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KATHERINE MANSFIELD ON THE WRITER'S CRAFT

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

of the degree of Master of Arts in

the English Department of the

American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon

October, 1965

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer would like to extend her sincere gratitude and appreciation to her adviser, Professor A. Sewell, without whose guidance and understanding this work would never have been completed. The writer would also like to thank Professor M. Welland who read the first draft of this essay and further advised this work.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to show Katherine Mansfield's concern with the craft and problems of the artist: in particular with the use of language, and with character creation. The work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with Katherine Mansfield's view of the language of the artist. The second chapter discusses Katherine Mansfield's vision of life. The third presents her view of contemporary writers as shown by her reviews of novels collected as Novels and Novelists. An appendix entitled "Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov" follows the last chapter.

Most writers about her have concentrated heavily on her biography which may be found in Isabel C. Clarke's Katherine Mansfield, A Biography, and Antony Alpers' extensive study Katherine Mansfield, A Biography.

CHAPTER I

KATHERINE MANSFIELD ON WORDS

Katherine Mansfield sought to be crystal clear in her writing. A clarity obtained not only through the language used, the style and choice of words, but also through the undistorted conveying of the emotional experience involved. In other words, she sought to present such a translucent image of the idea as to give her style a "special kind of purity." Professor A. Sewell writes:

We may call her style "pure," but there are many purities of style different from hers. There is the cold clarity of French prose style, a kind of choice mosaic-like quality in words which makes for logical exactness and seeming precision in emotional analysis. Katherine Mansfield, however, found French prose deficient in clarity, even woolly in statement.¹

For Katherine Mansfield the English language seems to be capable of that clarity. In a letter to Middleton Murry (February 27, 1918), she wrote:

It's the result of Shakespeare, I think. The English language is damned difficult, but it's also damned rich, and so clear and bright that you can search out the darkest places with it. Also it's heavenly simple and true.²

¹ Arthur Sewell, Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Essay (Auckland: The Unicorn Press, 1936), p. 2.

² The Letters of Katherine Mansfield, ed. John Middleton Murry (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1928), I, 138.

To illustrate this point she quotes from a speech by Paulina in The Winter's Tale (V.iii.132 ff.):

I, an old turtle,
Will wing me to some wither'd bough, and there
My mate, that's never to be found again,
Lament till I am lost.³

The word turtle refers here to the turtle-dove, noticed by poets as an emblem of love and constancy. The turtle will wing her, fly her "to some wither'd bough." Similarly the expression "till I am lost" reminds one of the fate of Antigonus, Paulina's husband who was lost (killed). Paulina is faithful to the memory of her husband and would like to join him. Earlier in the play Florizel says to Perdita (IV.iii.154):

Your hand, my Perdita: so turtles pair
That never mean to part.

Katherine Mansfield illustrated with her quotation from the play, as I have tried to explain, how the English language is "damned rich and so clear and bright."

Katherine Mansfield found French prose deficient in clarity.

In the same letter she wrote:

I do find the French language, style, attack, point of view, hard to stomach at present. It's all tainted. It all seems to me to lead to dishonesty -- Dishonesty Made Easy -- made superbly easy. All these half-words, these words which have never really been born and seen the light, like "me trouble," "vague," "tiede," "blottant,"

³ The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, ed. J.W. Craig, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 354.

"inexprimable" (these are bad examples, but you know the kinds I mean) and the phrases and whole paragraphs that go with them - they won't, at the last moment, do at all. Some of them are charming and one is loth to do without them, but they are like certain plants -- once they are in your garden they spread and spread and spread, and make a showing perhaps, but they are weeds. No, I get up hungry from the French language. I have too great an appetite for the real thing to be put off with pretty little kickshaws, and I am offended intellectually that 'ces gens' think they can so take me in.⁴

This view of the French language is personal and exaggerated. French at its best does not give that effect of vagueness. A writer in French surely would restrain himself from using words such as "me trouble," "vague," and "blottant" since they do not convey exactly the idea. Only popular descriptions would contain them.

In connection with the French language, what Katherine Mansfield meant by dishonesty was that "language, style, attack and point of view are tainted." They do not reveal the true emotions. Dishonesty in this context means that the true emotions are not revealed. These words are not transparent and translucent. They convey only a slipshod and woolly expression of the emotion. However, it is appropriate to mention here that "tiède" expresses something exactly: an absence of vitality, a coolness, a tepid quality. Moreover, Katherine Mansfield herself used the words vague and troubled in her stories. Several examples could be cited. In "Psychology" there is the sentence: "Vague and

⁴ Letters, I, 138.

troubled though they were, they knew enough to realise their precious friendship was in danger."⁵ Beryl at the end of "At the Bay" hears the sound of the sea as "a vague murmur, . . ."⁶ Constantia in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is standing before the Buddha "wondering, but not as usual, not vaguely."⁷ Still in the same story, Constantia "turned away from the Buddha with one of her vague gestures."⁸ Mr. Neave in "An Ideal Family" "thought vaguely, . . ."⁹ In "A Truthful Adventure" the words "vague" and "vaguely" are each mentioned once. Ma Parker, in "Life of Ma Parker," sees the bush "very vague."¹⁰ In "Honesty" Archie "Answered vaguely, . . ."¹¹ Milly, in "The Doves' Nest" looked at Miss Anderson "in a vague stare."¹² In "Something Childish But Very Natural" there occurs the phrase: "'Oh', said the woman vaguely, . . ."¹³ In "A Dill Pickle" Vera's former lover "had lost all that dreamy vagueness. . . ."¹⁴

⁵ Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield (London: Constable, 1962), p. 115.

⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

⁷ Ibid., p. 284.

⁸ Ibid., p. 284.

⁹ Ibid., p. 374.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 304.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 498.

¹² Ibid., p. 457.

¹³ Ibid., p. 625.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

Rosemary Fell in "A Cup of Tea" "looked vague."¹⁵ Violet, in the story with the same name, "looked vague, . . ."¹⁶

II

Katherine Mansfield, as her stories, letters and journal show, seems to be interested in the "real thing." She liked to see through to the centre, or the heart of the matter. Her desire and aim was to be honest enough and put creatively the truth with the least amount of falsification. In a letter to Middleton Murry (Saturday, October 30, 1920) she wrote: "As I write I falsify slightly. I can't help it, . . ."¹⁷ An understanding of Katherine Mansfield's view of truth and honesty is vital to an understanding of her own stories. There is a passage in her Journal dated December 17, 1919 explaining truth and honesty:

. . . Honesty (why?) is the only thing one seems to prize beyond life, love, death, everything. It alone remaineth. O you who come after me, will you believe it? At the end truth is the only thing worth having: it's more thrilling than love, more joyful and more passionate. It simply cannot fail. All else fails. I, at any rate, give the remainder of my life to it and it alone.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 409.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 599.

¹⁷ Letters, II, 68.

¹⁸ The Journal of Katherine Mansfield, ed. John Middleton Murry, (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1927), p. 133.

Middleton Murry in his introduction to the Journal of Katherine

Mansfield writes:

She felt she had a responsibility to these people. To them she must tell the truth, and nothing but the truth. This preoccupation with truth, in what she told and in herself to be worthy to tell it, became the devouring passion of her last years. She turned away from modern literature: so little of contemporary work seemed to her to be "true." "The writers are not humble," she used to say; they were not serving the great purpose which literature exists to serve.¹⁹

Still in the same introduction Middleton Murry writes: ". . . because her art was of a peculiarly instinctive kind, Katherine Mansfield's stories are read and loved by innumerable simple people, who find in her characters a living reality which is rare in the literature they read."²⁰ The term "instinctive" may require some clarification. "Instinctive" may be explained by another term Middleton Murry himself uses in his essay "Katherine Mansfield." "Spontaneity" is the word. Middleton Murry explains the term as "an absence of any cleavage or separation between the living self and the writing self. The art corresponds to the human experience."²¹ Her work is based on her own experiences. For example, her first collection of stories In A German Pension and "The Woman at the Store" show the bitterness and disillusionment of her early days.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. xi.

²⁰ Ibid., p. xiv.

²¹ John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield and Other Literary Studies, (London: Constable, 1959), p. 73.

Pat, the gardener, in "Prelude," is drawn from the Beauchamp's own gardener. Similarly the Kelveys in "The Doll's House" are taken from a poor family the Beauchamps' knew at Karori. In other words, Katherine Mansfield's art was not instinctive or spontaneous as a bird sings or a fish swims, but in a critical sense. Katherine Mansfield's art was instinctive, unflawed by reason that corrodes. It is immediate and spontaneous, simple and crystal clear, not stained or smeared. St. Paul in his second epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 3, verse 6 writes: "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." Katherine Mansfield's art was instinctive in this same sense. Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey (Saturday 22 November 1817) wrote: "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!"²²

Illustrations from Katherine Mansfield's stories will show her concern for a "living reality" and the "real thing." She wrote with honesty about the truth of various experiences of life and man's behaviour in these experiences. For example, in "Life of Ma Parker" "we are exposed to the fact that man will be heartless and unsympathetic. Although the literary gentleman knew that Ma Parker had buried her grandson yesterday, he asked her if she had thrown away any cocoa last time she was here. In another story, "The Singing Lesson," Miss Meadows at the beginning of the story

²² The Letters of John Keats, ed. Maurice Buxton Forman, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 67.

is "with despair -- cold, sharp despair -- buried deep in her heart like a wicked knife, . . ." ²³ She asks her students to sing "A Lament." But after receiving a telegram from her fiancé she is very happy and asks her singing class to sing a joyful song. "And this time Miss Meadows' voice sounded over all the other voices -- full, deep, glowing with expression." ²⁴ In a letter to Richard Murry in 1921 Katherine Mansfield wrote: "To be thorough -- to be honest." ²⁵ In her stories, Katherine Mansfield tried to "be thorough -- to be honest."

It is this great desire "to be thorough -- to be honest" that made Katherine Mansfield so strongly opposed to dishonesty. "Marriage à la Mode," one of her most bitter stories, is against dishonesty. Isabel is dishonest. She will certainly write, but later, not now. She cannot leave her 'modern' friends waiting for her. "And, laughing in the new way, she ran down the stairs." ²⁶ At the end of another story Rosemary Fell asked her husband first about the "fascinating little box" then followed it by what she really wanted to say. The story ends:

²³ Collected Stories, p. 343.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 350.

²⁵ Letters, II, 92.

²⁶ Collected Stories, p. 321.

"Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, "am I pretty?"²⁷

Thus ends "A Cup of Tea" where a "really rich" young wife hears her husband say about a poor little girl she had brought home with her: "'she's so astonishingly pretty'" and "'she's absolutely lovely'."²⁸

III

There are many definitions of good prose and good verse. Coleridge in his Table Talk (July 3, 1883) defines good prose as "proper words in their proper places", and good verse as: "the most proper words in their proper places."²⁹ Katherine Mansfield, in her prose, merges these two definitions thus obtaining the proper words, and the most proper words in their proper places. She wrote in what she herself called, in her Journal as early as January 22, 1916, "in a kind of special prose."³⁰ She mentions in a letter to Middleton Murry in October 1919 that she wants to be "fine down to every minutest particular, as a writer, . . ."³¹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 416.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 415.

²⁹ Coleridge's Literary Criticism, intro. J. W. Mackail, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1931), p. 7.

³⁰ Journal, p. 42.

³¹ Letters, I, 254.

In another letter to Middleton Murry in October 1920 she writes:
"You know how I choose my words; they can't be changed."³² More-
over, mention should be made that she admired Shakespeare because
of his choice of "proper words." To illustrate this point she quotes
from Antony and Cleopatra (II.v.24):

Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,
That long time have been barren.

She wrote about the quotation in her Shakespearean notes included
in her Journal:

Good lines! And another example of the choice of
the place of words. I suppose it was instinctive.
But 'fruitful' seems to be just where it ought to
be, to be resolved (musically speaking) by the
word 'barren'. One reads 'fruitful' expecting
'barren' almost from the "sound sense."³³

Cleopatra is in Alexandria and she is waiting for news from Antony
who is in Rome. She is expecting "fruitful tidings." Although she
refers to her ears "that long time have been barren," she herself
has been barren without her lover. However, this quotation becomes
even more meaningful when we recall Cleopatra's lines applying the
asp to her breast (V.ii.310):

Peace, Peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

³² Ibid., II, 52.

³³ Journal, p. 205.

Cleopatra's marriage was "barren," yet it also was fruitful and the "baby at my breast" refers to the asp which she has applied to her breast. The words are ironical. The asp will suck "the nurse asleep."

IV

There is a relation between Katherine Mansfield's statement about the English language and her concept of overtones and quarter-tones. The English language is "damned difficult" because it is "damned difficult" to find the right word with its appropriate overtone, and at the same time it is "damned rich," because once the word is found, it has many overtones. For example the line:

Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

from Shakespeare's sonnet LXXIII has a whole series of overtones. It has been interpreted by Professor William Empson in his book Seven Types of Ambiguity. It reminds one of the architecture of a cathedral or a church. The building has turned into ruin and the wooden choirs are left bare. Near the choirs are large stained glass windows with flowers and leaf designs. There also is the overtone of the protestant destruction of monasteries and the fear of puritanism.³⁴

³⁴ William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, (London: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 2, 3.

The example from Shakespeare was chosen to illustrate an overtone. In Katherine Mansfield's stories there are no such highly developed overtones. She does not mean this kind of other meaning. She rather means ambiguities of feeling and subtleties of emotion, tone and address. The acheing sense of beauty as we look at something painful or even ugly: beauty in ugliness: "The lovely woman has bad teeth." To the Hon. Dorothy Brett she wrote (March 9, 1922):

The poor man lives and the tears glitter in his beard and that is so beautiful one could bow down. Why? Nobody can say. I sit in a waiting-room where all is ugly, where it's dirty, dull, dreadful, where sick people waiting with me to see the doctor are all marked by suffering and sorrow. And a very poor workman comes in, takes off his cap humbly, beautifully, walks on tiptoe, has a look as though he were in Church, has a look as though he believed that behind that doctor's door there shone the miracle of healing. And all is changed, all is marvellous.³⁵

Besides being "damned difficult," the English language is "also damned rich and so clear and bright that you can reach out in the darkest places with it." The English language is simple not as an arithmetical problem may be simple, especially once the method of reasoning is understood, but simple as saintliness may be simple, unsophisticated. In Katherine Mansfield's own words the phrase is: "simple enough, as one would be simple before God. . . ." We may illustrate this point by quoting a line from Twelfth

³⁵ Letters, II, 195.

Night which Katherine Mansfield mentions in her Shakespeare Notes. Malvolio (II.v.68), touching his steward's chain, says: "some rich jewel." He sees himself in a "branched velvet gown, . . ." "from the while; and perchance wind up my watch, . . ." Katherine Mansfield writes about the passage:

There speaks the envious servant-heart that covets his master's possessions. I see him stroking the cloth with a sigh as he puts away his master's coat -- holding up to the light or to his fingers the jewel before he snaps it into its ivory case.³⁶

As mentioned above, this quotation serves to explain the richness and brightness of the English language. The words are so clear and bright that they convey the desired attitude towards the character of Malvolio. Malvolio is projecting himself into the future when he will have married Olivia, the rich countess. Then he will no longer play with "a steward's chain," but with "some rich jewel." The English language is "damned rich and so clear and bright" because the two words "chain" and "jewel" are connected. Surely, the jewel will be attached or fastened to a chain.

