taken up golf' (Letters, Newberry).

Elizabeth's diary entries are generally very short and elliptical compared with her cousin's (but equally illegible); they also reveal certain similarities of style and humour. Mansfield, for example, first described James Joyce's *Ulysses* as 'that great tome' with an atmosphere of 'wet linoleum and unemptied pails' (Letters to Schiff:January 1922). Elizabeth commented, 'Ulysses made me feel as if I were shut up with a lunatic who was doing what the courts call "exposing himself". I got as far as the detailed account of the man's visit to a lavatory and then boredom so profound fell upon me that I went to sleep' (Russell:23 May 1922). In fairness to Mansfield I have to say that she later revised her opinion — but I don't think Elizabeth ever did finish the book. On the other hand, both admired Jane Austen, and Lawrence's vitality, when he was not obsessed by 'sex in everything'.

As the relationship between the two women developed and became more complicated, there were difficulties. It has been suggested, for example, that Elizabeth was in some ways the original for the character of Rosemary Fell in 'A Cup of Tea', written early in 1922; and later that year Katherine Mansfield advised her father not to read Elizabeth's most recent book because of too many jokes about husbands and God.

Nevertheless, she described Elizabeth to Brett, 'She appeared today behind a bouquet — never smaller woman carried bigger bouquets. She looks like a garden walking, of asters, late sweet peas, stocks and always petunias... I do hope we shall manage to keep her in our life. Its terrible how ones friends disappear... The point about her is that one loves her and is proud of her. That's so important...' (Letters, Newberry). For her part Elizabeth wrote about 'The Garden Party', 'I'm fearfully proud of her — just as if I'd hatched her.'

Each gave the other much needed support at a time that was difficult for them both. Yet, looking at their diaries and letters, we can see that the relationship was, like so many in Mansfield's life and fiction, never *quite* what it might have been. Mansfield wrote to Brett, 'No doubt Elizabeth is far more important to me than I am to her...' (Letters, Newberry). And three and a half years after Mansfield's death, on reading the *Journal*

published by Murry, Elizabeth confessed to him: 'So strange ...that she too felt our meetings unsatisfactory. I used to be dreadfully embarassed, afraid of being stupid, slow.' Those are the same words that Dorothy Brett used of her relationship with Mansfield. Elizabeth continued 'If only I hadn't been so much *afraid* of Katherine!... I felt so gross when I was with her, such a great clumsy thing, as if my hands were full of chilblains' (Russell:8 September 1927). As Elizabeth was in fact a tiny woman, this is a particularly revealing comment. It is also interesting because it describes feelings that were very similar to those frequently described by the 'Rhodesian Mountain', Ida Baker (LM). What was it about Mansfield that had this effect on her friends?

Although the relationship between the two cousins was in some ways tenuous and uncertain, they enjoyed each other's company for much of 1921 and 1922. At times Elizabeth visited the Chalet des Sapins daily, or at least several times a week, laden with flowers, apricots, books. Her letters and diaries provide a new perspective of Katherine Mansfield's life at that time. They reveal how very ill she was during that extraordinarily productive and creative period. Often when Elizabeth visited her, taking one of her many house guests with her, her lover Frere or her old friend Hugh Walpole for example, one of them would sit outside with Murry for half an hour while the other went in to talk to Katherine. She also recognised the defiant vitality and humour:

> *July 14* Cooler, not so sunny... took Katherine some nasturtiums & talked a little. Thought she seemed less well than last time—[but] she [was] extraordinarily brilliant & alive.
> *Sept 26* Katherine & John, greatly adventurous... drove down to lunch.
> *Sept 28* Tea at Katherine's very amusing.
> *June 1922* She coughed a lot but her face looked rounder. [she] Talked vivaciously.

Shortly after that entry Mansfield left Murry and moved down the mountain to Sierre. Murry visited Elizabeth daily for some weeks, and her diary gives some indication of the strain between him and his wife at that time. In July 1922 it was Elizabeth whom Katherine asked for a loan of £100: 'I will pay it back the moment my book is paid for. But that will not be before the late autumn. May I keep it as long? Of course, if in the meantime my Papa shakes a money bag at me—But it is far more likely to be a broomstick' (Letters to Russell: July 1922). Elizabeth's reply was immediate: 'I'd love to... Men do these things so simply and never give it another thought. Is it *really* impossible for us to be brothers?' (Russell: n.d.1922).

Their letters to each other give that sense of collusion and intimacy

to which I have referred. Mansfield's to Elizabeth are among her most affectionate and amusing. One, from mid 1921, gives a key to a great deal of her thinking — and her writing — at this time: 'perhaps the truth is some people live in cages and some are free. One had better accept ones cage and say no more about it. I *can* — I will' (Lettersto Russell:1921). This introduces a whole network of images: cages, with the physical and emotional restrictions they suggested; but also flight, voyages and home. These images dominated much of her writing at this time, recurring in letters, diary entries and fictions such as 'A Married Man's Story', 'The Voyage', 'Six Years After', and 'The Canary'.

On New Year's Eve 1922, beside the fire at Fontainebleau, she wrote to Elizabeth,

> When I came to London from Switzerland I did go through what books and undergraduates call a spiritual crisis I suppose... if I had been well I should have rushed off to darkest Africa or wherever... But such grand flights being impossible I burned what boats I had and came here... It is a fantastic experience... I cannot tell you what a joy it is to be in contact with living people who are strange and quick and not afraid to be themselves.
>
> Goodbye, my dearest cousin. I shall never know anyone like you. I shall remember every little thing about you for ever. (*Letters* 1928:31 December 1922)

Elizabeth, not having received this, wrote on 3 January 1922, 'Dearest cousin, I miss you so... I like to imagine that you are suddenly going to walk in radiant and well, and that...is why you haven't written. John too had disappeared into silence but not for so long as you have, and I *miss* you so!'

Living 'remote, always cut off' as she was during that time in Switzerland, apart from Elizabeth's visits and the presence of Murry and LM, Mansfield continued to write. As always her correspondence was voluminous, in spite of her illness and her commitment to her fiction. After her death Murry wrote '...there were moments when I wanted to write to everybody and cry aloud: Can't you understand that she hasn't strength to write? For she gave so much of herself to her chosen friends... that a single letter sometimes would wear her out. And I used to do my best to stop her from writing letters' (Murry to Millin:22 March 1923).

The Beauchamp family had always been great travellers. Arthur Beauchamp, grandfather of Elizabeth and Katherine, had been so well known for his restless globetrotting that there was a family joke that as he moved so often his hens, when they saw him coming towards them lay down on their backs obligingly stretching their legs in the air,

waiting for their feet to be tied together in preparation for the next move. Her father would have smiled when he received her letters from Switzerland. On 9 July 1922 she wrote to him 'I too wish I was taking a trip home with you. It would be a marvellous experience. The very look of a steamer trunk rouses the old war horse in me. I feel inclined to paw the ground and smell the briny. But perhaps in ten years time if I manage to keep above ground' (*Letters* 1928).

But that journey was no longer possible. Instead she travelled to Fontainebleau, explaining to Dorothy Brett, 'I am so glad to get your letter saying you would understand if I were to join the institute. I have joined it for a time. I have thought of writing about it. But it's useless to explain in any letter and I have so little time to write. So will you think of me as "en voyage". That's much the best idea, and it's the truest too' (Letters, Newberry). From there she wrote to her father on New Year's Eve 1922 'the old year is at his last gasp and in the very act of turning up his toes! I wish I could imagine we might meet in it, but perhaps in the one after I shall be fortunate enough to turn towards home...It is a dream I would love to realise...' (Letter to Harold Beauchamp, ATL)

I began with a letter from Katherine Mansfield to Sarah Gertrude Millin; after her death John Middleton Murry continued the correspondence. In April 1924 he wrote, 'I envy you your feeling of coming home. I've had it so seldom, and so often longed for it, and now it's impossible. Katherine *longed* for it, I think beyond all human happiness, and it was always denied her.' Perhaps, at the risk of sounding sentimental, we have this year finally brought her home.

Gillian Boddy is a tutor in New Zealand literature at Victoria University, and author of *Katherine Mansfield, the Woman and the Writer* (1988). This is a shortened version of the paper she delivered at the Mansfield Centennial Conference, Victoria University.

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1928. *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 2 Vols., ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1951. *Letters of Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable

'Juliet'. Notebook 1 (May-December) 1906. Alexander Turnbull Library q MS 1242.

Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

Letters to Elizabeth, Countess Russell (May Annette Beauchamp). British Library Add 50844.

Letters to Sydney and Violet Schiff, 1912-1922. British Library 52919.

Letter to Harold Beauchamp, 31 December 1922 (typed transcript). Alexander Turnbull Library MS papers 3996, Folder 3.

Letters of Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry to Sarah Gertrude Millin. University of Witwatersrand.

Elizabeth, Countess Russell (May Annette Beauchamp). Unpublished letters and diaries. Huntington Library.

Woolf, Virginia. 1977. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell. Hogarth Press.

Katherine Mansfield Reading other Women:

The Personality of the Text

Ruth Parkin-Gounelas

Katherine Mansfield and other women: the alignment does not on the face of it seem very promising. We know all about the backbiting and the disloyalties. And apart from a passing gesture of teenage support for the suffragette movement ('ex*cellent* for our sex — kicked policemen or not kicked policemen') (*Letters* I:47), Mansfield made no overt commitment either to female solidarity or to a tradition of women's writing — in the way, for example, that Virginia Woolf did. Literary models for her work have been looked for in a predominantly male tradition: Theocritus (Antony Alpers), Chekhov (Mansfield herself, and numerous others,[1] Orage (Claire Tomalin), and the Confessional tradition from Rousseau to Proust (Cherry Hankin).

When Mansfield insisted in later years that she was 'a writer first and a woman after' (see Alpers, 1982:323), she was expressing not so much the priorities of her life choices as the sense, shared by most women writers, of the unhappy fellowship of femaleness and artistic endeavour. It was all very well to espouse radical feminism as a young woman needing to shock parochial Wellington. But as a mere colonial and outsider in London, Mansfield had a vested interest in channelling her

energies into her acceptance as an artist first and foremost, without simultaneously taking on board the whole question of the eligibility of women in the pantheon of 'Art'. Her ridicule of a suffragette meeting to Garnet Trowell in 1908, within a month of arriving in London, is characteristic of the insecurity of marginalisation seeking applause for disloyalty (*Letters* I:60).

But if Mansfield denied women her waking allegiance, her dreams and day-dreams, narrated in letters and the *Journal*[2], allowed them a different kind of hearing. Of the women writers who figure in these narrations, each appears to have stimulated a different aspect of her conscience. George Sand evoked a language of vague mystical sisterhood: 'Had a strange dream. "She is one with the moonlight." George Sand — ma soeur' (*Journal* 1954:198).[3] With the Brontë sisters, she seems to have shared a sense of the rigour, isolation and bleakness of the female literary condition:

> I dreamed that I went to stay with the sisters Brontë who kept a boarding house called the Brontë Institut — *painfully* far from the railway station and all the way there through the heather. It was a sober place with linoleum on the stairs. Charlotte met me at the door & said 'Emily is lying down' ... (*Letters* I:178).

Finally, there was Colette, who conjured up one particular day-dream in the arch, fey mood which Mansfield fostered on certain occasions:

> I should like to be at a large circus tonight, in a box — very luxurious, you know, very warm, very gay with a smell of sawdust & elephants. A superb clown called Pistachio — white poneys, little blue monkeys drinking tea out of Chinese cups — I should like to be dressed beautifully, beautifully, down [to] the last fragment of my chemise, & I should like Colette Willy to be dressed just exactly like me and to be in the same box. And during the entr'actes while the orchestra blared Pot Pourri from The Toreador we would eat tiny little jujubes out of a much too big bag & tell each other all about our childhood (*Letters* 1:212-3).

To understand the detail here, we need to know that, in 1902, a play adapted by Colette's husband Willy from one of her schoolgirl novels, *Claudine à Paris*, appeared at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens with the young actress Polaire in the lead part. It was an enormous success and Willy, a publicist of the first order, took to appearing in public with Colette and Polaire dressed as identical twins.[4] To imagine herself as Colette's identical twin under such circumstances clearly made an appeal to Katherine Mansfield's theatricality, too.

Colette's attraction for Mansfield, however, was more than just a question of style. In 1915, at the very time references to Colette occur in the *Journal* and letters, Mansfield was reunited with her brother in London and was on the lookout for a discursive model to apply to the childhood experiences Chummie had helped her recall. Colette's novels provided just such a model. On the face of it, their respective childhoods seem to have had little in common aside from the rural setting: Colette had been pampered by an adoring mother in an old village in Burgundy while Mansfield suffered from a sense of parental neglect in new Wellington. But the identity came with what this childhood came to stand for in their adult consciousness. Like the French woman, Mansfield had chosen independence over security and left home at an early age for a large cultural capital. Both women, symbolically identical as Mansfield perceived it, were attempting the same kind of re-enactment of female childhood across adulthood. It is hardly surprising, then, that Mansfield chose Colette, at this vital point in the development of her writing, as her auditor and mentor.

The price each paid for independence is reflected in the sometimes nostalgic, compensatory tone of their backward looking. In this both writers were conforming to a turn-of-the-century tradition which sentimentalised childhood as redemptive.[5] Both, in particular, stressed the importance of the qualities of watchfulness and responsiveness to nature fostered in childhood. Colette wrote of learning to 'regarde' (a favourite word) from her mother, whom she immortalised as Sido and who was unable to pay a long-awaited visit to her daughter because she had to watch the pink cactus about to burst into rare bloom. This incident, described at the opening of *La Naissance du Jour* (1928), is a curious echo of the scene in 'Prelude', published ten years earlier, where both Kezia and her mother are similarly transfixed by the aloe cactus. The child, trained by the mother in creative observation, acquires the habit of formulating such verbal icons from nature's reserves and of resurrecting them to last through the deserts of urban adulthood. For Mansfield, as much as for Colette, the famous words from the latter's *Les Vrilles de la Vigne* could stand as a motto to most of what she wrote: 'I belong to a land that I have abandoned.'[6]

But Colette offered something new, as well, in the depiction of childhood — a post-lapsarian, incipiently sexual young girl, a wayward dreamer whom she called the 'innocent libertine'. Claudine, Minne and her type roam the fields in a state of drowsy intoxication, devouring cigarette papers and lime buds. Kezia moves with something of the same half-conscious stealth as she 'thieves' away from company in 'The Doll's House' or retreats, 'far to quickly and airily', from Beryl's dress-

ing-table at the end of 'Prelude'.