Sometimes, Katherine Mansfield's clarity in writing comes from her choice of similes, thus making the light shine through. Jonathan Trout in Part X of "At the Bay" compared himself with an insect. He says to Linda Burnell:

³⁶ Journal, p. 203.

"But as it is, I'm like an insect that's flown into a room of its own accord. I dash against the walls, dash against the windows, flop against the ceiling, do everything on God's earth, in fact, except fly out again.³⁷

And in fact, Jonathan Trout's insect metaphor is wholly in tone with himself. He is only an ordinary clerk, Stanley earns twice as much money as he. "He had no ambition." In his own words he is "Weak . . . weak. No stamina. No anchor. No guiding principle, . . ."³⁸

In her book reviews too Katherine Mansfield looked for clarity, brightness and simplicity in the language. Writing to Arnold Gibbons (June 24, 1922) about his short stories she mentioned the words "blurred" and "vague" as opposed to clarity. The passage goes:

Each is a whole, complete in itself. But I don't feel any of them quite ~~come~~ off. Why? It's as though you used more words than were necessary. There's a kind of diffuseness of expression which isn't natural to the English way of thinking. I imagine your great admiration for Tchekov has liberated you but you have absorbed more of him than you are aware of and he's got in the way of your individual expression for the time being. It's very queer; passages read like a translation! It's as though you were in his shadow and the result is you are a little bit blurred, a bit vague. Your real inmost self (forgive the big words but one does mean them) doesn't seem to be speaking except occasionally. . . .

Still in the same letter she writes:

It seems to me that when Russians think they go through a different process from what we do. As far as we can gather they arrive at feeling by a process of . . .

³⁷ Collected Stories, p. 237.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

spiritual recapitulation. I don't think we do. What I imagine is we have less words but they are more vital; we need less. So though one can accept this recapitulating process from Russian writers it sounds strange to me coming from your pen. For instance, in "Going Home" you get in five lines: "enthusiasm, doubtful, mistrust, acute terror, anxious joy, sadness, pain, final dissolution, filth and degradation." Or (p. 2) "the unhappiness, the misery and cruelty, all the squalor and abnormal spiritual anguish." Again, last page but one of "The Sister," "futility, monotony, suffocated, pettiness, sordidness, vulgar minuteness."

When one writes like that in English it's as though the nerve of the feeling is gone. Do you know what I mean?

I realise it's all very well to say these things -- but how are we going to convey these overtones, half tones, quarter tones, these hesitations, doubts, beginnings, if we go at them directly? It is most devilishly difficult, but I do believe that there is a way of doing it and that's by trying to get as near to the exact truth as possible. It's the truth we are after, no less (which, by the way, makes it so exciting).³⁹

What Katherine Mansfield means by the "recapitulating process" is the fact of getting closer and closer, asymptotically, to the true emotion but never reaching it. The reader is never quite there, though he is getting nearer and nearer to it. Here again, Katherine Mansfield did not know Russian, because had she known Russian, she would not have sought for the Russian equivalent for words such as: "smoke, strong, wood, matches, paper, good, it is late, white, black, cinders";⁴⁰ to mention a few from those

³⁹ Letters, II, 220-22.

⁴⁰ The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield, ed. John Middleton Murry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), pp. 279-280.

quoted at the end of her Scrapbook. Yet she has an opinion about Russian writers and the Russian language. We may even ask how did she know of the "recapitulating process" in Russian? But the important question is how do we get "the nerve of the feeling" in her own writing? We get the nerve of the feeling in her own writing by her actual conveying to us the emotional state instead of merely explaining and describing. We get in her stories the "Dramatic Representation of Passion" of the feeling or emotion as contrasted with the "descriptive manner of representing passion, . . ." ⁴¹

Kames uses the terms "Dramatic Representation of Passion" and "descriptive manner of representing passion" in Chapter XVI of his Elements of Criticism (1762). He wanted to see on stage the "Dramatic Representation" of Passion as opposed to the "descriptive manner of representing passion, . . ." We have a good instance of "Dramatic Representation of Passion" of Lear's compassion when we hear him say, (III.iv.28ff):

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these?

A descriptive representation of Lear's compassion would include a narration on how Lear thought about the "poor naked wretches." Not all representation in drama is dramatic; often it is "descriptive." The plays by Corneille and Addison are

⁴¹ Shakespeare Criticism, A Selection, intro. D. Nichol Smith, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 70.

examples of "descriptive representation" in drama. Let us compare for a moment the death scene in Othello and Cato. The stage directions in Cato (V.i) give: "Cato solus, sitting in a thoughtful posture: in his hand Plato's Book on the Immortality of the Soul. A drawn sword on the table by him."⁴² In the last scene in Othello, Othello in his speech makes very poetic similes, such as:

Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe;
.
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their med'cinable gum. (V.ii.349)

Long ago (III.iii.350) Othello had apostrophized his military position and rank mentioning in his apostrophe "the neighing steed," "the shrill trump," the spirit-stirring "drum," the ear-piercing "life," and "the royal banner." At the end of the last scene of the play (V.ii) he speaks of himself and proceeds to tell how he would like to be remembered. He says:

I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,

Cato in his chair before dying criticizes the world and says:

-I'm sick to death -- O when shall I get loose
From this vain world, th'abode of guilt and sorrow!

We have here, as opposed to Othello to use Kames' words, "the descriptive manner of representing passion." "Our sympathy is not raised. We are not "lulled into a dream of reality."

⁴² The Works of Joseph Addison, (New York: Harper and Bros, 1864) III, 497.

Katherine Mansfield, too, uses the "dramatic representation" of the feeling or emotion. In "Her First Ball" the following passage would illustrate the feelings of Leila better than a description:

Was it -- could it all be true? It sounded terribly true. Was this first ball only the beginning of her last ball, after all? At that the music seemed to change; it sounded sad, sad; it rose upon a great sigh. Oh, how quickly things changed! Why didn't happiness last for ever? For ever wasn't a bit too long.⁴³

Leila musing in interrogatory remarks followed by short answers shows not her sadness but her slight disappointment. Although this unpleasant note is struck, she is at her first ball seeing life and experiencing it in a new light. How every single thing seemed so new and exciting!

V

In most of her stories Katherine Mansfield uses concreteness by her choice of detail. For example Mouse in "Je Ne Parle Pas Francais," under strain, clings to her little grey muff and

⁴³ Collected Stories, p. 342.

strokes it in silence. Mr. Salesby in "The Man Without a Temperament" turns "the heavy signet ring upon his little finger"⁴⁴ throughout the story. Alice's white gloves "stained at the fastenings with "iron mould"⁴⁵ in part VIII of "At the Bay," show the fact that the servant girl was poor although she dressed for her afternoon out. Rosabel's "coarse, calico night-dress"⁴⁶ in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" reveals how poor Rosabel is. In "A Dill Pickle" Vera's lover, meets her again after six years, draws "her glove through his fingers, gently, gently, . . ." Later, he strokes the glove, pretending that "she was that glove that he held in his fingers. . . ."⁴⁷ This instance with the glove is a concrete evidence of how much he loved Vera.

This concreteness helps us to get the "nerve of the feeling," which is also produced by conveying these overtones, half tones, quarter tones, these hesitations, doubts, beginnings, by going at them directly. It is most devilishly difficult" she writes in the same letter to A. Gibbons quoted a little earlier, "but I do believe that there is a way of doing it and that's by trying to get as near to the exact truth as possible."

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 529.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

Katherine Mansfield's portrayal of Beryl Fairfield in "Prelude" and "At the Bay" can be analysed and enjoyed in regard to the author's concept of "hesitations, doubts, beginnings." Beryl is described as a slim young lady about thirty years old, with a "tiny waist" and "lovely, lovely hair. And such a mass of it. It had the colour of fresh fallen leaves, brown and red with a glint of yellow." Moreover, "she loved to feel it loose, covering her bare arms." She is hesitating whether or not to be her true self. Her false self not only bored but disgusted her real self. It is because of this hesitation that she feels "so miserable" -- so frightfully miserable."⁴⁸ In "Prelude" she says: "I know that I'm silly and spiteful and vain; I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a moment." She later sees "her false self running up and down the stairs, laughing a special trilling laugh if they had visitors, standing under the lamp if a man came to dinner, so that he should see the light on her hair, pouting and pretending to be a little girl when she was asked to play the guitar."⁴⁹ Everybody, including her friend Nan Pym, had known her in her false self. "It wasn't her nature at all. Good heavens, if she had ever been her real self with Nan Pym, Nannie would have jumped out of the window with surprise. . . ."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

We may ask ourselves what is Beryl's real self? We have a glimpse of it at the end of "Prelude." "She saw the real Beryl -- a shadow . . . a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she. Beryl could almost remember every one of them. At those times she had felt: 'Life is rich and mysterious and good, and I am rich and mysterious and good, too.' Shall I ever be that Beryl for ever? Shall I? How can I? And was there ever a time when I did not have a false self?"⁵¹

It is Beryl's false self in "At the Bay," that enjoys bathing with Mrs. Harry Kember, a woman the other women disapprove of. Beryl is lonely living by herself. "Of course, there are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that's not what she means. She wants someone who will find the Beryl they none of them know, who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover."⁵² She feels "restless and "miserable." She says about herself: "It wasn't possible to think that Beryl Fairfield never married, that lovely, fascinating girl."⁵³ Beryl is displeased and feels unhappy. She is "restless, restless." The face in the mirror seemed to ask her "Why must you suffer so? You were not

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵² Ibid., p. 242.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 243.

made for suffering."⁵⁴

The end of "At the Bay" builds up to a climax in Beryl. In wrenching and wringing herself free from seduction. After the climax all dies down, and the last sentence of the story is, significantly enough, "All was still." The paragraph itself makes one interpret the end of the story as a quietening and calming down. It goes:

A cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still.⁵⁵

The moment of darkness for Beryl was gone, "the cloud sailed away." One could argue that it would have been better to have "the sound of the sea was a murmur," thus avoiding "vague," but "vague" seems to convey the "hesitations and doubts" of Beryl herself.

It is this preoccupation with the exact truth that makes Katherine Mansfield write stories true to life and art. In an unposted letter written in January 1921 and included in her Journal she mentions her "hatred of insincerity." Still in the same letter she writes:

You see -- to me -- life and work are two things indivisible. It's only by being true to life that I can be true to art. And to be true

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 245.

to life is to be good, sincere, simple, honest.⁵⁶

Earlier she had written to Richard Murry (November 1920):

I am dead certain that there is no separating Art and Life. And no artist can afford to leave out Life. If we mean to work we must go straight to Life for our nourishment.⁵⁷

In her stories Katherine Mansfield fuses Life and Art. What she meant by "no separating Art and Life" is the fact that Art is the creative or imaginative way of putting on paper the experiences and her vision of life.

In her book reviews, collected as Novels and Novelists, we find Katherine Mansfield objecting to the sentimental novel, the novel where the "exact truth" is not revealed.

VI

Mr. Sewell in his essay on Katherine Mansfield writes that the high degree of purity in style never came to Katherine Mansfield "easily or luckily."⁵⁸ She strove and worked for it; and in a letter to Richard Murry (January 17, 1921), she wrote:

⁵⁶ Journal, pp. 174-175.

⁵⁷ Letters, II, 80.

⁵⁸ A. Sewell, op.cit., p. 5.

It's a very queer thing how craft comes into writing. I mean down to details. Par exemple. In "Miss Brill" I choose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I choose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on that day at that very moment. After I'd written it I read it aloud -- numbers of times -- just as one would play over a musical composition -- trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill -- until it fitted her.

Still in the same letter she wrote:

... people have hardly begun to write yet. Put poetry out of it for a moment and leave out Shakespeare -- now I mean prose. Take the very best of it. Aren't they still cutting up sections rather than tackling the whole of a mind?⁵⁹

In "Miss Brill" she is "tackling the whole of a mind" and not only "cutting up sections" but getting "nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill." We may ask: How was she feeling? Miss Brill is not sad, yet not completely happy. The passage goes: "something light and sad -- no, not sad, exactly -- something gentle seemed to move in her bosom."⁶⁰

A close analysis of the story would reveal its well-knit quality. The close-knit quality is best revealed by the fact that the various persons in the park: "the fine old man," "the big old woman" and the boy and girl who talked about her (Miss Brill) built the emotional climax at the end of the story. The story ends:

⁵⁹ Letters, II, 88, 89.

⁶⁰ Collected Stories, p. 331.

She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.⁶¹

This climax, I feel, is prepared by a sentence which moves the reader deeply. Miss Brill feels that the whole company would be singing, and her "eyes filled with tears as she looked smiling at all the other members of the company."⁶² Why did her eyes fill with tears? Maybe she was remembering her youth, or was she weeping for the sheer joy of being accepted in the group?

VII

Although to obtain an overtone is not easy, Katherine Mansfield succeeds in obtaining a few. Her stories are enriched, as the leaven enriches the bread, by the use of overtones. The following sentence from "The Fly" can serve as an illustration of an overtone. "Over and under, over and under, went a leg along a wing as the stone goes over and under the scythe."⁶³ This sentence reminds us of the fact that the fly's movements were as numberless

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 336.

⁶² Ibid., p. 335.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 427.

as the whetstone's over the scythe. In its transferred sense, the scythe is attributed to time and death. It is in this meaning that the word is used in Shakespeare's Sonnet XIII:

And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence

In Katherine Mansfield's story too we are reminded of the idea of death. The fly died. Yet it had struggled for life.

VIII

Katherine Mansfield achieves a wonderful emotional effect through her choice of words, and through writing in compressed sentences obtained through working them over and over again. In her Journal there are a few instances of rewritten passages, one of them written in 1919 is entitled Being Alone:

This joy of being alone. What is it? I feel so gay and at peace -- the whole house takes the air. Lunch is ready. I have a baked egg, apricots and cream, cheese straws and black coffee. How delicious! A baby meal! Mother shares it with me. Athenaeum is asleep and then awake on the studio sofa. He has a silver spoon of cream -- then hides under the sofa frill and puts out a paw for my finger. I gather the dried leaves from the plant in the big white bowl, and because I must play with something, I take an orange up to my room and throw it and catch it as I walk up and down. . . .⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Journal, p. 105.

The rewritten form is:

Peaceful and gay. The whole house takes the air. Athenaeum is asleep and then awake on the studio sofa. He has a silver spoonful of my cream at lunch time -- then hides under the sofa frill and plays the game of the Darting Paw. I gather the dried leaves from the plant in the big white bowl; they are powdered with silver. There is nobody in the house, and yet whose is this faint whispering? On the stairs there are tiny spots of gold -- tiny footprints. . . . 65

"Plays the game of the Darting Paw," is better than "puts out a paw for my finger." "Peaceful and gay" has more strength than "this joy of being alone. What is it? I feel so gay and at peace."