Mansfield's references to Colette began in November 1914 when she wrote in the *Journal*, 'Colette Willy is in my thoughts to-night.' Twelve days later she wrote: 'I've re-read *L'Entrave*. I suppose Colette is the only woman in France who does just this. I don't care a fig at present for anyone I know except her' (*Journal* 1954: 61-62).

The terms of personal acquaintance were to characterise her references to Colette throughout. I want to argue later that it was the particular nature of Mansfield's response as a reader, as it has been of other women readers, to construe the text not as an object, but as a manifestation of the subjectivity of the absent author. *L'Entrave* ('The Shackle' in English) had much for her to identify with, even though it was, like its companion piece *La Vagabonde*, a very different kind of book from those of the *Claudine* series. It engages with that more immediate pressure point in both authors' lives: their predicament as bourgeois women attempting to reconstruct themselves in relation to a new urban bohemia. Their frames of reference in this new environment were remarkably similar, in spite of the difference in nationality. Both had husbands who were literary editors, and both had experimented or would experiment with a variety of homosexual and heterosexual relationships — Colette rather more scandalously than Mansfield, although the young New Zealander is known to have performed at a lesbian club, as Colette did. In their attraction to emasculated men, they even shared a friend in Francis Carco, who turned out to be more loyal to Colette than to Mansfield. (His *Les Innocents* (1916), which contains a brutal assination of a female character thought to be based on Mansfield, was dedicated to Rachilde, a close friend of Colette's and an author Mansfield admired greatly, as we shall see.) In addition, both Mansfield and Colette performed in music-hall and brought to their writing a quality mentioned by Brigid Brophy in 1962 in relation to Mansfield: 'The obvious -- indeed, dazzling — talent...for multiple impersonation, through sketches whose form must be derived partly from her music-hall turns'.[7]

L'Entrave, like *La Vagabonde*, which Mansfield had almost certainly read, is about a woman conditioned only to love but driven by an irresistible need for solitude and independence. This need is constructed in terms of an actress's compulsive travel from one city to another in a permanent state of vagabondage, like several other 'femmes seules' around but apart from her. The phrase 'femme seule' is Colette's in *La Vagabonde* of 1911, but it was appropriated by Mansfield and assimilated so naturally as a frame for her own discourse, both fictional and non-fictional, that it has come to seem her own. Throughout 1915,

the phrase 'femme seule' (or, alternatively, 'dame seule') occurred frequently in Mansfield's letters, *Journal* and stories — most conspicuously, perhaps, in 'The Little Governess' of May of that year. At the same time Middleton Murry, too, played his part in endorsing Mansfield's self-image in Colettean terms — as in a letter of March 1915: 'You are...the eternal woman...(You is a type — the wonderful type from Aspasia to B.B. Colette Vagabonde, and you above all moderns)' (Murry, 1983:53-54).

However, this bombast was deflated by Mansfield on a later occasion when she wrote to him, from Cornwall, in May 1918:

> I feel extraordinarily better and stronger with no pain at all, but I cant write you the letters I should like to because my 'vagrant self' is uppermost — and you dont really know her or want to know her (*Letters* II: 188).

Her self-definition as 'femme seule', the vagrant-vagabond who could never be satisfied with the alternatives of cabaret artist and bourgeois wife between which she vacillated, was one which persisted for her till the end, but left Murry increasingly behind.

The nature of Colette's attraction for Katherine Mansfield had to do as much with the reader response the French woman aroused as it did with the two writers' similarity of preoccupation. Mansfield described this response in a letter of October 1916 to Mary Hutchinson: 'For me she is more real than any woman Ive every known' (*Letters* I:282). 'Knowing' as an intimacy of reader and text was more meaningful than anything that might occur in the contingencies of personal friendship.

When we talk about 'friendship' in Mansfield's life, we think of the precariousness of her contact with others as much as of the rapport, even with her most intimate companions Murry and LM. Much of this had undoubtedly to do with the strain of maintaining the fixity of the different persona that she presented to each acquaintance: from the 'brassy little shopgirl of literature' (Frank O'Connor)[8] or the 'foul-mouthed, virulent, brazen-faced broomstick of a creature' (Lytton Strachey),[9] to Murry's 'sensitive...frail...delicate' Dream Child (Murry, 1983:196). Her society's construction of behavioural models for women, or rather for women writers, offered a series of alternatives which bewildered Mansfield into an intensive search for a 'real' self, a postulate which others also tried to abstract from her. Virginia Woolf, for example, thought she could see beneath, as she put it, the 'hard composure' of Mansfield's facade.[10] Not surprisingly, Mansfield was sceptical of Polonius's advice to Laertes: 'To thine own self be true'. 'True to oneself!' she exclaimed in 1920, 'which self? Which of my many...?' But the multiplicity seemed deceitful to her as it did to others, and she

attempted to make a distinction between the 'personal', which she defined as that which is made and unmade as a result of 'all we acquire and all we shed', and the 'self', that which she believed is 'continuous and permanent' within each individual and which 'flowers' at the peak of our existence. It is in the light of this distinction that we need to understand what she called, in the same year, 'my philosophy — the defeat of the personal' (*Journal* 1954:205, 195).

The 'personalities' formed an imprisoning mesh of other people's constructions of her, and the more public the occasion, with an impersonator like Mansfield, the greater the temptation to perform. The private moment, writing to herself, suited her best, as it has done many women. Reading, too, invited a different kind of personal contract, for here, instead of being the object of another's construction, *she* was in the subject position.

In reading, Mansfield looked for signs of what she thought of as authorial presence, that shape or figure of a personality which she put together from the text, often in the attempt at self-recognition. Some authors made themselves accessible in this respect, others did not. Virginia Woolf, for example, was a closed book for Mansfield and seemed to have no textual personality. This was because, in Mansfield's words, she was not 'of' her subject (unlike Mansfield who felt she could 'become' a duck, or an apple), but rather above it, like a bird who hovers, dips and skims from on high (*Letters* II:333-34). Rachilde, on the other hand, was a 'fascinating creature' — or at least her textual presence was, for of course Mansfield never met this woman known in France as the 'Queen of the Decadents'. But she read her, through her own preoccupations, into the introspective, erotic narrative of *L'Heure Sexuelle* (1898), and would have agreed with Maurice Barrès, another of Rachilde's admirers, that 'In all her work...Rachilde does little but write the self'.[11] Other writers, too, had authentic selves as well as made up personalities, and in her attempt to distinguish the one from the other, Mansfield privileged reading as an act of the most personal intimacy. The experience of reading a poem by Emily Brontë called 'I know not how it falls on me' illustrates the effect of the process on her. The poem, with two personal pronouns in the first line, seemed to invite a particular kind of closeness. She wrote:

> The first line — why is it so moving? And then the exquisite simplicity of 'Forgive me'...I think the Beauty of it is contained in one's certainty that it is not Emily disguised — who writes — it is Emily. Nowadays one of the chief reasons for ones dissatisfaction with modern poetry is one can't be sure that it really does belong to the man who

> writes it. It *is* so tiring — isn't it — never to leave the Masked Ball — never — never — (*Letters* II:334).