As shown by the above quotations her prose is compressed.

In a letter to Richard Murry (January 1921) she wrote:

I often wonder whether other writers do the same -- If a thing has really come off it seems to me there mustn't be one single word out of place, or one word that could be taken out. That's how I AIM at writing.⁶⁶

In fact, in her best stories not a single word is out of order or could be taken out. Note the opening of "Miss Brill":

Although it was so brilliantly fine -- the blue sky powdered with gold and the great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques -- Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur.⁶⁷

We gather how brilliantly fine the weather was and Miss Brill

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁶ Letters, II, 89.

⁶⁷ Collected Stories, p. 330.

seems to be very pleased with her decision regarding her fur. It is in the afternoon, the sun has not set yet and the blue sky was "powdered with gold." From these few lines we gather a lot of information about the weather and that there had previously been a moment of indecision whether or not to take the fur.

Concerning an unfinished story she wrote in her Scrapbook:

This story seems to lack coherence and sharpness. That's the principal thing: it's not at all sharp. It's like eating a bunch of grapes instead of a grape of caviare. . . . I have a pretty bad habit of spreading myself at times -- of over-writing and understating.⁶⁸

Katherine Mansfield did not use "more words than were necessary."

In October 1920, on sending "The Young Girl" to Middleton Murry she wrote: "You know how I choose my words; they can't be changed."⁶⁹

In her stories, even the punctuation is important and deliberate for the special effect. In November 1920 she wrote to Middleton Murry: "About the punctuation in "The Stranger." No, my dash isn't quite a feminine dash. (Certainly when I was young it was). But it was intentional in that story."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Letters, II, 52.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

CHAPTER II

"TAKE A LONG LOOK AT LIFE"

I

Katherine Mansfield is true and sincere to her art. Her sincerity to her art is accounted for by her oneness with her art. D.M. Davin in his introduction to Katherine Mansfield's Selected Stories calls Katherine Mansfield as well as Keats, Chekhov and D.H. Lawrence "artists 'devoured by their art.'"¹ In this chapter emphasis will be placed on Katherine Mansfield's "long look at life" and hence her vision of life.

David Daiches in his essay, "Katherine Mansfield and the Search for Truth," writes:

Katherine Mansfield's desire for truth was not desire for a more adequate fable but for a more intense vision. Her whole life, as well as her work, goes to prove this: for what other purpose was her final retirement at Fontainebleau? The story as fable hardly matters with her. She tells in her Journal that she has scores of stories waiting to be written, but they must wait -- wait until she can contemplate them with the proper intensity of vision.²

The word "fable" has two meanings. It means the story as such,

¹ Katherine Mansfield, Selected Stories, intro. D.M. Davin, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. xi.

² David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 78.

the plot, but also the moral or didactic connotation or significance. The last part of the quotation: "wait until she can contemplate them with the proper intensity of vision" throws light on the meaning of the word. Katherine Mansfield's unfinished stories as found in The Scrapbook, or published in the collection The Doves' Nest seem to have a plot but she waited to "contemplate them with the proper intensity of vision." In an entry in her Journal on November 13, 1921, she mentions the fact that "the stories wait for me, grow tired, wilt, fade, . . ." ³

However, all these half finished or unfinished stories, in fact, have a special finality about them because of the small details inserted which set the mood and tone of the story. Terms as "Spring . . . wet lilac . . . spouting rain," "cold buttons," and "from autumn to spring" ⁴ give the general atmosphere the stories in their final forms will have. But the stories waited because Katherine Mansfield had not yet looked into the life of her hero or heroine "without self consciousness."

II

Katherine Mansfield accepted life in spite of all. She

³ Journal, p. 196.

⁴ Collected Stories, p. 384.

herself in a letter to Middleton Murry (September 25, 1920) used the term "in spite of all." Middleton Murry in his essay "Katherine Mansfield" writes that the term "contains the secret of herself and her art."⁵ These few words, I feel, show and confirm her acceptance of life. As Middleton Murry writes, still in the same essay: "In spite of all, the little lamp glows gently and eternally in "The Doll's House"; in spite of all, the sleeping face of the dead man in "The Garden Party" murmurs that All is well; and though Ma Parker has nowhere to cry out her misery, she is beautiful for ever, in spite of all."⁶ In spite of all his tiredness, Mr. Neave, the father, will be going down to dinner in "An Ideal Family." In spite of all George, the hairdresser, in "Revelations" will set Madame's hair though his "little daughter died this morning."⁷ In spite of all, I would say, Beryl Fairfield wrung herself free from seduction in "At the Bay" and in spite of all Miss Ada Moss in "Pictures" keeps her cheerfulness. In spite of all Beauty triumphs over ugliness. In spite of all the physical pain and suffering, Katherine Mansfield went on writing.

It is because of this acceptance of life "in spite of all" that as Professor A. Sewell writes in his essay: She found "in

⁵ J. Middleton Murry, op.cit., p. 93.

⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

⁷ Collected Stories, p. 196.

life, not a problem, but a pageant, not a question, but an experience."⁸ Moreover, it is this acceptance of life that makes her dislike "problem art." In a letter to the Hon. Dorothy Brett (November 11, 1921), she wrote:

And when you come to think of it, what was Chaucer's problem or Shakespeare's? The 'problem' is the invention of the 19th Century. The artist takes a long look at life. He says softly, "So this is what life is, is it?" And he proceeds to express that. All the rest he leaves.⁹

The statement clearly shows her view that the artist, whether Chaucer or Shakespeare, tries to put imaginatively, creatively, what his vision of life is, and later readers see in the writing a problem. For example, The Divine Comedy is not a problem poem; but there is a theology which gives it a thematic structure. Mr. John Danby sees in Cordelia the Christian redemptive principle, and the whole play, King Lear, according to him, may be interpreted as a Christian allegory. Still another problem in King Lear, is to see the play as an example of Senecan Stoicism as T.S. Eliot sees. However, he goes on to say that there is in the play "much less and much more."¹⁰

"The problem is the invention of the 19th century," in the sense that during that century writers wrote novels about problems:

⁸ A. Sewell, op.cit., p. 10.

⁹ Letters, II, 152.

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, (1917-1932) (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1932), p. 114.

social or political. Three writers who were interested and wrote about the problems of their time were: Balzac, Stendhal and Zola. Balzac's monumental La Comedie Humaine studied country and city life at his time. Stendhal's Le Rouge et le Noir, Chronique du XIX Siecle, or La Chartreuse de Parme uses the moral problems of the Restauration in France. Especially in Le Rouge et le Noir we have a study of the moral aspects or attitudes of the Restauration. Zola, too, quite akin to Stendhal, has a whole series of novels about Les Rougon Macquart studying his society in the Second Empire. Furthermore, being concerned with social problems made Zola so intensely interested about the Dreyfus case, which was a political problem too, and write about it.

Katherine Mansfield in her reviews of novels published as Novels and Novelists, shows clearly her dislike of the problem novel. However, the term problem novel may require some clarification. For Katherine Mansfield the term covers a number of shortcomings which make a novel a problem novel. We shall come to these shortcomings in the next chapter.

III

During her lifetime, Katherine Mansfield suffered a great deal. The facts and events of her life show the amount of bodily,

spiritual or moral suffering she had endured. Time and again in her Journal and letters reference is made to suffering and ugliness in life. More than once she had felt hopeless and desperate. In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, (May 24, 1918) she wrote:

--wringing my hands, quite overcome, for the nth time by the horror of life -- the sense that something is almost hopelessly wrong. What might be so divine is out of tune -- or the instruments are all silent and nobody is going to play again. There is no concert for us.

.....
But the ugliness -- the ugliness of life -- the intolerable corruption of it all -- How is it to be borne? To-day for the first time since I arrived, I went for a walk. Anne Rice had been telling me of the beauty of the Spring-- all the hedges one great flower -- of the beauty of these little 'solid' white houses set in their blazing gardens -- and the lovely hale old fishermen. But -- the sea stank -- great grey crabs scuttled over the rocks -- all the little private paths and nooks had been fouled by human cattle -- there were rags of newspapers in the hedges ^{ll}

Another passage from a letter to Richard Murry (February 1920) shows clearly that Katherine Mansfield was disturbed by the evil and cruelty found in the world yet she accepted it side by side or as part of life. The passage goes:

I can't help seeing all the evil and pain in the world: it must be faced and recognised, and I can't bear your sentimentalist or silly optimist. I know it all: I feel it all. And there is cruelty for instance -- cruelty to children how

^{ll} Letters, I, 176, 177.

are you going to explain that? and, as you say, the beauty -- yes, the beauty that lurks in ugliness, that is even outside the pub in the gesture of the drinking woman. I can't explain it. I wish I could believe in a God. I can't. Science seems to make it impossible. And if you are to believe in a God it must be a good God and no good God could allow his children to suffer so. No, Life is a mystery to me. It is made up of Love and pains. One loves and one suffers, one suffers and one has to love. I feel (for myself individually) that I want to live by the spirit of love -- love all things. See into things so deeply and truly that one loves. That does not rule out hate, far from it. I mean it doesn't rule out anger. But I confess I only feel that I am doing right when I am living by love. I don't mean a personal love -- you know -- but -- the big thing. Why should one love? No reason; it's just a mystery.¹²

Katherine Mansfield believed that the bodily suffering she had endured was the main cause, and affected her acceptance of beauty and ugliness. In a letter to Middleton Murry (October 1920) she wrote:

And then suffering, bodily suffering such as I've known for three years. It has changed forever everything -- even the appearance of the world is not the same -- there is something added. Everything has its shadow. Is it right to resist such suffering? Do you know I feel it has been an immense privilege. Yes, in spite of all. How blind we little creatures are! It's only the fairy tales we really live by. . . . And if someone rebels and says, Life isn't good enough on those terms, one can only say: "It is!"¹³

¹² Ibid., II, pp. 17-18.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 57, 58.

In spite of all the suffering she had endured, the cruelty, she had witnessed, Life is good enough on those terms. In another letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell (March 14, 1921) she wrote:

Beautiful Life! In spite of everything one cannot but praise Life! I have been watching the peach tree outside my window from the very first moment, and now it is all in flower and the leaves are come, small shy clusters like linnets' wings.¹⁴

This passage can be paired with another from an entry written in her Journal (May 19, 1919) where she writes: "The lovely world (God, how lovely the external world is!) is there and I bathe in it and am refreshed."¹⁵ Later in another passage, still in her Journal, she writes: "how perfect the world is, with its worms and hooks and ova, how incredibly perfect. There is the sky and the sea and the shape of a lily, and there is all this other as well. The balance how perfect!"¹⁶ Here again we have beauty along with ugliness; the terms "all this other as well" refer to ugliness, pain and suffering. What she praises in life, in spite of the worms, the suffering, and the cruelty is the balance with beauty, especially external beauty.

A passage entitled Suffering in her Journal (December 1920) shows Katherine Mansfield's view on human suffering:

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁵ Journal, p. 102.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

I should like this to be accepted as my confession.

There is no limit to human suffering. When one thinks: "Now I have touched the bottom of the sea -- now I can get no deeper," one goes deeper. And so it is for ever. . . . Suffering is boundless, it is eternity. One pang is eternal torment. Physical suffering is -- child's play. . . .

I do not want to die without leaving a record of my belief that suffering can be overcome. For I do believe it. What must one do? There is no question of what is called 'passing beyond it'. This is false.

One must submit. Do not resist. Take it. Be overwhelmed. Accept it fully. Make it part of life.

Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become Love. This is the mystery. This is what I must do. I must pass from personal love to greater love. I must give to the whole of life what I gave to one. The present agony will pass -- if it doesn't kill. It won't last. Now I am like a man who has had his heart torn out -- but -- bear it -- bear it! As in the physical world, so in the spiritual world, pain does not last for ever. . . .¹⁷

.....

Life is a mystery. The fearful pain will fade. I must turn to work. I must put my agony into something, change it. 'Sorrow shall be changed into joy'.¹⁸

Katherine Mansfield admits not only human suffering but animal suffering too as portrayed in a passage concerning a "poor underfed dog." Towards the end of 1918 she wrote in her Journal:

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 163-64.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.165.

This is the hour when the poor underfed dog appears, at a run, nosing the dry gutter. He is so thin that his body is like a cage on four wooden pegs. . . . His lean triangle of a head is down, his long straight tail is out, and up and down, up and down he goes, silent and fearfully eager. The street watches him from its creeper-covered balconies, from its open windows -- but the fat lady on the ground floor who is no better than she should be comes out, down the steps to the gate, with a bone. His tail, as he waits for her to give it him, bangs against the gate post, like a broomhandle -- and the street says she's a fool to go feeding strange dogs. Now she'll never be rid of him.

(What I'd like to convey is that, at this hour, with this half light and the pianos and the open, empty sounding houses, he is the spirit of the street -- running up and down, poor dog, when he ought to have been done away with years ago).¹⁹

However, in another letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell in June 1918

Katherine Mansfield wrote her credo:

You see, I cannot help it. My secret belief -- the inner most 'credo' by which I live is -- that although Life is loathsomely ugly and people are terribly often vile and cruel and base, nevertheless there is something at the back of it all -- which if only I were great enough to understand would make everything, everything, indescribably beautiful. One just has glimpses, divine warnings -- signs -- Do you remember the day we cut the lavender? And do you remember when the Russian music sounded in that half-empty hall? Oh, those memories compensate for more than I can say --²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

²⁰ Letters, I, 204-5.

This passage can be put beside another from a letter to the Hon.

Dorothy Brett, March 9, 1922, a few months before her death:

But do you really feel all beauty is marred by ugliness and the lovely woman has bad teeth? I don't feel quite that. For it seems to me if Beauty were Absolute it would no longer be the kind of Beauty it is. Beauty triumphs over ugliness in Life. That's what I feel. And that marvellous triumph is what I long to express. The poor man lives and the tears glitter in his beard and that is so beautiful one could bow down. Why? Nobody can say. I sit in a waitingroom where all is ugly, where it's dirty, dull, dreadful, where sick people waiting with me to see the doctor are all marked by suffering and sorrow. And a very poor workman comes in, takes off his cap humbly, beautifully, walks on tiptoe, has a look as though he were in Church, has a look as though he believed that behind that doctor's door there shone the miracle of healing. And all is changed, all is marvellous. It's only then that one sees for the first time what is happening. No, I don't believe in your frowsty housemaids, really. Life is, all at one and the same time, far more mysterious and far simpler than we know. It's like religion in that. If we want to have faith, and without faith we die, we must learn to accept. That's how it seems to me.²¹

Yet there also is Beauty existing along with suffering.

And glimpses of these moments of Beauty occur when "we cut the lavender," or the sound of the Russian music in a half empty hall," or when the tears glittered in the poor man's beard. "Life is a mystery." "Sorrow will be changed into joy."

²¹ Ibid. II, 195.