She could not be sure that a poem of her day really belonged to the man who wrote it; the word 'man' here, I think, needs to be read in gender-specific terms. Mansfield was finding her literary voice at the very time that Modernist poets — an all-male battalion headed by Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, accompanied by novelists like Joyce and Lawrence — were formulating poetics based on what Maud Ellmann, in a recent book on the subject, calls 'scriptive self-occlusion.[12] While Mansfield wanted to *leave* the Masked Ball, her male contemporaries were at the height of the revels. Yeats, following Oscar Wilde, had made his well-known statement ten years before that 'all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self...all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself'.[13] Related statements by his contemporaries are equally well known: Eliot in 1919, the same year as Mansfield's letter about the Brontë poem: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of an emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'; or, 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates'.[14] Then there was Stephen Dedalus, the refined, impersonalised mask of his creator, James Joyce: 'the personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak'.[15]

Mansfield, as much as these men, was a product of the 1890s, a decade of extravagant poseurs such as Lionel Johnson and Aubrey Beardsley, who spent a lifetime trying on different masks. But while her stint as a Wildean impersonator may have suited her in her late teens and early twenties, the process of multiple self-invention, of fabricating images to fit the occasion, became an increasing strain.[16] Privately (and Mansfield became an increasingly private person after 1916) the dissatisfaction with 'personalities' and the obsession with 'selfhood' grew, accompanied by a growing interest in models of self-inscription in the works of other writers, particularly women.

Is there, then, any connection between Mansfield's interest in detecting methods of self-inscription in the work of others, and her own fiction, which is in one sense perversely 'unknowable', dispensing as it does with a narrative voice and exploiting a series of evasions of a stable subject position? Her ability to assume the voice of a wide range of characters in a series of gliding shifts, in stories such as 'At the Bay', is usually recognised as her most outstanding contribution to the short story, even if it gave Orage occasion to charge her with 'promiscuity'.[17]

Such a writer would seem to have little need to invest in a memorable textual presence. The voice of the *Journal* is intensely familiar, exhorting itself to authenticity at the very moment that it watches itself perform. Is it necessary to carry our apprehension of Mansfield the rigorous self-analyst over from the *Journal* and letters into the stories, in order to respond to something other than a ventriloquistic mastery in her fiction?

In some cases I think it is. The *Journal* and letters are so enormously instructive because they detail an effort, concentrated to breaking point towards the end, expended on groping for discursive forms true to her experience as a woman writer. This required, as they show, an iron-willed resistance to the voices she acquired with such facility from a predominantly masculine literary discourse, voices she could succumb to with alarming ease in the stories. She soon learned that there were no rewards to be gained from the mode of fulminatory resistance learned from Marie Bashkirtseff in her youth and practised in the *Journal* ('Damn my family!') (*Journal* 1954:21). To a certain extent Mansfield never did find a story mode to match her best letters of the 'look here' kind, written to LM in particular, or the angry—not the conciliatory—ones to Murry.

Recent feminist critics, following Julia Kristeva, have written about the discourse of the hysteric as characteristic of a great deal of women's writing. By this they mean a simultaneous refusal of, yet submission to, femininity as it is constructed under patriarchy, woman's enactment of herself as a lesser male.[18] Mansfield's writing illustrates this process in several of its forms. The *German Pension* stories, on one level, represent a major attempt to conform to rigourous masculine standards. Those which are in the first person are narrated by a voice that we initially feel tempted to construct as 'Katherine'. (She does, after all, call herself this in 'Being a Truthful Adventure', a story not actually in the *Pension* volume but close to it in time and manner.) This 'Katherine', however, is probably the least accessible of all her guises in that it refuses allegiance to anything but its own mocking gibes. The narrator is, as Pamela Dunbar says*, problematically evasive rather than simply anonymous. She constructs what we think will be the world of her observation, only to raze it to the ground with a cavalier wave of the hand, for example in asides like the following from *Epilogue II: Violet:* 'I thought how true it was that the world was a delightful place if it were not for the people' (*Stories* 1984:143). Mansfield had been a quick pupil in the Oragean school and could outdo the master himself in what Claire Tomalin details as the Oragean style: 'the sharp observation, the

*See her article in this issue.

puncturing aside...understatement, and an eye for absurdity' (Tomalin, 1987:81). And yet there is something else in these stories which makes them subversive of their own practices, and it is this factor of Mansfield's writing which strikes me as particularly interesting. She may well, as one character says at the beginning of *Violet*, have 'put [the] collective foot down upon the female attempt to embroider everything'. But the first-person narrator's iconoclastic astringency turns out to be not quite as victorious over her preconceptions of female sentiment and embellishment as she would have us believe. The story in fact performs a subtle act of re-alignment whereby Violet's naive sentimentality and ability to 'sympathise' serve to expose the narrative detachment, rather than vice versa.

Another version of the hysteric comes in the reviews written for *The Athenaeum* in 1919-20. Like the *New Age* c ontracts, this writing made a particularly public demand on her, and Mansfield responded accordingly. What resulted was a series of attempts at an experienced, armchair manner of the sort done well by Virginia Woolf, who added her own inflextions to the acquired paternal voice of Leslie Stephen, editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Mansfield was less adapted to the Olympian manner, and the linguistic features register the discomfort. There are evasions and euphemisms. This is how she expresses her dissatisfaction with two books, Jane Mander's *The Story of a New Zealand River* and Margaret Symonds' *A Child of the Alps*, for what she considered their faint-heartedness: 'What is extremely impressive to the novel reviewer is the modesty of the writers — their diffidence in declaring themselves what they are' (*Novels and Novelists* 1930:220).

Given that she is attacking a failure in personal accountability, as the rest of the review makes clear, the use of the word 'impressive' here is positively disingenuous. Then, the sheltering reference to herself as 'the novel reviewer' (more common is the bland, avuncular 'we'), as well as the use of the euphemism 'modesty' when she clearly means 'vapidity', are illustrative of the very faults she finds in her reviewees. In another review, this time of a novel by the woman writer W. Bryher, she attacks, from an elevated height, the writer's 'female' disposition. But in so doing, we notice, she again becomes an illicit accomplice with her victim:

> What could be more 'female' than her passion for rummaging in, tumbling over, eyeing this great basket of coloured words? That she can find no use for them; that, lovely as they are, she has nothing to pin them on to, nothing to deck out in them; that *la bonne Littérature*, in fine, has not bid her bind her hair, is no great marvel. She has been to a feast of

> languages ever since she was old enough to beat a spoon on the table (*Novels and Novelists* 1930:231-32).

If Bryher's basket of words is full, it can be no more so than Mansfield's, which has at least five mixed metaphors into the bargain. If it were not for the fact that such extended metaphors are one of Mansfield's favourite devices throughout the reviews, we might be tempted to read ironically this exploitation of the very devices she would abjure. The contorted syntax and repeated double negatives, the verbosity and the royal 'we' all add up to an evasiveness barely comparable to the spareness, mobility and directness of the more private voice. Virginia Woolf thought that Mansfield's novel reviews showed that she was not interested in novels (Murry, 1983:221). She was, but never succeeded in finding a public discourse to animate this interest.

In an article on his compatriot written for the *New Zealand Listener* forty years ago, 'The Feminine Tradition', Frank Sargeson complained that Mansfield's writing was limited because she lived in a 'state of suspension' where 'You have to depend on yourself too much — and what you find *in* yourself.[19] Today a feminist, post-structuralist age invites us to read her stories as being about what she could *not* find in herself because of all that she was acquiring and all that she was shedding, to use her own words. The 'feminine' acquisitions were the most tenacious and long-lived of all. They were everything that a woman writer was as condescended to for being as she was condemned for not being: bright, effusive, self-deprecatory, petulant, wheedling, infantile. Many readers from Mansfield's time to the 1960s heard this voice in the stories and called it 'cheap', as did Virginia Woolf at one stage, admitting later that she had been too deafened by jealousy to hear anything else (see Tomalin 1988:204). We read Mansfield differently now because we can hear the counterpoint to this voice, the driving intellect that made her her own most ruthless critic in her collusion with femininity. Her writing is thus a brilliant enactment yet simultaneous deconstruction of the feminine code of practice.

The process is most noticeable in the correspondence with Murry, who, as I have said, was the last to want to know her vagrant solitary self. In a letter to him in late 1920, she wrote:

> My [mental] landscape is terribly exciting at present. I never knew it contained such features or such fauna (they are animals various, aren't they?). But I do want a gentleman prepared to pay his own exes, to join me in my expedition. Oh, won't YOU come? No one else will do. But when you do it's a bit sickening — all my wild beasts get a bit funny-looking — they don't look such serious monsters

any more. Instead of lions and tigers it's apt to turn into an affair of:

> 'The Turkey ran pas' with a flaf in his mas'
> An' cried out: "What's the mattah?"'

Not that I think for one minute that you don't treat me au GRAND serieux or would dare to question my intelligence, of course not. All the same — there you are — Alone, I'm no end of a fillaseafer but once you join me in the middle of my seriousness — my deadly seriousness — I see the piece of pink wool I have put in your hair (and that you don't know is there).

Queer, isn't it? Now explain that for me.[20]

The games are apparent, the piece reads like a model for the feminine style as analysed by linguists such as Robin Lakoff: the insecurity of the tag questions and repeated emphases, the juvenile vocabulary ('a bit sickening', 'a bit funny-looking', 'queer') alternating with the slightly pretentious (mental landscapes and fauna and French phrases).[21] And yet she makes her complaint against Murry's trivialisation of her with such gaiety and grace that she wins a very feminine forgiveness for the seriousness of her charge, at the same time as she apes his expectations of her.

A hypothetical Murry seems to be the assumed auditor of a number of the stories. Like her cousin Elizabeth Von Arnim, whose shadow as a successful literary Antipodean, a female one at that, hung over Mansfield for much of her life, she found it easy at times to earn praise for a style described as feminine for its highly-strung sensitivity and animation. Both Katherine and Elizabeth would write of objects like books or tables looking as if they might begin dancing.[22] When Mansfield wrote to her cousin at the end of her life that most of her past work seemed to her to be 'little stories like birds bred in cages' — she may have had in mind the stories recently turned out to pay heavy medical bills — she was acknowledging her (and perhaps also Elizabeth's) complicity in the breeding of the feminine consciousness.[23] Ellen Moers has analysed the prevalence of bird imagery in women's writing. The image is here being turned against itself in a conscious gesture of self-exposure.

If the process of feminisation is accentuated by the inevitable patriarchal pressures of the public situation, what happens when women are alone, or in solely female company? This question lies behind a number of Mansfield's stories. Much of the energy of her women characters is expended on seeking solitude, even if this solitude, when found, is as torturous, or more so, than its alternative. They are like Linda Burnell

in 'Prelude' who constantly dreams of escape — driving away from everybody in a small buggy 'and not even waving', or being rowed faster and faster away in the thorny aloe ship, warding off pursuers. Or they are the 'femmes seules', feeling potential violation, gusts of wind tugging threateningly at their hats and skirts. Or they are like Jinnie Salesby in 'The Man Without a Temperament', who is characterised by a querulous excitability and an enforced dependence, and for whom there is little left but to attempt to penetrate the reserve of her husband. With the odd exception such as Reggie in 'Mr and Mrs Dove' or Dick Harmon in 'Je Ne Parle Pas Francais', the men exude confidence — confidence in their bodies (like Stanley Burnell), in their talents (like Reginald Peacock), in their sexual prowess (like Herr Brechenmacher), or in their power (like the Late Colonel, or the boss in 'The Fly'). Against this, the women suffer from their nerves, like the woman in 'The Escape', or retreat to their chaises longues to become, like Mrs Trout in *The Aloe*, 'a perfect martyr to headaches'. These 'femmes seules' have far less nerve than Colette's, and are as much preyed upon by their imaginative projection of fearful possibilities as by any experienced threat.

In the moments when women are together with women in Mansfield's stories, the text often quietens to a brief moment of composure as reserves are lowered. There are the scenes with Con and Jug in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', the Fairfield women sewing in *The Aloe*, Bertha and Pearl Fulton at the pear tree in 'Bliss', or, most memorably, the relief of the women in the Burnell household after Stanley's departure in 'At the Bay'. The story most conspicuously 'female' is 'Prelude', which builds the female life cycle, from youth to old age, into its very structure. The various generations of Fairfield women are presented in subtle nuances of inter-relatedness, whereby each reflects backwards and forwards upon the others in echo. In the earlier story 'A Birthday', the grandmother had been from the paternal side. This time, Mansfield chose a direct female line.

The echoes may be a question of shared preoccupation. For example, both Kezia and Linda fear the thrusting forces in the environment around them, whether it be the dogs, parrots or camels that rush in Kezia's imagination, 'their heads swell[ing] e-enormous', or the very real Stanley who jumps up and barks at Linda, who 'had always hated things that rush at her, from a child'. Both mother and daughter, too, are haunted by the 'coming alive of things', things which seem to demand something of them, or call for submission. Kezia , alone in the empty house, calls them 'IT'; for Linda they are 'THEM'. Dream or day-dream preoccupations are also shared by the sisters Beryl and Linda, for all their waking differences. They dream of birds, and of escape, of 'waiting

for someone to come who just did not come, watching for something to happen that just did not happen'. The only form of escape available to Beryl's imagination is that of ravishment by a dark lover. Together, Linda and Beryl embody the fate of women of their class: passive, unfulfilled, temperamental, idle.

Just as there are projections backwards, Kezia reacting as Linda had done as a child, so there are conjectural leaps forward. At the end of 'Prelude', after Beryl has powdered her nose and gone down to meet a male visitor, Kezia takes her place at the dressing-table to play with the make-up, offering herself up as a potential victim of feminisation. Beryl's guilty acquiescence in the process is a major concern of the story. Kezia, with intuitive insight into this acquiescence and the inevitability of her own future complicity, creeps guiltily away. Similarly, Linda's future as Fairfield grandmother is foretold in the penultimate scene with her mother, when all the tensions and frustrations of her bourgeois life-style as wife and mother are resolved into a version of Mrs Fairfield's resignation and serenity, with yet more children and proliferating gardens.