In a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell (Friday August 1917) she had written: "Life is a queer, a damn queer business!"²² Later, in June 1919 to the same person she had written: "Life is wonderful -- wonderful -- bitter-sweet, an anguish and a joy --"²³

The last eight words of the Journal: "I feel happy -- deep down. All is well"²⁴ summarize Katherine Mansfield's view and opinion of life. The expression "I feel happy -- deep down. All is well" is not very far away from "Beautiful life" which she had uttered earlier. These eight words are a fitting close to her Journal. It is, I feel, by an irony of fate that three months later, still at Fontainebleau, at 10 p.m. she was seized by a fit of coughing which culminated in a violent haemorrhage. In half an hour Katherine Mansfield was dead.

In her stories too, Laura in "The Garden-Party," Constantia and Josephine in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," and Miss Ada Moss in "Pictures" have come to understand that life is good enough on the terms that Katherine Mansfield has expressed. They have, through their various experiences, accepted everything in life. In their own ways, they have come to say that "All is well."

²² Ibid., I, 76.

²³ Ibid., p. 233.

²⁴ Journal, p. 251.

IV

Crime and insanity too are part of the ugliness in life. Both can, therefore, be included in "a long look at life." Three of Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories "The Woman at the Store," "Ole Underwood" and "Millie" published in Something Childish deal with murder although the murder and crime occur outside the actual narrative of the story.

The woman in "The Woman at the Store" has a secret crime to conceal; an act which we later learn from her child who "had drawn the picture of the woman shooting at a man with a rook rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in."²⁵

"Ole Underwood" (written in 1912) is about a derelict sailor released after twenty years' imprisonment for killing his wife. The plot of the third story, "Millie," is about a childless and hardhearted woman who becomes momentarily human as she gives a youth who had shot a man, a little beef, bread and butter.

All three stories show how isolation can effect human beings. The woman in "The Woman at the Store" has been left too much alone. She says about her husband: "sometimes he'd go away days, sometimes he'd go away weeks, and leave me ter look after the store."²⁶

²⁵ Collected Stories, p. 572.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 569.

Ole Underwood is lonely. The little girl ran away. "When she saw Ole Underwood she let the clothes-prop fall and rushed screaming to the door, beating it screaming 'Mumma - Mumma!'"²⁷ Later at the bar "somebody kicked him."²⁸ Still later, the chinamen "screamed."²⁹

Millie, in the story with the same name, is all alone at home, as her husband had gone to the township "to hunt down" the young murderer. She feels uneasy, may be "a good cry -- just for nothing -- . . ." ³⁰ would make her feel better.

V

Katherine Mansfield's range of subjects is limited. D.M. Davin writes in his Introduction to the Selected Stories: "Her stories are for the most part domestic, her range seldom reaches beyond the familiar, beyond the walls, the garden, the street. Her concern is with the experiences that overtake everyone, not with what is externally rare or strange."³¹ In Katherine Mansfield's

²⁷ Ibid., p. 574.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 575.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 576.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 583.

³¹ Selected Stories, op.cit., p. xvii.

stories there is a concentration on an individual character who is undergoing an experience. For example, in "A Cup of Tea," concentration, or focus is on Rosemary Fell and feminine mentality. Towards the end of the story, Philip Rosemary's husband, had said "slowly" about the starving little girl: "She's absolutely lovely, Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I came into your room just now."³² Rosemary was surprised and also displeased to hear her husband say so. Half an hour later, Rosemary came to Philip, in the library, "the poor little thing" had left with "a present of money." The story ends; "'Philip', she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, 'am I pretty?'"³³ This short sentence shows how well Katherine Mansfield had studied feminine mentality. Rosemary Fell is trying hard, very hard, to hear from her husband that she is pretty, prettier than the poor little girl. Of course, she would never conceive the idea that the little girl may be prettier than she is!

Another story, "Pictures," is about how a middle aged contralto is out of a job, faces eviction and looks for a job in order to pay her lodging to her landlady. "Revelations" concentrates on Mrs. Monica Tyrell, young and slightly neurotic, who feels terribly upset and sorry when she hears at her hairdresser's that his "little daughter died this morning." It is

³² Collected Stories, p. 415.

³³ Ibid., p. 416.

true to a certain extent that Katherine Mansfield's range is limited, but the potency or significance of her stories lies elsewhere. Somerset Maugham, in his essay "The Short Story," phrases it thus: "She could take a situation and wring from it all the irony, bitterness, pathos and unhappiness that were inherent in it."³⁴ Katherine Mansfield takes a situation as for example in "A Cup of Tea," or that of Miss Ada Moss in "Pictures" whose every attempt on that day with film producer after film producer, desperately fails. Her job hunting was unsuccessful and she thinks: "And I'm only trembling because I've had nothing to eat to-day. . . ."³⁵ The pathos and bitterness in this story lie in the fact that at the end of the story she has to follow a "very stout gentleman wearing a very small hat that floated on the top of his head like a little yacht. . . ." The story ends:

"I'll come with you, if it's all the same," said Miss Moss. And she sailed after the little yacht out of the café.

Jane Austen too, like Katherine Mansfield, had a limited range. But the limitation of range in the latter is quite different from the limitations of range in Jane Austen. With Jane Austen it

³⁴ W. Somerset Maugham, Points of View (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 186.

³⁵ Collected Stories, p. 127.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

is the lesser English gentry, the country town society and Bath. With Katherine Mansfield "range" is not social. It is emotional - it is a range of feeling. Death is not included in Jane Austen whereas Katherine Mansfield uses it in a number of her stories: such as "The Fly," "The Garden-Party," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "The Voyage," "Six Years After," "Life of Ma Parker," "The Stranger," "At the Bay."

It is pointless to stress any further that Katherine Mansfield's range was limited because she did not seek to have a wide gamut, but to produce stories not "full of sediment." She believed that in order to be able to write with no sediment, her personal life must be neither "with earthly degradation" nor "full of sediment." Consequently, she was pursued by the idea of purification.

In her Journal on July 13, 1921 she wrote: "But marks of earthly degradation still pursue me. I am not crystal clear."³⁷ Three months later, having completed "The Garden-Party" she wrote in her Journal: "To be 'simple' enough, as one would be simple before God. . . ."³⁸ In October, she had found herself not "simple enough" and she wrote in her Journal:

I wonder why it should be so very difficult to be humble. . . . It's a kind of excitement within, which shouldn't be there. Calm

³⁷ Journal, p. 182.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 193.

yourself. Clear yourself. And anything that I write in this mood will be no good; it will be full of sediment."³⁹

Still a few days later (November 21,) came the ultimate cry in the form of a prayer: "Lord, make me crystal clear for thy light to shine through!"⁴⁰

In 1922, she entered the Gurdjieff Institute at Fontainebleau ready to endure deliberately all possible physical discomforts to wipe away the last marks of "earthly degradation." She achieved her aim, but paid a high price -- her own life. Middleton Murry in his postscript to The Journal of Katherine Mansfield wrote about Katherine Mansfield's last day:

I arrived early in the afternoon of January 9. I have never seen, nor shall I ever see, any one so beautiful as she was on that day; it was as though the exquisite perfection which was always hers had taken possession of her completely. To use her own words, the last grain of 'sediment', the last 'traces of earthly degradation', were departed for ever. But she had lost her life to save it.⁴¹

VI

Katherine Mansfield's vision of beauty was naturally

³⁹ Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 252.

influenced by her experience in life. Middleton Murry writes in his essay: "She discovers and loves Beauty, then she discovers and hates the ugliness that seems to be inseparable from the Beauty -- 'the snail under the leaf'; then she becomes indifferent towards it; then, finally, she discovers and loves a new Beauty, in which the ugliness is included."⁴² A paragraph in her Journal (1920) entitled "The Change" seems to explain this:

For a long time she said she did not want to change anything in him, and she meant it. Yet she hated things in him and wished they were otherwise. Then she said she did not want to change anything in him and she meant it. And the dark things that she had hated she now regarded with indifference. Then she said she did not want to change anything in him. But now she loved him so that even the dark things she loved, too. She wished them there; she was not indifferent. Still they were dark and strange, but she loved them. And it was for this they had been waiting. They changed. They shed their darkness -- the curse was lifted and they shone forth as Royal Princes once more, as creatures of light.⁴³

Middleton Murry writes: "This movement of the soul, which I have instanced in regard of her personal love, was exactly the same in the growth of her impersonal love -- her love towards life itself. Love -- disillusion -- a new and more comprehensive love: that was the movement in the subject. Beauty -- darkness -- a new and more comprehensive Beauty: that was the reality in the

⁴² Middleton Murry, op.cit., p. 77.

⁴³ Journal, p. 168.

object."⁴⁴ At the end of "The Garden-Party" Laura has understood a little this new Beauty. The story ends:

"No", sobbed Laura." "It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie --" She stopped, she looked at her brother. "Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life --" But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

"Isn't it, darling?" said Laurie.⁴⁵

The end of "The Fly" too, gives us that impression of understanding a new Beauty in life on the part of the boss after six years of his only son's death. The words "'My son!'" no longer make the boss cry. Whereas:

In the past, in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him.⁴⁶

Now, after the incident with the fly, the boss does not know what he was "thinking about before." The passage goes:

. . . he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it? It was . . . He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.⁴⁷

The two passages show the understanding of the new beauty: a smoothing away of the first emotion. It does not mean that the boss now likes his son less than he did six years ago when he

⁴⁴ J. Middleton Murry, Op.cit., p. 77.

⁴⁵ Collected Stories, p. 261.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 425-426.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 428.

heard of his death, but now time has made him "not remember," and the passing of the handkerchief inside the collar shows the uneasiness of the boss.

The last paragraph of "A Married Man's Story," an unfinished story, brings out that new Beauty, which in this case is that of being accepted:

The barriers were down. I had been all my life a little outcast; but until that moment no one had "accepted" me; I had lain in the cupboard -- or the cave forlorn. But now I was taken, I was accepted, claimed. I did not consciously turn away from the world of human beings; I had never known it; but I from that night did beyond words consciously turn towards my silent brothers. . . .⁴⁸

This feeling of acceptance is very important. It means a resignation, a surrender, a giving up of struggle, a passivity. "The barriers were down" says the man in "A Married Man's Story." Katherine Mansfield writes in a passage entitled "Suffering" (quoted earlier in this work) in her Journal (December 1920):

I do not want to die without leaving a record of my belief that suffering can be overcome. For I do believe it. What must one do? There is no question of what is called 'passing beyond it'. This is false.

One must submit. Do not resist. Take it. Be overwhelmed. Accept it fully. Make it part of life.

Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become Love. This is the mystery.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 447.

⁴⁹ Journal, pp. 163-164.

VII

Katherine Mansfield's true vision of beauty triumphing over Ugliness is revealed in a letter to the Hon. Dorothy Brett (March 9, 1922). The passage has been quoted in extenso earlier in this chapter and part of it will suffice to remind us of the whole: "And a very poor workman comes in, takes off his cap humbly, . . . as though he believed that behind the doctor's door there shone a miracle of healing. And all is changed, all is marvellous." Earlier in the same passage Katherine Mansfield writes: "Beauty triumphs over ugliness in Life." I think this quotation itself gives us her true vision of Beauty and Ugliness. In his essay "Katherine Mansfield," Middleton Murry quotes at length the passage from part VII of "At the Bay" where "Kezia and her grandmother were taking their siesta together" and writes about the grandmother:

she represents, instinctively, the discovery of the Beauty of the whole Truth: the acceptance of suffering and death and its change by acceptance into Beauty, seen by the Love which is true wisdom.⁵⁰

Middleton Murry, I feel, has failed to understand Katherine Mansfield's vision of Beauty. "The discovery of the Beauty of the whole Truth" is not the acceptance of suffering and death and its change by acceptance into beauty, but the existence of beauty side by side with ugliness

⁵⁰ Middleton Murry, op.cit., p. 80.

and the final triumph of beauty over ugliness. Katherine Mansfield herself writes in a passage quoted earlier, that "Beauty triumphs over Ugliness." There existed with the beauty of Spring with all the hedges in one great flower, "the lovely hale old fishermen," the stinking sea, "the great grey crabs scuttled over the rocks," "the little private paths and nooks had been fouled by human cattle." Moreover, the passage from part VII of "At the Bay" which Middleton Murry quotes supports and proves the fact that beauty triumphs over ugliness. In the passage, the grandmother, Mrs. Fairfield, had been staring at the wall and thinking of her son, William, dead "of a sunstroke." And now she considers:

Did it make her sad? To look back, back.
To stare down the years, as Kezia had been
her doing. To look after them as a woman
does, long after they were out of sight. Did
it make her sad? No, life was like that.⁵¹

Part VII ends in a happy tone because beauty triumphs over ugliness:

"Kezia!" The old woman dropped her knitting. She swung back in the rocker. She began to tickle Kezia. "Say never, say never, say never," gurgled Kezia, while they lay there laughing in each other's arms. "Come, that's enough, my squirrel! That's enough, my wild pony!" said old Mrs. Fairfield, setting her cap straight. "Pick up my knitting."
Both of them had forgotten what the "never" was about.⁵²

⁵¹ Collected Stories, p. 226.

⁵² Ibid., p. 227.

What better passage is there to show that Beauty triumphs over Ugliness? Our attention should be drawn to the fact that whereas at the beginning of part VII the grandmother was staring at the wall," she now is laughing and calling Kezia "my squirrel!" "My wild pony!"

In Katherine Mansfield's other stories too, Beauty triumphs over Ugliness. Rosabel in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" in her "dull" room with not much furniture, with her tiredness from work "smiled in her sleep, and once threw out her arm to feel for something which was not there, dreaming still."⁵³ A few lines later, the passage goes: "And because her heritage was that tragic optimism, which is all too often the only inheritance of youth, still half asleep, she smiled, with a little nervous tremor round her mouth."⁵⁴ Here too beauty triumphs over ugliness, especially comparing the two sentences: "Presently the cold fingers of dawn closed over her uncovered hand; grey light flooded the dull room." Later we have: "She smiled with a little nervous tremor round the mouth."

Similarly in "At the Bay" too we see Beauty and Ugliness beside each other; Professor A. Sewell phrases it thus: "there are little hatreds and little lusts and little evils on the beach as well as the shimmering sea and the bright sunshine and the cries

⁵³ Ibid., p. 529.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 530.

of the children."⁵⁵ We have in the story a representation of a day's life and activities. The story starts at "very early morning" and ends "at night." Here too we have the juxtaposition of beauty with ugliness." Now the leaping, glittering sea was so bright . . ."⁵⁶ "And from the bush there came the sound of little streams flowing, quickly, lightly, slipping between the smooth stones, gushing into ferny basins and out again; . . . a faint stirring and shaking, the snapping of a twig . . ."⁵⁷ We also have the instance where Mr. Harry Kember attempts to seduce Miss Beryl Fairfield. Yet the overall impression the story leaves is that of Beauty triumphing over Ugliness; the last paragraph of the story explains this:

A cloud, small, serene, floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still.⁵⁸

There came a cloud across the moon as Beryl "slipped, ducked, wrenched free" from the arms of Harry Kember crying: "'you are vile, vile!'" But now, all is over, "the cloud sailed away." She has wrenched herself free. "Beauty triumphs over Ugliness."

⁵⁵ A Sewell, op.cit., p. 12.

⁵⁶ Collected Stories, p. 206.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 205.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 245.

VIII

It is her utter sincerity and honesty that made Katherine Mansfield write in her Journal (October 16, 1921): "To be 'simple' enough, as one would be simple before God. . . ." ⁵⁹ Earlier in the same year she wrote, still in the same work: "And to be true to life is to be good, sincere, simple, honest." ⁶⁰ It is her honesty that made her brave enough to stand up to the "truth" of her own conceptions. It is a kind of artistic conscience which prevents her from falsifying or sentimentalizing her stories. As quoted in the previous chapter, she had written to Middleton Murry (October 31, 1920): "As I write I falsify slightly." ⁶¹ But this is not to say that Katherine Mansfield was satisfied with all her work.

She was not pleased with "Mr. and Mrs. Dove," finished in July 1921, and wrote about the story in her Journal:

I finished "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" yesterday. I am not altogether pleased with it. It's a little bit made up. It's not inevitable. I meant to imply that those two may not be happy together -- that that is the kind of reason for which a young girl marries. But have I done so? I don't think so. Besides, it's not strong enough. I want to be nearer -- far, far nearer than that. I want to use all my force even when I am taking a fine line. And I have a sneaking notion that I have, at the

⁵⁹ Journal, p. 193.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

⁶¹ Letters, II, 68.

end, used the Doves unwarrantably. Tu sais ce que je veux dire. I used them to round off something -- didn't I? Is that quite my game? No, it's not. It's not quite the kind of truth I'm after.⁶²

As Mr. A. Sewell wrote in his work:

Katherine Mansfield has an "idea" of the slightness of pretexts on which young girls may marry -- and the slightness, too, of the chance of happiness in married life. This is all very well and a story may well have been written out of which this "idea" emerged. But her own boy and girl, Mr. and Mrs. Dove that are to be, are too much entangled in the idea. The idea makes them: they do not make the idea.⁶³

In the story Reggie and Anne are almost running after each other as Mr. and Mrs. Dove do in the Dove house. The end of the story goes:

"Roo-coo-coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo-coo!" sounded from the veranda. "Reggie, Reggie" from the garden.

He stopped, he turned. But when she saw his timid, puzzled look, she gave a little laugh.

"Come back, Mr. Dove," said Anne. And Reginald came slowly across the lawn.⁶⁴

Katherine Mansfield criticized herself because "it's not inevitable," therefore, she could have avoided it. The analogy with the doves in the dove house has been used to wind up and bring home a point. Katherine Mansfield used "the doves unwarrantably" because the comparison between Reggie and Anne

⁶² Journal, p. 184.

⁶³ A. Sewell, op.cit., p. 10.

⁶⁴ Collected Stories, p. 294.

and the doves' pursuing each other was too crude and obvious. In other words, she had found an easy way to wind up her point.

Katherine Mansfield was against falseness and sentimentality because she sought to be true and honest. Human beings are not brave and kind (that is the grim truth!) and Katherine Mansfield is honest, sincere enough to expose the fact as she does in "Marriage à la Mode" and "A Cup of Tea." As Professor A. Sewell writes in his essay, "the bitterness in this story," Marriage à la Mode," is a protest against another kind of falseness, which she found in most of her contemporaries, in the so-called 'moderns.'⁶⁵ Katherine Mansfield disliked modern novels, and reading Jane Austen's Emma she wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell in December 1921:

Emma is really a perfect book -- don't you feel? I enjoy every page. I can't have enough of Miss Bates or Mr. Woodhouse's gruel or that charming Mr. Knightley. It's such an exquisite comfort to escape from the modern novels I have been forcibly reading. Wretched affairs! This fascinated pursuit of the sex adventure is beyond words boring! I am so bored by sex quâ sex, by the gay dog sniffing round the prostitute's bedroom or by the ultra modern snigger -- worse still -- that I could die -- at least.⁶⁶

What Katherine Mansfield admires in Jane Austen is how she "exists in the imagination as a writer who has remained wonderfully remote and apart and free from the flying burrs of this work -a

⁶⁵ A Sewell, op.cit., p. 14.

⁶⁶ Letters, II, 159.

day world."⁶⁷ Jane Austen refused to write the big novel of public life; she did not leave what she herself calls: "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory. . . ."⁶⁸ In her novels there is an intelligent detachment on her part. (This is one other thing Katherine Mansfield would have admired). Though she lived through the French and the Industrial revolutions she hardly ever mentions or uses them as backgrounds. She remained "wonderfully remote and apart and free" from the flying burrs of this work - a day world." She remained apart from these two major historical happenings, the French Revolution and the Industrial revolution. Jane Austen confined her plots to the world she knew: the world of the lesser English gentry.

Similarly, Katherine Mansfield was dissatisfied with modern poetry and after reading Emily Bronte's poems she wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell in June 1919:

Nowadays one of the chief reasons for one's 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.⁶⁹

She had enjoyed one of Emily Bronte's poems because of its "exquisite simplicity," and its being written not by "Emily disguised,"

⁶⁷ Novels and Novelists, p. 314.

⁶⁸ Jane Austen, Selected Letters, ed. R.W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 189.

⁶⁹ Letters, I, 234.

but by Emily. The very expression "Masked Ball" may stand for the pursuit of escape from reality, and a deliberate effort to flee from reality. Emily Bronte's poem was not "disguised" as one is at a "Masked Ball," but was opened and simple, simple for the light to shine through.

IX

A very important influence on the literature of the time was the First World War. Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and many others were deeply influenced by it. In Lawrence's letters there are many references to the war, such as "I am very miserable about the war."⁷⁰ In another letter he writes: "What colossal idiocy, this war."⁷¹ A longer allusion to the war occurs in his letter to Gordon Campbell (21 September 1914) where the terms "the ghastliness and mechanical, obsolete, hideous stupidity of war"⁷² are found. The following year, in November, Lawrence suffered a disaster: the suppression of his fourth novel, The Rainbow.

⁷⁰ The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. & Int. Harry T. Moore (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), I, 289.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 290.

⁷² Ibid., p. 291.

Katherine Mansfield too, especially with her dear brother's death experienced the disaster of war very severely. Middleton Murry notes in the Journal that: "no single one of Katherine Mansfield's friends who went to the war returned alive from it. This will explain the profound and ineradicable impression made upon her by the war, an impression which found utterance in the last year of her life in the story, "The Fly."⁷³ Katherine Mansfield was utterly shocked by her brother's death, and there are numerous references to him as well as remembrances of snatches of conversations with him recorded in her Journal. In November 1915 she wrote:

I think I have known for a long time that life was over for me, but I never realized it or acknowledged it until my brother died. . . . I am just as much dead as he is.⁷⁴

From 1915 onwards, the purpose of writing for Katherine Mansfield was: "I will write for you" (for her brother). The passage goes (October 29, 1915):

I believe in immortality because he is not here, and I long to join him. First, my darling, I've got things to do for both of us, and then I will come as quickly as I can. Dearest heart, I know you are there, and I live with you, and I will write for you.⁷⁵

⁷³ Journal, p. 58.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

Still in her Journal, a passage entitled A Dream is also about her brother.

In Katherine Mansfield's letters too there are a few references to the war. There are three major references to the war and its effect on the novel. In a letter to Middleton Murry (November 10, 1919) she wrote:

but the novel can't just leave the war out. There must have been a change of heart. It is really fearful to see the 'settling down' of human beings. I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same -- that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new moulds for our new thoughts and feelings. Is this exaggeration? What has been, stands.⁷⁶

It must be borne in mind that at the time Katherine Mansfield wrote the above passage as well as the next one, she was reviewing novels in the Athenaeum. In another letter which followed the previously quoted one by six days she wrote:

But seriously, the more I read the more I feel all these novels will not do. After them I'm a swollen sheep looking up who is not fed. And yet I feel one can lay down no rules. It's not in the least a question of material or style or plot. I can only think in terms like "a change of heart." I can't imagine how after the war these men can pick up the old threads as though it had never been. Speaking to you I'd say we have died and live again. How can that be the same life? It doesn't mean that life is the less precious or that 'the common things of

⁷⁶ Letters, I, 278-279.

light and day' are gone. They are not gone, they are intensified, they are illumined. Now we know ourselves for what we are. In a way it's a tragic knowledge: it's as though, even while we live again, we face death. But through Life: that's the point. We see death in life as we see death in a flower that is fresh unfolded. Our hymn is to the flower's beauty: we would make that beauty immortal because we know. Do you feel like this -- or otherwise -- or how?

. . . No, I mean 'deserts of vast eternity'. But the difference is (perhaps I'm wrong) I couldn't tell anybody bang out about those deserts: they are my secret. I might write about a boy eating strawberries or a woman combing her hair on a windy morning, and that is the only way I can ever mention them. But they must be there. Nothing less will do.⁷⁷

Among her own stories, "The Fly," "Six Years After" and "An Indiscreet Journey" use the theme of the war. In these three stories she comes closest to expressing "that change of heart," dissatisfaction or "desert" caused by the war. The ~~last~~ sentence in "The Fly" "But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened" shows how uneasy or uncomfortable the boss has been feeling remembering his son dead in the war. In the last part of "Six Years After," the mother while in the steamer, remembers her son dead in the war. She hears him call her and tell her about "a terrible dream" he had had. The story ends with the mother's thinking of her son's

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 287-288.

return, his wedding and even his first child who will be "a beautiful dark-haired boy born in the early morning -- a lovely morning -- spring!"⁷⁸ There occurs in the mother, I feel, what Katherine Mansfield herself calls "a change of heart;" she can now, six years after her son's death, think of her son's return and wedding.

"An Indiscreet Journey" is based on a trip Katherine Mansfield had taken to join Francis Carco in Gray, northeastern France, the zone of the army encampments. There is a long entry about the journey in her Journal (February 20, 1915). The story itself was written later as an expansion of the entry in her Journal and is written in the first person. On her way to Gray she sees the wounded sitting "against the walls sunning themselves." A passage from the story goes:

At all the bridges, the crossings, the stations, a petit soldat, all boots and bayonet. Forlorn and desolate he looked, like a little comic picture waiting for the joke to be written underneath. Is there really such a thing as war?⁷⁹

In the Novel, Katherine Mansfield objected not so much to the direct references to the World War ("bang out") as to that lack of "a change of heart. The war demanded, she felt, "a change of heart."

⁷⁸ Collected Stories, p. 470.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 630.

Writers using the theme of the war in their works fall in either of two categories: having actually experienced of war, they present a documentation or description of it, or they show us its impact on their characters. Works like All Quiet on the Western Front, A Farewell to Arms, and poetry by R. Brooke, Sassoon, Wilfred Owen would fall into the first category.

J. Braine's Room at the Top and Sartre's La Nausee would be appropriate to show the impact of war. These works are not so much a direct representation of war as they are to show its impact and after effect on individuals. The action of the novel occurs after the war. A passage from La Nausee will illustrate this change of feeling or attitude which occurred during the war.

The Autodidacte says to Antoine Roquentin:

"La guerre est venue et je me suis engage sans savoir pourquoi. Je suis reste deux annees sans comprendre, parce que la vie du front laissait peu de temps pour reflechir et puis les soldats etaient trop grossiers. A la fin de 1917, j'ai ete fait prisonnier. . . . Mais, dans le camp de concentration, j'ai appris a croire dans les hommes."

And he continues:

"Tous ces hommes etaient la, on les voyait a peine mais on les sentait contre soi, on entendait le bruit de leur respiration. . . . Une des premieres fois qu'on nous enferma dans ce hangar la presse etait si forte que je crus d'abord que j'allais etouffer, puis, subitement, une joie puissante s'eleva en moi, je defaillais presque: alors je sentis que j'aimais ces hommes comme des freres, j'aurais voulu les embrasser tous."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausee (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 145-146.

The book shows the utter boredom, purposelessness of life, loss of hope after the 1st World War. As is revealed in his description L'Autodictate in La Nausee has terribly suffered. Critics have hailed La Nausee as being the truest, the most sincere study of this attitude of hopelessness after the war in French Literature. To the Frenchman who has actually experienced war, the book is deeply meaningful.

John Braine's Room at the Top does not have the same strength La Nausee does. The war reference is to the 1941 blitz. The novel is optimistic. It is the story of Joe Lampton who has emerged from the fringes of poverty and squalor into the bright world of money.

Joe Lampton went past his old home in Dufton. Then he remembered the scene, "the living room," "the fireplace that had survived the bomb untouched." "Father and Mother had gone to bed when the bomb dropped." "They'd died instantly."⁸¹

The effect of the two World Wars on literature is undeniable. Certain new themes appeared, new notes were struck in creative writing: that of portraying, showing forth the utter disappointment and boredom of man or the descriptions of horror scenes, sheer cruelty as can be found in All Quiet on the Western Front. A good instance of a cruelty scene occurs in Chapter II:

⁸¹ John Braine, Room at the Top, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 100.

the hero's remaking of the Corporal's bed fourteen times in one morning, or his kneading "a pair of prehistoric boots that were as hard as iron for twenty four hours"⁸² are only a few facts about German camps.

X

Katherine Mansfield's close and "long look at life" accounts for her love of detail. She had written to Koteliansky on May 17, 1915: "Do you, too, feel an infinite delight and value in detail -- not for the sake of detail but for the life in the life of it."⁸³

On the same day she wrote in her Journal:

the amount of minute and delicate joy I get out of watching people and things when I am alone is simply enormous -- I really only have 'perfect fun' with myself. When I see a little girl running by on her heels like a fowl in the wet, and say 'My dear, there's a gertie', I laugh and enjoy it as I never would with anybody. Just the same applies to my feeling for what is called 'nature'.⁸⁴

And the entry ends with the words: "the detail of life, the life of life." Katherine Mansfield enjoyed watching or observing people for the sake of "the detail of life, the life of life."

⁸² Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front (New York; Fawcett World Library, 1963), p. 18.

⁸³ Letters, I, 28.

⁸⁴ Journal, pp. 29-30.

Four years later in a letter to Middleton Murry (October 15, 1919) she wrote: "But the older I grow, the more exquisite I want to be, fine down to every minutest particular, as a writer, . . ." ⁸⁵ In another letter written on October 17, 1920 she wrote to Middleton Murry: "of the life in each curve" ⁸⁶ of leaves. In her stories too she uses details which help to make them unforgettable. It may be the "pebble eyes" of the inspector in "An Indiscreet Journey," or still in the same story, "the ragged drifting light" of dusk that give a peculiar concreteness and reality to the story. The servant's arms in "Pension Séguin" are referred to as "her big red arms"; ⁸⁷ still in the same story, M. Séguin's spectacles are "all misted over with soup steam." ⁸⁸ In "Father and the Girls" the father's hands are referred to as "pale claws"; ⁸⁹ Emily, later, lifts "the slender steel catch" ⁹⁰ of the door. In "Widowed" the cat's "whiskers looked surprised." ⁹¹ All these details inserted in their appropriate places help to convey

⁸⁵ Letters, I, 254.