This identity among the women, from one generation to another, extends also to a telepathic communication, as when Linda, in mock indifference to her children's welfare, speculates that 'Kezia has been tossed by a bull hours ago' when Kezia *has*, in fact, just had a confrontation with a bull. Or, one step further, the text may exploit an ambiguity of the pronoun 'she', referrable to any one of the women between whose consciousness it is constantly fluctuating. An example of this occurs when the narrative shifts from Linda, still in bed, to Kezia, playing outdoors with her sisters:

> 'Where are you going to, Kezia?' asked Isabel, who longed to find some light and menial duty that Kezia might perform and so be roped in under her government.
>
> 'Oh, just away,' said Kezia...
>
> Then she did not hear them any more. What a glare there was in the room. She hated blinds pulled up to the top...

Is the 'she' at the end Linda, not hearing the three girls any more, or Kezia, not hearing her sisters as she wanders off? This is clarified only by the next sentence.

All four women are united under the moon, when the aggression of the daytime, patriarchal activities, symbolised by the daytime aloe, that 'fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem' which cuts blindly into the air, is replaced by the night-time aloe, cool and watery, promising escape. Linda is 'discovered' by the moon, the same moon,

we are told, 'that Lottie and Kezia had seen from the storeman's wagon'. Under its influence, Linda speaks to her mother 'with the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave'.

Recent work in object relations theory by feminists such as Nancy Chodorow and Jane Flax has suggested that there may be important socio-psychological reasons why women are less liable than men to set up a firm distinction between subject and object, self and other, and why identification or merging with others may be an early-implanted female characteristic. As long as women continue to 'mother', to be the primary caretakers of infants, they argue, baby boys will be conditioned to differentiate from this primary object in order to establish separate ego boundaries, while girls will be free of this necessity. Mansfield seems, fleetingly, to capture such moments of female relatedness and to grope towards the kind of specifically female discourse which feminists such as Hèléne Cixous have recently celebrated (Cixous refers, incidentally, to Colette's writing as a prominent twentieth-century example of the inscription of the female).[24]

The essence, however, is the ephemerality of such moments in Mansfield's writing. Mrs Fairfield's mind wanders away from her daughter to the traditionally feminine activity of jam making; Pearl Fulton switches from female ally to rival over the man; Con creeps away from Jug to lie in lonely communion with the full moon; the Fairfield women quarrel. Mansfield's writing seems to me to be important as an inscription not of the female, but of its corruptibility, and of the exploitation of *feminine* discourse as defensive option.

But whereas writers like George Eliot succumbed with apparent ease to a version of the female hysteric, as Elizabeth Von Arnim did to a feminine discourse, Mansfield's submission, like Colette's, was modernist in its self-consciousness. Her work offers an extraordinary record of the encoding of both submission and resistance to the feminine by a woman as exceptional as mimic as she was discerning as critic of this mimicry. It is for this reason, I think, that her writing is as 'knowable' (in her sense) today as it has ever been.

Ruth Parkin-Gounelas is a New Zealander who teaches English at the University of Thessalonika.

Notes

1. Mansfield referred to herself, in a doggerel verse on the fly leaf of a volume of Chekhov's stories, as 'the English Anton T.'. Cited in Boddy, 1988:174.
2. The compilation of extracts from scrapbooks, diaries, notebooks and fragments which John Middleton Murry published as Mansfield's *Journal*.
3. Mansfield seems to have regarded Sand as a type of the endurance of female creativity - see a letter of May 1918 (*Letters* I:176) where she tells Murry that a young doctor 'made me feel like an old writing woman - a sort of old George Sand tossed up by the tide last night'.
4. Margaret Crosland, *Colette: The Difficulty of Loving*, Laurel, 1975:77-78.
5. For an interesting discussion of turn-of-the-century treatments of childhood, see Marcia Jacobson's analysis of *What Maisie Knew* in *Henry James and the Mass Market*, Alabama, 1983, especially pp. 100-108.
6. Cited in Margaret Davies, *Colette*, Oliver & Boyd, 1961:1.
7. Brigid Brophy, *Don't Never Forget: Collected Views and Reviews*, Jonathan Cape, 1967:257.
8. Cited in C.K. Stead, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Art of "Fiction"', *New Review* IV, 42, September 1977:29.
9. Cited by Margaret Drabble in 'The New Woman of the Twenties: Fifty Years On', *Harpers and Queen*, June 1973:135.
10. Entry for April 1919, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* Vol. I, 1915-19, ed. A.O. Bell, Hogarth Press, 1977:265.
11. M. Barres, Introduction to *Monsieur Venus* (first published 1884), Flammarion, 1977:13 (my translation).
12. Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*, Harvester, 1987:ix.
13. Cited in Richard Ellman, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (first published 1949), Faber & Faber, 1973:177.
14. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *Selected Essays*, Faber & Faber, 1976:21, 18.
15. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (first published 1916), Penguin Books, 1974:214.
16. For a discussion of Wilde's influence on Mansfield from 1906, see Vincent O'Sullivan, 'The Magnetic Chain: Notes and Approaches to K.M.', *Landfall* 114, June 1975:95-131.
17. Orage wrote of her 'promiscuity of reflection, taste, judgement, character and intelligence' in 'A Fourth Tale for Men Only', Part III, 'H.H. Congreve' (A.R. Orage), *The New Age*, XI, 3, 16 May 1912:62.
18. See in particular Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution*, Virago, 1982.
19. Frank Sargeson, 'The Feminine Tradition: A Talk about Katherine Mansfield', *NZ Listener*, 6 August 1948:10-12.
20. *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry 1913-1922*, ed. J.M. Murry, Alfred A. Knopf, 1951:590.
21. Robin Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place*, Harper & Row, 1975.
22. See, e.g., *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, Macmillan, 1904:73-74, and the end of the unfinished story 'Father and the Girls'.

23. *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J.M. Murry, Vol. II, Constable, 1928:268.
24. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, Harvester, 1980:249 (note).

References

Mansfield, Katherine. 1930. *Novels and Novelists*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1954. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1982. *The Aloe: with Prelude*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan. Port Nicholson Press.

_____ 1984. *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Antony Alpers. Oxford University Press.

_____ 1984. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Vol. I: 1903-1917*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott. Clarendon Press

_____ 1987. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Vol. II: 1918-1919*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott. Clarendon Press.

Alpers, Antony. 1982. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (first published 1980). Oxford University Press.

Boddy, Gillian. 1988. *Katherine Mansfield, The Woman and the Writer*. Penguin Books.

Murry, J.M. 1983. *The Letters of John Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield*, ed. C.A. Hankin. Hutchinson Group.

Tomalin, Claire. 1987. *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*. Viking.