⁸⁶ Ibid., II, 56.

⁸⁷ Collected Stories, p. 591.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 593.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 479.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 481.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 518.

However, this is not to say that Katherine Mansfield abuses detail. She herself mentions the fact that the artist should be selective in his use of detail. She writes in her Journal on January 17, 1922:

The truth is one can get only so much into a story; there is always a sacrifice. One has to leave out what one knows and longs to use. Why? I haven't any idea, but there it is.⁹²

XI

"Long look at life" also includes her description of children and young girls. Katherine Mansfield's study of children and young girls is quite comprehensive and her gamut is wide. She studies children in their relationship with each other as in "At the Bay"; or the child-father bond starting with the resentment of the young child against the omnipotence of the parent as seen in "Sixpence," "A Suburban Fairy Tale," and "New Dresses." "The Little Girl" illustrates the change from the fear of the father's physical force to: "what a big heart you've got, father dear."⁹³ Another story shows how the daughter-father bond has persisted till life without the parent becomes almost impossible

⁹² Journal, p. 218.

⁹³ Collected Stories, p. 582.

as the two daughters, Con and Jug, believe that "father will never forgive us for this (burying him) -- never!" This is unmistakably "The Daughters of the Late Colonel."

There are children in most of Katherine Mansfield's stories. "An Indiscreet Journey," "A Dill Pickle" and "Je ne Parle pas Français" are among the few stories where children do not take part. Her children are genuine children; that is: they act and talk as children in real life act and talk. Katherine Mansfield, the writer, has entered into their lives (without) either sentimentality or a patronizing attitude. She has entered into the lives of Kezia, Lottie, Pip and little Rags playing together, or being afraid in the wash-house in "At the Bay!" Middleton Murry in his introduction to the Journal of Katherine Mansfield mentions "that the local printer . . . had exclaimed, on reading the MS., 'My! but these kids are real!'"⁹⁴ Although this exclamation by the printer refers to "Prelude," it could, I feel, be equally well applied to the other "kids" in Katherine Mansfield's other stories; such as: "A Suburban Fairy Tale," "See-Saw" and "The Little Girl."

In Prelude (part IX), Pip, Kezia, Isabel have seen a duck decapitation scene. Pat, the gardener, has with a little tomahawk

⁹⁴ Journal, p. x.

beheaded a duck. The children are horrified, and little "Kezia suddenly rushed at Pat and flung her arms round his legs and butted her head as hard as she could against his knees." The horror of the scene affected little Kezia and she screamed: "Put head back! Put head back!"

The passage is quoted in extenso:

When he stooped to move her she would not let go or take her head away. She held on as hard as she could and sobbed: "Head back! Head back!" until it sounded like a loud strange hiccup.

"It's stopped. It's tumbled over. It's dead," said Pip.

Pat dragged Kezia up into his arms. Her sun-bonnet had fallen back, but she would not let him look at her face. No, she pressed her face into a bone in his shoulder and clasped her arms round his neck.

The children stopped screaming as suddenly as they had begun. They stood round the dead duck. Rags was not frightened of the head anymore. He knelt down and stroked it now.

"I don't think the head is quite dead yet," he said. "Do you think it would keep alive if I gave it something to drink?"

But Pip got very cross: "Bah! You baby." He whistled to Snooker and went off.

When Isabel went up to Lottie, Lottie snatched away.

"What are you always touching me for, Isabel?"

"There now," said Pat to Kezia. "There's the grand little girl."

She put up her hands and touched his ears. She felt something. Slowly she raised her quivering face and looked. Pat wore little round gold ear-rings. She never knew that men wore ear-rings. She was very much surprised.

"Do they come on and off?" she asked huskily.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Collected Stories, pp. 46-47.

We have in these few lines a typical child's behaviour. Kezia has now forgotten the duck scene, now she has noticed Pat's gold ear-rings. A child's span of attention is short, and the duck incident is discarded, and over now.

Three stories "Her First Ball," "The Wind Blows" and "The Young Girl" are devoted to young girls -- adolescents on the brink of growing up. We see the indecision or puzzlement of Mrs. Raddick's daughter in "The Young Girl." She does not want to go into the casino with her mother, or appear to be excited about food like Hennie. "She was bored." "'I'm always waiting -- in all kinds of places. . . .'"⁹⁶ she says. As Professor A. Sewell writes: "she ^{is} feels restless and self-tortured."⁹⁷

Leila, in "Her First Ball" while still "in the cab" on her way to the ball was feeling excited:

Oh, dear, how hard it was to be indifferent like the others! She tried not to smile too much; she tried not to care. But every single thing was so new and exciting . . . Meg's tuberose, Jose's long loop of amber, Laura's little dark head, pushing above her white fur like a flower through snow.⁹⁸

"The Wind Blows" shows the emotional turmoil of an adolescent girl. The wind blows through the story, it shakes the house rattles the windows, banging a piece of iron on the roof and makes her bed

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 301.

⁹⁷ A. Sewell, op.cit., p. 31.

⁹⁸ Collected Stories, p. 336.

tremble. "She has a music lesson at ten o'clock. At the thought, the minor movement of the Beethoven begins to play in her head, . . ."

Later, on her way to her lesson, "her skirt flies up above her waist; she tries to beat it down, tuck it between her legs while she stoops, but it is no use -- up it flies. All the trees and bushes beat about her."⁹⁹ And the story ends with the words: "The wind -- the wind."

XII

Besides children and young girls, flowers too are involved in "a long look at life." Katherine Mansfield likes flowers and she makes use of them in her stories and Journal. There are many instances in her letters where she expresses her desire for a house with a garden and flowers. It is her love of exactness that makes her know their names and colours and mention details about them. She does not dispose of flowers vaguely or in general terms. In "At the Bay" she writes:

Dazzling white the picotees shone; the golden-eyed marigolds glittered; the nasturtiums wreathed the verandah poles in green and gold flame.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 221.

We have flowers in the bedroom as in "All Serene"; petunias are "purple floppy flowers."¹⁰¹

Katherine Mansfield knows her flowers so well that even those traced on the wall paper are real. In "Prelude," Isabel "turned over to the wall and idly, with one finger, she traced a poppy on the wall-paper with a leaf and a stem and a fat bursting bud. In the quiet, and under her tracing finger, the poppy seemed to come alive. She could feel the sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud."¹⁰²

A little later, still in "Prelude," we have two consecutive paragraphs on flowers in the garden as Kezia sees them:

. . . The camellias were in bloom, white and crimson and pink and white striped with flashing leaves. You could not see a leaf on the syringa bushes for the white clusters. The roses were in flower -- gentlemen's button-hole roses, little white ones, but far too full of insects to hold under anyone's nose, pink monthly roses with a ring of fallen petals round the bushes, cabbage roses on thick stalks, moss roses, always in bud, pink smooth beauties opening curl on curl, red ones so dark they seemed to turn back as they fell, and a certain exquisite cream kind with a slender red stem and bright scarlet leaves.

There were clumps of fairy bells, and all kinds of geraniums, and there were little trees of verbena

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 486.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 27.

and bluish lavender bushes and a bed of pelargoniums with velvet eyes and leaves like moths' wings. There was a bed of nothing but mignonette and another of nothing but pansies -- borders of double and single daisies and all kinds of little tufty plants she had never seen before.

Katherine Mansfield's stories almost abound with flowers and gardens. In "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" "the hollyhocks glowed in the cottage gardens."¹⁰⁴ Mary Bezley in "The Singing Lesson" gives Miss Meadows a chrysanthemum. In "The Doll's House," Isabel, Lottie and Kezia "brushed through the thick buttercups."¹⁰⁵ In "Weak Heart," an unfinished story, daffs, wild snowdrops, hyacinths and violets are mentioned in a single paragraph.¹⁰⁶

In "The Garden-Party" too, we have a description of flowers. The florist brings "a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies -- canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems."¹⁰⁷

We enjoy looking at flowers, in our sitting rooms or gardens. They somehow seem to give us a feeling of pleasure. Katherine Mansfield regarded flowers as an overtone of the idea of beauty

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 32, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 394.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 512.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 249.

triumphing over ugliness.

Reading Katherine Mansfield's stories and especially her flower descriptions, one is struck by her sensitivity to colour. She uses colour throughout her stories. Her flowers are very colourful. Her palet seems to be very rich with its vast variety of shades of one colour or different colours. We have in "Father and the Girls," "blue-green leaves," and "bright-green curly suckers,"¹⁰⁸ or "the green and gold garden, . . ."¹⁰⁹ In "Prelude," we have "red clouds on a faint green sky. . . ."¹¹⁰ Later, in part IX, we have another colourful bit of scenery described concisely: "Tall bushes overhung the stream with red leaves and yellow flowers and clusters of blackberries."¹¹¹ In Violet, the "bushes were touched with pink and crimson, and against the blue sky the trees stood sheathed in gold."¹¹² In "At the Bay," "dazzling white the picotees shone; the golden eyed marigolds glittered; the nasturtiums wreathed the veranda poles in green and gold frame."¹¹³ Linda (in the same story) seeing "the yellow hats of the boatmen"¹¹⁴ reminds one of Van Gogh. At the beginning of "Honeymoon," George and Fanny

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 476.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 482.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 44.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 597.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 221.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

went "under the green and gold shade of the plane trees, . . ."¹¹⁵
The darkness of the shade of red of the carnation in "Carnation"
is "deep, deep red one, that looked as though it had been dipped
in wine and left in the dark to dry."¹¹⁶ In "The Doves' Nest" the
glass dish contains flowers in many colours, "half yellow, half
blue, hung over the edge, wisps of green trailed across and in the
middle there was a large scarlet rose."¹¹⁷ Mr. Neave, the father,
in "An Ideal Family" sees in their garden "the pinkish, bluish
masses" of hydrangeas.¹¹⁸ Edna, in "Something Childish But Very
Natural," "sat down on the bench, in the pretty garden all white
and yellow with spring flowers."¹¹⁹ Later, she and Henry "walked ...
in through the gate and up the grassy path between the pink and
white trees." The chrysanthemum in "The Singing Lesson" is "a
beautiful yellow."¹²⁰

In Katherine Mansfield's letters too there are constant
references to flowers and trees. It would be too long to refer to
all the quotations here, but it must be mentioned that in her
stories as well as in her letters there are different kinds of
flowers. There is no doubt that Katherine Mansfield likes flowers
very much. Violets, roses, jonquils, narcissi, tulips, geraniums

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 402.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 664.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 455.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 370.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 624.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 345.

are only some of the names mentioned. There also is an instance where Katherine Mansfield saw gardens drift by (as she couldn't get to sleep), and wrote: "the most incredible sort of tropical gardens with glimpses of palaces. . . . Trees I've never seen or imagined -- trees like feathers and silver trees and others quite white with huge transparent leaves passed and passed."¹²¹ An almost entire letter written in February 1920 to Middleton Murry deals with flowers and mention is made here of almond trees in flower, wild cherry trees, along with wild hyacinths and violets. Still in another letter written to the Hon. Dorothy Brett on January 26, 1922 Katherine Mansfield writes:

My trouble is I had so many flowers when I was little, I got to know them so well that they are simply the breath of life to me. It's no ordinary love; it's a passion.¹²²

Katherine Mansfield uses flowers in her stories not for the sake of mentioning names of flowers, but rather for the sake of what has already been mentioned earlier: "the detail of life, the life of life."

XIII

Katherine Mansfield's dealing with the time element in her

¹²¹ Letters, I, 305.

¹²² Ibid., II, 178.

stories is also part of her "long look at life." There seldom is straight-forward chronological narration, but rather the flash back technique is used. Time is shifted from the present to the past or even to the future as is the case in "At the Bay" and "Prelude." Katherine Mansfield's shift of tense is done with great skill. In "A Birthday," Andreas Binzer remembers hearing the church bells ring when he and his wife had been engaged some four years ago. He recalls:

The way she'd run down the road to meet him
after business! And the way she laughed when
they were looking for a house. By Jove! that
laugh of hers!¹²³

Soon after, he is brought back to reality by the "wailing cry" of his wife in bed with child birth.

Miss Brill too, after having studied the various couples in the park, recalls the past; "her English pupils," and "the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden."¹²⁴ She then recalls his "frail head," "the hollowed eyes," "the open mouth and the high pinched nose." Soon, the fusion between the past, the present

¹²³ Collected Stories, p. 755.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 334.

and the future is made in Miss Brill's mind as we read:

But suddenly he was having his paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress -- are ye"? And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently; "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."¹²⁵

The fusion is made because earlier in the story she had been herself as an actress in the park, taking part in the singing with the others. "Even she had a part and came every Sunday," "she was part of the performance,"..

In "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," we have a constant shift of tense from present to past, further past, glances into the empty future and back to the present.

The opening sentence: "The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives"¹²⁶ shifts from the present into the past. Con and Jug are discussing the disposition of their dead father's effects; then time goes back a few days more -- Nurse Andrews will stay on with them for a week -- a return to time present -- Mr. Farolles calls on them, very eager to give them "a little Communion" and "arrange for the funeral" too. The scene goes back to the past again -- and the funeral -- the present again -- the problem of

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 334.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

Father's things; should the watch go to Benny, or Cyril the grandson? The mentioning of Cyril finds in the past again a former visit by Cyril which in turn comes right up to the present where Cyril and the two daughters have tea with meringues and cakes and go to the old man's room to see him. The story is brought back to the present by Kate's bursting into the room and asking what they would like -- "fried or boiled fish."

In "The Tiredness of Rosabel" time and place shift at one and the same time. Rosabel is in her room, but she sees and imagines herself in her dreamed "boudoir" dismissing the servant¹²⁷ and going to the park the next morning.

Katherine Mansfield, herself, was very conscious and explicit about her method of construction. She writes about one of her unfinished stories, "Weak Heart," in her Journal, on November 21, 1921:

To-day I began to write, seriously, "The Weak Heart," -- a story which fascinates me deeply. What I feel it needs so peculiarly is a very subtle variation of 'tense' from the present to the past and back again -- and softness, lightness, and the feeling that all is in bud, with a play of humour over the character of Ronnie. And the feeling of the Thorndon Baths, the wet, moist, oozy . . . no, I know how it must be done.¹²⁸

Although the story is unfinished there is a subtle variation

¹²⁷ Collected Stories, p. 529.