Carousing in the Carcase of Katherine Mansfield

Sara L. Knox

Strangers are an endangered species

In Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst
cocktails are served the scholars
gather in celebration
their pious or clinical legends festoon the walls like imitations
of period patterns

(...and, as I feared, my 'life' was made a victim)

The remnants pawed the relics
the cult assembled in the bedroom

and you whose teeth were set on edge by churches
resist your shrine
escape
are found
nowhere
unless in words (your own)
Adrienne Rich[1]

In a letter of 21 November 1921 Mansfield wrote '...you know...I shall not be "fashionable" long. They will find me out; they will be disgusted; they will shiver in dismay...' (*Letters* 1928:156-7). However, her swift

acceptance into the literary canon precluded her from becoming just fashionable, and thus from becoming unfashionable in her turn. Her writing has been regarded as 'influential' — credited with extending the parameters of modern prose (along with Stein, Woolf and Joyce); her work is also seen as the maturation of the short story as a serious genre.

Yet the woman writer who saw herself 'unfashionably' deriving enjoyment from '...sitting on doorsteps, and talking to the old woman who brings quinces...and...to captains of shabby little steamers...' (*Letters* 1928:156-7) has become in 1988 more than just a fit subject for MA and PhD theses in English departments world-wide, and the inspiration for Wellington City Council scenic bus tours. She has become an industry.

The centennial is not a celebration but a business, one primarily interested in its providential profit margins — and with an agenda resting upon the country's need for a healthy tourist industry, a burgeoning book trade and a place by proxy in the western literary tradition. Mansfield's life, and, particularly, her work, have fallen victim to the exigencies of broad-based market appeal. A successful product needs to be reproducible — it must thus undergo at least a level of standardisation. Therefore those who celebrate the centenary have defined a range of new but standard products — marketable Mansfields.

There is something unsettling about the photographs of famous people, now dead; a familiarity about them. Their eyes, even from amongst a crowd, or fixed upon someone with whom they are deep in conversation, peer out from the picture — knowing, almost afraid. Something makes that face, even averted, stand out. In her photographs Mansfield seems aware of the curious and critical gaze under which she has so mutely rested, unable to resist the changes it has wreaked upon her. But the appearance resides within the mind of the viewer. The overexposure of an image can alter what seems to be fixed — the meaning of the image changes with its repetition. Thus John F. Kennedy's last wave from the Dallas motorcade — his death replayed before us — has detached from an ordinary, transient life, an extraordinary — and now not transitory — death.

Thus the recorded image of Katherine Mansfield becomes an icon, rather than a simple graphic.

As a twentieth century woman writer, Mansfield, more than Virginia Woolf or even Sylvia Plath, has suffered the reductive reading of her work through continual reference to her life. Thus, the lines from Shakespeare she recorded in her journal:

> When you have spoken it, 'tis dead
> and I am the grave of it
> (*Journal* 1984:273)

quite aptly lament the dimunition of her work. Biography became the mire in which the words she so carefully crafted submerged and drowned.

Biography attempts to describe the individual in the context of their environment and society. It fixes them in a certain space and time. Thus, when a writer's work is read through the sometimes distorting lens of biography, its power, its fluidity, can be severely reduced. A life proceeds from birth to death, not necessarily orderly, but conforming to the laws of simple chronology — befores and afters and then agains. Literature, however, is not so bound. Literature and language are kinetic. Reductive or mechanistic reading can render the question into rhetoric, depowering it.

Susan Gubar, in her article 'The blank page' (Gubar, 1981) refers to the idea of the woman writer as text — object rather than speaking subject. She becomes the vacant space upon which is projected the chimera of myth — the discourses of dominant, phallocentric culture. This concept gains new layers of meaning in the case of Katherine Mansfield. Her work, brought down to fit the limits of a described life (not to be confused with a life actually lived), is then further conscribed by the reader's preoccupation with the writer's physical state — the cell of a body made abject by illness and mis-use.

Mansfield's death at age 34 from tuberculosis has become, rather simplistically, the prime signifier for her life and work. Tuberculosis, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was seen to be an honourable and somehow intellectually respectable way to die. In later times the myth of escape which consumption represented was replaced by that of mental illness (Sontag, 1983). The romanticisation of the disease had extra dimensions for the woman consumptive: it was a disease with distinct physical manifestations that imparted to the woman a fatal attractiveness. The combination of pallor, high fever, weight loss and long bursts of what Sontag terms 'paroxysmic enlightenment' affirmed already potent feminine and artistic archetypes.

Indicative of the objectification of the woman artist are those photographs of Mansfield most frequently seen. They are the ones taken in her years of severe physical decline — after 1919. She lost weight steadily over these years. The child whose mother had remarked, displeased, upon her return to New Zealand that she looked as fat as ever, had wasted into a petite and child-like figure. It is this 'delicate, intense gazed woman' that a succession of biographers, mainly men, have iconified.

The Cult of Saint Katherine is well described by the story of her disinterment in 1929. It had come to Harold Beauchamp's attention that

his son-in-law, in a moment of vagueness, had forgotten to pay for Katherine's burial. Thus her body had been shifted just after the service — once the omission had come to light — to a pauper's grave. Six years later, when Beauchamp provided for her reinterment, the sexton, Madam Boutemps, not being able to resist a glance at the famous face, opened the coffin and reported that 'death had preserved her in the state that it had carried her off', prosaically adding 'raise the lid so that Katherine may breathe'.

The myth assiduously cultivated by John Middleton Murry of Katherine's spirituality (Moore, 1980:2-6) had found a fertile ground in the French imagination — well trained as it was by a Catholic patriarchy's habit of translating heroine into martyr, and woman into icon, in order to divest her of any suggestion of temporal power.

The cult of Katherine Mansfield flourishing in France in 1929 still retains its influence today, with surprisingly little alteration to its tenets (Mortelier, 1969). Neither does the obverse of the cult provide it with any criticism, conforming instead to dualistic notions of woman as saint or whore. The Saint figure of Katherine Mansfield is spiritual-romantic, woman-child personified. The obverse casts her as manipulative femme-fatale. The first infantilises her and the second makes her corruptly passive, her life and work a lie; the extension of an act; the will of a woman out to charm the world. Both views are prescriptive; by determining the figure of the woman they also dictate the terms by which her writing must be read.

Importantly, it must be acknowledged that both stereotypes are strongly heterosexist — placing the emphasis on Mansfield's attention to her relationships with men. The 'saint' figure portrays the cultivation of a passion by proxy, through the letters which provided her the distance in which to purify her love for Middleton Murry — extracting the carnal whilst leaving the romance intact. This further implied in Mansfield a child-like tenacity that enabled her to return, loyally, to the idea of love, no matter what difficulties it presented in fact. There is little room within this mythic characterisation for a second, female-centred relationship; Ida Baker, LM, takes up her place in it simply as old friend and nursemaid. The oppositional stereotype of the 'Pandora's box' femme-fatale assigns different roles again to Murry and LM — as loyal unfortunates who, along with others, were continually played off against one another by a calculating and selfish Mansfield.

Neither of these assigned stereotypes fairly fits the woman to whom Mansfield wrote in 1922 that she thought it her duty to spend 6 months of every years with [Jack]' and the next six 'ought to be fearfully nice...foreign months together.. you and I...' She then attempted both to

admit and to disclaim selfish motives, saying 'I'm only talking in the dark — trying to keep you — yes, I will own to that, and trying to make things easy, happy, good, delightful. For we must be happy. No failures. No makeshifts. Blissful happiness. Anything else is somehow disgusting' (unpublished letter, KM to LM, 15 March 1922, Alexander Turnbull Library MS Papers 3991:2). Certainly Mansfield had no shortage of cruel things to say about LM (or Middleton Murry, for that matter) but that is more or less irrelevant when weighing the intensity of their relationship. How many of us do not grow to loathe what we intimately know and rely upon, despising vulnerability?

However, caution against a heterosexist reading of Mansfield's work is quite a separate thing from trying to 'reclaim' her as a lesbian writer. Certainly proof of her passionate attachment to women (whether implicitly or explicitly sexual) can be produced — particularly prior to 1909 — and her relationship with LM was inarguably significant. However, Mansfield's writing also clearly exhibits an attraction to men. To attach the description 'lesbian' to Mansfield would be both ahistorical and, beyond functioning as a challenge to the conservative literary canon, hardly useful. It is important to bear in mind that Mansfield lived in a world where the western cultural crisis of the first world war and the impact of Freudian psychoanalytic thought had not yet eroded the nineteenth century social code in which intimate relationships between women were commonplace. These relationships were quite ordinarily sustained from adolescence, irrespective of marriage, up to death. 'Lesbianism' certainly existed then (as it has throughout human history, in a diversity of cultures) but the 'female world of love and ritual', as Caroll Smith-Rosenberg (1985:53ff) calls it, consisted of a quite different complexity of feeling and convention from that suggested by the modern meaning of 'lesbian'.

Attention to the controversial elements of the Mansfield debate is, however, of definite relevance — particularly in the years of her centennial, with its conservatism crucial to the success of the venture as 'good business'. Under these conditions it is of particular importance that a feminist critique be made both of Mansfield's work and the industry that plunders it.

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned that the centennial provided certain necessities for the maintenance of the dominant culture's tenuous pride — a boost to tourism (the feeling that there is someone out there watching) and, crucially, a representative in the prestigious annals of English literary history. The will to preserve prevails, in the search for a sense of culture and for material profit.

For this we preserve or signpost the houses in which she lived (one

which she left at age four, a damp house in the shadow of the hills), tag the photographs, and record the oral histories of those who knew her well but refuse to talk, growing tired of the same questions; and those who knew her less but say more, wanting to be remembered themselves. An actor's voice repeating in my head places the emphasis upon another's words to disclose a facile sentimentality, an edge of hysteria, the numb feminine particular in a world of encompassing male generality.

Mansfield's voice is lost but her words return unsatisfied, their meaning increasingly difficult to discern beneath the detritus of a greedy and insecure culture's hoarding of all these houses, memories, photographs...

The centennial, whether commemorating the achievement of an individual or an event, functions — like all forms of memory – selectively. It is the expression of a 'cultural theory' — one that dictates what is retained in the cultural consciousness — providing the protocol for its progress into the future. The cultural theory of which the centennial is expressive constructs both past and present. It is the imposition upon a diverse society of those values and aspects of history held dear by that society's ruling classes. It disguises conflict within a nation's history by positing a falsely linear progress from one period to another, no matter what tears in the social fabric time, dissent and radical change may have made. What is more, this means of inventing tradition carries an inherent facility to forget its own genesis. Thus it should not be surprising that the French, who so loudly proclaim the sanctity of their revolutionary tradition with Bastille Day, have been doing so only since 1880 (Terdiman, 1985).

Centennials celebrate only what is useful to a regime and its identity in progress. They suggest the monolithic — that which denies diversity; that which will brook no variant interpretation of the events commemorated. These ideas also apply to the centennial of individuals — the social function remains the same, the only difference being that it is the cultural myths they or their work embody that the centennial honours.

The Katherine Mansfield centennial, then, offers a unique means by which to affirm potent myths and loyalties in a culture still fondly clinging to the breast of Mother England. Is it of such great significance that this woman writer was born in New Zealand? There are more appropriate concepts with which we, in a changing world, might identify ourselves. The re-reading of Katherine Mansfield should concentrate upon revealing the work beneath the shroud of biography that obscures it. Such a re-evaluation implies a consciousness of the tyrannies a woman writer undergoes in a world intent on retaining her

in controllable flesh (even after death).

Angela Carter, in her review of Anthony Alpers' biography *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (1980)concluded that

> ...one of the great traps for the woman writer is the desire to be loved for oneself as well as admired for one's work, to be a beautiful Person as well as a Great Artist... (Carter 1982:156).

And, indeed, Katherine Mansfield was expected to be that Beautiful Person in a variety of ways to a variety of people. This pressure, internalised, resulted in a splitting of identity into discrete versions, each of which could meet the expectant and powerful gaze of the watching other on equitable terms. The further result of this was a sense of 'inauthenticity'. Mansfield wrote in 1922:

> You see, if I were allowed one single cry to God, that cry would be: I want to be REAL. Until I am I don't see why I shouldn't be at the mercy of old Eve in her various manifestations for ever ... At this present moment all I know really, really, is that though one thing after another has been taken from me, I am not annihilated, and that I hope — more than hope — believe.... (*Letters* 1928:156-157).

She defines herself through subtractions, absence — an absence she seeks to redeem by finding a 'real' self, a new self, one not victim to Eve 'in her various manifestations'. But how can she find this self in a world that imposes the parameters of selfhood, relegating woman to the margin of identity, passive object rather than active subject: L'Etrangère?

These are important points to bear in mind when weighing the contradictory tones of Mansfield's writing. Sentimentality was as much a defence or diversionary tactic as it was a weakness for Edwardian convention. Revolutionary writing, or writing that is critical of society and gender, has often been disguised, couched within conventional forms. Thus Emily Dickinson's advice 'Tell all the truth but tell it slant' finds an appropriate echo in Mansfield's '...the plain truth, as only a liar can tell it' (*Journal* 1984:481).

For what is the truth in a world that determines truth by dictating the terms by which that very truth must be measured? 'Truth' in this context becomes the world as those who own it describe it — a phallocentric construct named as reality, of which the obverse, the negative, Eve embodying the lie, is woman.

Sarah Knox writes poetry and is doing a B.A. (Hons) in History at Victoria University of Wellington. She was co-curator of the 1988 exhibition on Mansfield, 'Hearts and Minds', at the National Library, Wellington.

Note:

1. Adrienne Rich , *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far* Norton, 1981, p.42.

References

Mansfield, Katherine,.1928. *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* Vol. II, ed. J.M. Murry. Constable.

_____ 1984. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield,* ed. J.M. Murry (first published 1954). Hutchinson.

_____ 1984. *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield,* ed. Antony Alpers. Oxford University Press.

Carter, Angela. 1982. *Nothing Sacred.* Virago

Gubar, Susan. 1981. 'The Blank Page'. *Critical Inquiry* 8, Winter.

Moore, James. 1980. *Gurdjieff and Mansfield.* Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mortelier, Christiane. 1969. 'The Genesis and Development of the Katherine Mansfield Legend in France'. *Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association Congress,* Perth 1969.

Smith-Rosenberg, Caroll. 1985. *Disorderly Conduct.* Oxford University Press.

Sontag, Susan. 1983. *Illness as a Metaphor.* Penguin Books.

Terdiman, Richard. 1985. 'Deconstructing Memory : on representing the past and theorising culture in France since the revolution.' *Diacritics* ,Winter.

◆ ISSN 0112-4099