¹²⁸ Journal, p. 197.

of tense from the present to the past. It is a sunny and still afternoon. Mrs. Bengel, Edie's mother, is getting ready to go out. Edie has been playing the piano from memory. "She plays on desperately until her nose is white and her heart beats."¹²⁹ Suddenly the action shifts into the future with Edie's apprehension of being accepted or refused from Miss Farmer's music school. We are back in the past again and are told the presents Edie received on her fourteenth birthday. Then emerges the character of Roddie (Ronnie in the Journal entry). He has a complete new outfit for the occasion, "A black serge suit, a black tie," and "a dazzling white straw hat with a broad black band."¹³⁰ The play of humour over the character of Roddie (Ronnie) is achieved as we see him dashing and running through the cemetery, down the avenue, "his suit was very tight and hot." He reached the gate, "up the steps, in at the front door, through the hall, up to the drawing room."¹³¹ And the story ends:

"Edie!" called Roddie. "Edie, old girl!"
And he gave a low strange squawk and cried
"Edie!" and stared across at Edie's piano.
But cold, solemn, as if frozen, heavily
the piano stared back at Roddie. Then it
answered, but on its own behalf, on behalf of
the house and the violet patch, the garden,
the velvet tree at the corner of May Street,
and all that was delightful: "There is nobody
here of that name, young man!"¹³²

¹²⁹ Collected Stories, p. 513.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 515.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 515.

¹³² Ibid., p. 515.

XIV

In her stories Katherine Mansfield shifts her point of view into the minds of her characters, from one character to the other. She becomes for a moment, as it were, the character and expresses his thought. She had "Negative Capability"¹³³ or in Coleridge's expression was a "Proteus."¹³⁴ She herself was very conscious of this quality as it may be illustrated from her letters. In 1920 she wrote about one of her stories in a letter entitled Dream II "I am writing -- do you know the feeling? -- and until this story is finished I am engulfed. . . . It seizes me -- swallows me completely."¹³⁵ On November 3 of the same year she wrote in another letter:

¹³³ Keats in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas (22 December 1817) used the words Negative Capability. He wrote: "at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously -- I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, . . ." The Letters of John Keats, p. 71). In a letter to Richard Wodehouse (27 October 1818) he wrote: "A Poet . . . has no Identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body -- The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women . . . the poet has none; no identity -- . . ." (Ibid., p. 227).

¹³⁴ Coleridge used the terms "Proteus" and "myriad-minded" in connexion with Shakespeare. In Chapter XV of his Biographia Literaria which is an essay on Venus and Adonis and Lucrece he wrote: "our myriad-minded Shakespeare." Concluding the same essay he wrote about Shakespeare: "... darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, . . . Proteus of the fire and the flood; . . ." He then wrote: "Shakespeare becomes all things, . . ." (Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), II), 13, 20).

¹³⁵ Letters, II, 71.

What a QUEER business writing is! I don't know. I don't believe other people are ever as foolishly excited as I am when I'm working. How could they be? Writers would have to live in trees. I've been this man, been this woman. I've stood for hours on the Auckland Wharf. I've been out in the stream waiting to be berthed -- I've been a seagull hovering at the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn't as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, God knows. But one IS the spectacle for the time.¹³⁶

Similarly in a letter to Sylvia Lynd in January 1921 she wrote: "But when I am writing of 'another' I want so to lose myself in the soul of the other that I am not. . . ."¹³⁷

Or later, in one of her last letters to her father, Sir Harold Beauchamp, (July 9, 1922) she wrote:

I have just finished a story with a canary for the hero, and almost feel I have lived in a cage and pecked a piece of chickweed myself.¹³⁸

Katherine Mansfield in a letter to Hon. Dorothy Brett on October 11, 1917 wrote:

When I pass an apple stall I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple, too, and that at any moment I can produce an apple, miraculously, out of my being, like the conjuror produces the egg. . . .
When you paint apples do you feel that your

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 225.

breasts and your knees become apples, too?
Or do you think this the greatest nonsense.
I don't. I am sure it is not. When I write
about ducks I swear that I am a white duck
with a round eye, floating on a pond fringed
with yellow -- blobs and taking an occasional
dart down beneath me, . . . In fact the whole
process of becoming the duck (what Lawrence
would perhaps call this consummation with the
duck or the apple!) is so thrilling that I can
hardly breathe, only to think about it. For
although that is as far as most people can get,
it is really only the 'prelude'. There follows
the moment when you are more duck, more apple,
or more Natasha than any of these objects could
ever possibly be, and so you create them anew.¹³⁹

.....

"Forgive me, but that is why I believe in tech-
nique, too. (You asked me if I did). I do just
because I don't see how art is going to make that
divine spring into the bounding outline of things
if it hasn't passed through the process of trying
to become these things before recreating them."¹⁴⁰

Note that we have here the very same word "become" that
Coleridge used in reference to Shakespeare: that he "becomes all
things." In another letter ^{to} Sydney and Viola Schiff on May 2, 1920
she wrote: "one must inhabit the other mind and know more of the
other mind and your secret knowledge is the light in which all is
steeped."¹⁴¹

In October 1921 she wrote in her Journal: "One must learn,
one must practise, to forget ^{oneself} himself. I can't tell the truth about

¹³⁹ Letters, I, 82.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁴¹ Letters, II, 33.

Aunt Anne unless I am free to look into her life without self-consciousness."¹⁴²

Consequently, it would be appropriate to show here how in her stories Katherine Mansfield made use of this quality. In the opening of "Prelude," in the very first sentence, we shift into the mind of Mrs. Linda Burnell in the passage:

There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled; the grand-mother's lap was full and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance.¹⁴³

"An inch of room," and "a lump of a child" are both Mrs. Linda Burnell's unexpressed thoughts.

"Prelude" is in twelve parts, and we are presented in turn with the different characters. However, sometimes within the same scene or part the point of view may shift from one character to another. Thus in part VI we first have the grand-mother in the kitchen "washing the breakfast dishes." "She had noticed yesterday that a few tiny corkscrew tendrils had come right through some cracks in the scullery ceiling and all the windows of the lean-to had a thick frill of ruffled green."¹⁴⁴ Later her daughter, Beryl Fairfield comes in very impatiently and asks

¹⁴² Journal, p. 195.

¹⁴³ Collected Stories, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

where to hang two pictures. In comes Mrs. Linda Burnell, the children's mother, eager to have breakfast. Her mother, Mrs. Fairfield mentions her children especially Kezia, and from that point on, the point of view shifts to Kezia playing alone in the garden. But suddenly something stuck her, something "she had never seen anything like . . . before."¹⁴⁵ And then she saw her mother coming down the path; the part ends with:

"Mother, what is it?" asked Kezia.

Linda looked up at the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem. High above them, as though becalmed in the air, and yet holding so fast to the earth it grew from, it might have had claws instead of roots. The curving leaves seemed to be hiding something; the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it.

"That is an aloe, Kezia," said her mother.

"Does it ever have any flowers?"

"Yes, Kezia," and Linda smiled down at her, and half shut hereyes. "Once every hundred years."¹⁴⁶

The end of part VII focusses on Miss Beryl Fairfield.

She is sitting on a hassock, singing and playing the guitar. She is daydreaming when she is disturbed by Alice, the servant girl.

"Alice lunged in with a heavy black iron tray."¹⁴⁷ Here again,

I feel, "lunged in" expresses Beryl Fairfield's unexpressed thought. She did not like the servant girl: "she could not stand

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

that fool of a girl."¹⁴⁸

There is another very good instance of this change of focus in Part II of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel." Nurse Andrews, Con and Jug are having breakfast. Con rings for the maid. "And proud young Kate, the enchanted princess, came in to see what the old tabbies wanted now."¹⁴⁹ In this single sentence the focus changes twice. The two sisters see the maid as "proud" and "enchanted princess," while the maid herself sees the two sisters as "the old tabbies."

In "Weak Heart" too we have a passage seen through the eyes of Mrs. Bengel. "Edie's hands drop from the keys. She squeezes them between her knees, her head is bent, her curls are fallen forward."¹⁵⁰ It is the mother, who sees her daughter's hands dropped from the keys or that her curls are fallen forward. Similarly it still is the mother who sees "it is dusky in the drawing room, the top of the piano is open."¹⁵¹

Katherine Mansfield's "Negative Capability" enables her to create her characters through oblique impersonation. We learn about one character from another. In "Je Ne Parle Pas Français"

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 513.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 513.

we learn about Mouse and Dick Harmon through Raoul Duquette, who tells the story. In "A Bad Idea" (an unfinished story) it is the husband who tells the story in the first person. Another unfinished story, "A Married Man's Story" is told by the husband.

XV

Katherine Mansfield herself, "the artist, takes a long look at life" and says softly "so this is what life is, is it? And (she) proceeds to express that. All the rest (she) leaves." "A long look at life" includes Beauty triumphing over Ugliness, flowers, children, the war, shifting from time present to time past and ever future. Moreover, was it not her attempt to lose her "self-consciousness" in order to be able to create her people, what she herself calls in her Journal on May 31, 1919: "my people: of 'life' -- it is Life,"¹⁵² that made her retire at Fontainebleau?

¹⁵² Journal, p. 110.

CHAPTER III

NOVELS AND NOVELISTS

I

Katherine Mansfield wrote no novels, although she had a few "false starts" at novel writing. "The Aloe," "Brave Love," "At Karori," "Maata," all using the New Zealand background, are titles mentioned in her letters and Journal for prospective novels. She wrote about her novel in a letter to Middleton Murry (March 25, 1915):

Not big, almost grotesque in shape -- I mean perhaps heavy -- with people rather dark and seen strangely as they move in the sharp light and shadow; and I want bright shivering lights in it, and the sound of water.¹

But by 1916, she had abandoned the idea of writing novels. In her Journal on January 22 she wrote: "No novels, no problem stories, nothing that is not simple, open."² The expression "nothing that is not simple" reminds one of another expression, quoted earlier "simple enough, as one would be simple before God." One is simple before God, as one is not trying to be what one is not. What Katherine Mansfield means by the term "simple" in connexion with her work is that it will not be tainted. The works

¹ Letters, I, 18.

² Journal, p. 43.

she intends to write will be simple, open in the sense that they will present life as it is and her true vision of life. The vision will be clear.

In the introductory note preceding Novels and Novelists, we are told that from April 1919 to October 1920, Katherine Mansfield, regularly reviewed fiction for The Athenaeum, edited by Middleton Murry. As we read these reviews, we form the opinion that Katherine Mansfield was an eager and sensitive reviewer. There are about a hundred and fifty reviews collected in the work Novels and Novelists. Among the large number of authors some only have survived as famous. We come across such names as Conrad, Galsworthy, Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, Somerset Maugham and D.H. Lawrence.

In his introduction to the Journal of Katherine Mansfield Middleton Murry writes: "She turned away from modern literature: so little of contemporary work seemed to her to be 'true'. 'The writers are not humble,' she used to say; they were not serving the great purpose which literature exists to serve."³

In October 1920 she wrote to Middleton Murry "the books I read nowadays astound me."⁴ Katherine Mansfield turned away

³ Ibid., p. xi.

⁴ Letters, II, 57.

from modern literature because it did not correspond with what Miss Sylvia Berkman calls "the vision of life she had conceived under the lesson of her own experience; . . ." ⁵ Miss Berkman then brings up the point that it is because of this similarity or compatibility of visions with the Russian masters and Chekhov in particular, that Katherine Mansfield "used their works almost without exception as a touchstone of literary failure or success." This statement is, I feel, true only to a certain extent, because "almost without exception" is an exaggeration. Katherine Mansfield's experience in life was hard, unpleasant, and a continuously prolonged struggle especially at the end of her life. Her experience in life influenced strongly her vision of life. Mention was made that Katherine Mansfield was an eager reviewer. In 1918 she quoted a passage from Dr. Johnson in her Scrapbook which is evidence of how seriously and eagerly she considered her position of fiction reviewer. The passage goes:

"Nobody has the right to put another under such a difficulty that he must either hurt the person by telling the truth or hurt himself by telling what is not true. . . . Therefore a man who is asked by an author what he thinks of his work is put to the torture, and is not obliged to speak the truth; so that what he says is not considered as his opinion, yet he has said it and cannot retract his opinion." ⁶

⁵ Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 115.

⁶ The Scrapbook, p. 129.

Besides the reviews collected and published under the title Novels and Novelists, time and again in her letters Katherine Mansfield discusses authors and their works. To Middleton Murry she wrote (October 17, 1920):

a writer must have knowledge -- he must make
one feel the ground is firm beneath his feet.⁷

A writer must know his people, the types and characters he is writing about. He must know his characters in their behaviour, their selfishness, their brutality and their attitudes. To Hugh Walpole Katherine Mansfield wrote in the same year: "what English writers lack today is experience of Life. They are self-imprisoned."⁸ This statement is not very remote from the one quoted earlier.

However, knowledge on the author's part does not mean "to amass observations -- to crowd and crowd his book with figures, scenes, bizarre and fantastic environments, queer people, oddities."⁹

Although a writer must have knowledge, he must also break new ground as Katherine Mansfield writes reviewing True Love by Alan Monkhouse. It is precisely here in his essay On The Function of the Novelist, that Joyce Cary finds fault with Emile Zola when he writes about Zola in general and his novel Nana in particular:

⁷ Letters, II, 57.

⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹ Novels and Novelists, p. 282.

He did not give a new intuition, much less a great one, if we mean by great rich in scope.¹⁰

Zola in Nana did not break new ground. "He made a world rich in characters, but they move on a surface." There is no difference between Nana and any other prostitute. The novel Nana as a whole does not show a new intuition in the workings of the mind of Nana. Zola for Joyce Cary, as Alan Monkhouse for Katherine Mansfield, would not be "time servers" to use Cary's expression, because the characters have neither "a new intuition" nor are "rich in scope."¹¹

¹⁰ L. Brown and P. Perrin (eds.) A Quarto of Modern Literature, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 543.

¹¹ A good instance of "a new intuition" in the character occurs in Sartre's La Nausée. The passage is too long to quote in extenso but here are a few lines: "Je vois ma main, qui s'épanouit sur la table. Elle vit -- c'est moi. Elle s'ouvre, les doigts se déploient et pointent. Elle est sur le dos. Elle me montre son ventre gras. Elle a l'air d'une bête à la renverse. Les doigts, ce sont les pattes." (La Nausée, p. 128). The passage gives new intuition because Antoine Roquentin, the hero, sees his own hand at one and the same time as part of himself and not a part of himself. He sees his hands as "deux betes qui s'agitent au bout de mes bras."

II

It was mentioned in the last chapter that Katherine Mansfield was against the problem novel. We will deal in separate sections with the shortcomings which make a novel a problem novel. Illustrations will be provided from novels and novelists.

One of the most basic shortcomings is the absence of sentiment, and Katherine Mansfield criticizes Esther Waters by George Moore for this absence of sentiment. She writes in her review:

it has not, from first to last, the faintest stirring of the breath of life. . . . What it comes to is that we believe that emotion is essential to a work of art; it is that which makes a work of art a unity. Without emotion writing is dead; it becomes a record instead of a revelation, for the sense of revelation comes from that emotional reaction which the artist felt and was impelled to communicate. To contemplate the object, to let it make its own impression -- which is Mr. Moore's way in Esther Waters -- is not enough. There must be an initial emotion felt by the writer, and all that he sees is saturated in that emotional quality. It

alone can give incidence and sequence, character and background, a close and intimate unity.¹²

What Katherine Mansfield means by "emotion" in this passage is twofold: it is first of all, the emotion felt by the writer as he experiences the revelation, and secondly, the "Negative Capability," or the apocalyptic ecstasis in which the writer feels himself to lose his own identity and find another identity in his character. George Moore may have had some "feeling" for the character of Esther Waters, but we do not feel he has lost himself, his own identity and found another in Esther Water's identity.

On reading the book we are aware of the "amount of sheer labour that has gone to its execution," but it "has no emotion." It is a clever study of a kitchen-maid's life, but the study is cold. Katherine Mansfield writes quoting Jacques in As You Like It: "As dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." The meaning of the quotation from the play and, of her expression "it has not, . . . the faintest stirring of the breath of life," are quite near to each other. No detail escapes the author's "observation." There is a complete description of the bedroom shared by Esther Waters and Margaret, the housemaid. We learn that "one end of the room was under the roof,"¹³ and what the coloured pictures on the wall represented. We have a display of scenes

¹² Novels and Novelists, pp. 245-246.

¹³ George Moore, Esther Waters, (New York: Brentano's, n.d., p. 9.

all carefully described in detail.

III

Katherine Mansfield criticized Virginia Woolf because of her deliberateness. Reviewing Night and Day she wrote:

It is extremely cultivated, distinguished and brilliant, but above all -- deliberate. There is not a chapter where one is unconscious of the writer, of her personality, her point of view, and her control of the situation. We feel that nothing has been imposed on her: she has chosen her world, selected her principal characters with the nicest care, and having traced a circle round them so that they exist and are free within its confines, she has proceeded, with rare appreciativeness, to register her observations.¹⁴

What she means by the sentence: "There is not a chapter where one is unconscious of the writer, of her personality, . . ." is sediment; the art of projection on the writer's part has not been made. The writer has not lost her own identity and found another identity in her character. Moreover, the novel does not show the author loving anyone of her characters, and none of the characters have a life of their own. Denham over-hearing all the conversation between Rodney and Katherine, though walking with Sandys a little behind, shows, I think, complete con-

¹⁴ Novels and Novelists, p. 113.

trol of the situation. Then, having parted with Sandys, he joins Katherine and Rodney.¹⁵ This is done very deliberately. Night and Day is about Katherine Hilbery's attempt to reconcile the world of reality with that of the dream, night and day. Katherine Hilbery herself puts it so in the novel:

Why, she reflected, should there be this perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other side of which it was contemplative and dark as night? Was it not possible to step from one to the other, erect, and without essential change?¹⁶

However, from other reviews included in Virginia Woolf's A Writer's Diary we have others' opinions about Night and Day. Clive Bell thought of the novel as "no doubt a work of the highest genius."¹⁷ In the same entry, Virginia Woolf mentions that The Times too wrote "high praise."¹⁸

What Katherine Mansfield objects in Night and Day is the fact that it has not accepted "the fact of a new world."¹⁹ She expresses it thus:

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, Night and Day (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 66.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁹ Novels and Novelists, p. 112.

As for the real world, the world for Mr. and Mrs. Hilbery, William Rodney, Cassandra Otway -- there we appreciate to the full the author's exquisite generosity. It is so far away, so shut and sealed from us to-day. What could be more remote than the house at Cheyne Walk, standing up in the night, with its three long windows gilded with light, its drawn velvet curtains, and the knowledge that within a young creature is playing Mozart, Mrs. Hilbery is wishing there were more young men like Hamlet, and Katherine and Rodney are faced by the incredible sight of Denham, outside in the dark, walking up and down. . . .²⁰

In the last paragraph of the review she writes:

We had thought that this world was vanished for ever, that it was impossible to find on the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening.

I think I know what Katherine Mansfield means by accepting "the new world." It is the fact of accepting the World War. The world existing before the War had "vanished for ever" and it is remote now to write about a large house "standing up in the night, with its three long windows gilded with light, its drawn velvet curtains, and the knowledge that within a young creature is playing Mozart, Mrs. Hilbery is wishing there were more young men like Hamlet, and Katherine and Rodney are faced by the incredible sight of Denham, outside in the dark, walking up and down. . . ."

This type of approach is considered passe now after the World War. Moreover, the novel, Night and Day is a problem novel because of its aloofness, and remoteness. What Katherine Mansfield means

²⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

by the novel accepting the new world is the fact that the artist has not taken "a long look at life and said "softly so this is what life is, is it?"

Considering one of Katherine Mansfield's best stories, The Daughters of the Late Colonel, we may describe it as a problem story, due to the fact that the story superficially presents a problem: separation by death. The two daughters, Constantia and Josephine, feel somehow at a loss after their father's death. They feel perplexed by knowing that life will be different for them from now on. Katherine Mansfield herself believed that the story was "so plain and unadorned," and in a letter to Middleton Murry (May 9, 1921) she wrote: "I felt it might fall dead flat. It's so plain and unadorned."²¹ But through one of her letters to William Gerhardt (June 23, 1921) we know that many of her readers did not think so at all. The letter is exclusively about "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and is quoted here in extenso:

I cannot tell you how happy I am to know that "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" has given you pleasure. While I was writing that story I lived for it but when it was finished, I confess I hoped very much that my readers would understand what was trying to express. But very few did. They thought it was 'cruel'; they thought I was 'sneering' at Jug and Constantia; or they thought it was 'drab'. And in the last paragraph I was "poking fun at the poor old things."

It's almost terrifying to be so misunder-

²¹ Letters, II, 102.

stood. There was a moment when I first had "the idea" when I saw the two sisters as amusing; but the moment I looked deeper (let me be quite frank) I bowed down to the beauty that was hidden in their lives and to discover that was all my desire. . . . All was meant, of course, to lead up to that last paragraph, when my two flowerless ones turned with that timid gesture, to the sun. "Perhaps now. . . ." And after that, it seemed to me, they died as surely as Father was dead.²²

At the end of the story both sisters have forgotten what they were going to say, yet each one of them has, in her own way, gone through an experience. There is a kind of symbolism in the sentence: "She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been." Moreover, it is precisely this kind of symbolism that Katherine Mansfield wanted from novels. This kind of symbolism adds to the meaning and potency of the story, and reinforces the vision. "She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been." A cloud, which gives an implication of sadness had come and veiled the sun. Josephine understood that the death of the father had taken away the good times. They are gone forever. True that life will never be the same again, but she had come through her experience as had her sister Constantia through hers to accept it.

About the same story, she wrote later to the Hon. Dorothy Brett on November 11, 1921: "For I put my all into that story and hardly anyone saw what I was getting at. Even dear old Hardy told me to write more about those sisters. As if there

²² Ibid., p. 120.

was any more to say!"²³

Another story, too, The Garden-Party, may be understood as a problem story. There is her note in her Journal that although she first thought of it "as a nice story," three days later (October 16, 1921) she wrote about it, still in her Journal: "But that is not good enough, either. . . ." ²⁴ In a letter to William Gerhardt (March 13, 1922) she wrote:

And yes, that is what I tried to convey in "The Garden-Party." The diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything, Death included. That is bewildering for a person of Laura's age. She feels things ought to happen differently. First one and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it. Laura says, "But all these things must not happen at once." And Life answers, "Why not? How are they divided from each other." And they do all happen, it is inevitable. And it seems to me there is beauty in that inevitability.²⁵

What Katherine Mansfield is writing about is the diversity, and inevitability in life.

The same story makes use of a technique that Katherine Mansfield was fond of, symbolism. Laura and her mother Mrs. Sheridan are placing the flags on the sandwiches for the garden party. "'Egg and mice'" Mrs. Sheridan said not being able to see

²³ Ibid., p. 150.

²⁴ Journal, p. 193.

²⁵ Letters, II, 196.

that the word is "olive." Early in the story, we are struck the unpleasant note which will be fully developed later. Mice are unpleasant, especially on a sandwich flag!

IV

Crisis in the novel is one of the most important factors.

Katherine Mansfield reviewing Heritage by V. Sackville West in May 1919 wrote:

The crisis, then, is the chief of our 'central points of significance' and the endeavours and the emotions are stages on our journey towards or away from it. For without it, the form of the novel, as we see it, is lost. Without it, how are we to appreciate the importance of one 'spiritual event' rather than another? What is to prevent each being unrelated -- complete in itself -- if the gradual unfolding in growing, gaining light is not to be followed by one blazing moment?²⁶

Katherine Mansfield is not the first to advocate crisis, so that she was not putting forth a new idea or concept.²⁷

²⁶ Novels and Novelists, p. 32.

²⁷ Aristotle in his Poetics writes that revolution or change and discovery may occur in tragedy. He then explains both terms and writes: "A revolution is a change . . . into the reverse of what is expected from the circumstances of the action; . . ." (Poetics and Rhetoric, intro. T.A. Morton London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1955, p. 23). Aristotle then mentions the instance in Oedipus: "the messenger, . . . by making known to him (Oedipus) his real birth, produces an effect directly contrary to his intention." Moreover, when Oedipus discovers that he has slain his (cont'd. on next page)

Katherine Mansfield's own stories had a crisis and an anti-crisis. The crisis occurs in "Miss Brill" when a boy and a girl sitting near her are preparing to make love; but they are annoyed by Miss Brill's presence and the boy says: "But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there? . . . Why does she come here at all -- who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"²⁸ And they make fun of Miss Brill's fur, comparing it to a "fried whiting." The anticrisis or anticlimax occurs at the end of the story when Miss Brill thinks she hears "something crying":

The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.²⁹

Moreover, in "Miss Brill" we have discovery. Miss Brill discovers and learns the fact that people did not like her "sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her."

The crisis in "Six Years After" occurs when the mother thinks she hears her son speaking to her. The anticrisis, on the other hand, occurs when she projects herself into the future

²⁷ (Cont'd.)

father and married his mother a change occurs, in fact the revolution happens: he is doomed and destroyed. Revolution and discovery are as important to the Greeks as crisis is for us.

²⁸ Collected Stories, p. 335.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 336.

and sees her son's wedding.

Similarly in "The Fly" there occurs a climax followed by an anti-climax. The death of the fly is the climax. The boss is frightened by "a grinding feeling of wretchedness," and he calls sternly his clerk: "'Bring me some fresh blotting-paper . . . and look sharp about it."³⁰ His calling old Macey sternly and asking for "some fresh blotting-paper" is the counter-reaction of his feeling of wretchedness.

Sometimes the same crisis may be at one and the same time external and internal. The death of the poor man in "The Garden-Party" is a crisis. It is an external crisis but also an internal one too because through it Laura understands the diversity of life. The story ends:

"Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life --"
But what life was she couldn't explain. No
matter. He quite understood.

"Isn't it, darling?" said Laurie.³¹

V

Monotony is one of the most dangerous pitfalls. Among Katherine Mansfield's condemning reviews is that of Gertrude Stein's Three Lives formed by "The Good Anna," "Melanctha," and

³⁰ Ibid., p. 428.

³¹ Ibid., p. 261.

"The Gentle Lena." Katherine Mansfield wrote in her review:

Don't mind how often you go back to the beginning, don't hesitate to say the same thing over and over again -- people are always repeating themselves-³²

The three stories in the book are full of repetitions. A quotation from "Melanctha" will show the numerous repetitions as well as the pattern of the sentences:

"I don't see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you're blue. I'd never kill myself Melanctha just 'cause I was blue. I'd maybe kill somebody else Melanctha 'cause I was blue, but I'd never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it'd be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I'd be awful sorry."³³

This pattern of repetition is boring. With these repetitions the story develops at a slow pace.

VI

Contrast is an interesting literary device which places side by side two opposites: good and evil, rich and poor. Katherine Mansfield makes use of this technique. In "The Garden-Party" the Sheridans' house is contrasted with the Scotts' poor cottage. The room in which Rosabel in "The Tiredness of Rosabel" lives is contrasted with the home she wishes to have. Juxtaposition on the transient and the vain, also, produces contrast.

³² Novels and Novelists, p. 283.

³³ Gertrude Stein, Three Lives, intr. Carl Van Vechten, (New York: The New Classics, 1933), p. 87.

In "The Garnet Bracelet" by Alexander Kuprin which gives its name to a collection of stories there is this juxtaposition. A poor official fell in love with a beautiful princess. For seven years he wrote to her, and then on her birthday he sent her the garnet bracelet. The princess' husband and brother interfered and sought the man out. The man, fully aware of the situation committed suicide. Reviewing The Garnet Bracelet in December 1919, Katherine Mansfield wrote:

From this old-fashioned plot, old fashioned like the poor bracelet with its ill-polished stones, its green stone in the middle with the five deep red ones surrounding, there come rays of deep quivering light, and all that they reveal is linked together just for one moment, becomes part of the tragic life-story of the strangely simple man for whom 'to love was enough'. 'May nothing transient or vain trouble your beautiful soul!' he writes. But the life of the Princess is composed of what is transient and vain; the society in which she lives is transient and vain; real love could have no part in it. But being a woman her secret dream is of a love that shall fill her own life; it has come near her, and now it is gone for ever.³⁴

The princess is living to quote a term from the second chapter at a "Masked Ball," a bal masqué. She sees the poor man in the "rays of the deep quivering light." Side by side is the princess with her life "composed of what is transient and vain" and the poor man who committed suicide.

³⁴ Novels and Novelists, op.cit., p. 137.

VII

The mentioning of terms as "all that they reveal is linked together just for one moment" and "one blazing moment" mentioned earlier (review of Heritage) reminds one of the epiphany.³⁵

Although Katherine Mansfield does not use the very word epiphany, she intends the same meaning when she writes to the Hon.

³⁵ James Joyce in Stephen Hero (chapter XXV) explains the meaning of an epiphany. Stephen Dedalus is walking down Eccles Street and he hears "a fragment of colloquy" between a young lady and a gentleman. And the passage goes: "This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. He told Cranly that the clock of the Ballast office was capable of an epiphany. (Stephen Hero London: Ace Books Ltd., 1961, p. 186). He goes on to say about the clock: "I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany." Ibid., p. 186. In an epiphany the clock of the Ballast Office will cease to be "an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture," it will have a deeper meaning and reveal itself.

In Ulysses, too, there is one reference to an epiphany. In the Proteus episode, Stephen sees himself or remembers the fact that he once aspired to write books. The passage goes: "O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, . . ." (Ulysses New York: Random House, 1961, p. 40).

Dorothy Brett on October 11, 1917, "lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then hide them again." Concerning "At the Bay," she writes:

Well, in the early morning there I always remember feeling that this little island has dipped back into the dark blue sea during the night only to rise again at gleam of day, all hung with bright spangles and glittering drops. (When you ran over the dewy grass you positively felt that your feet tasted salt.) I tried to catch that moment -- with something of its sparkle and its flavour. And just as on those mornings white milky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it, I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again. . . .³⁶

An illustration of this "one blazing moment" is at the end of Part X in At the Bay. Linda Burnell for the first time notices that Jonathan Trout's hair was grey. The passage goes:

Linda was surprised. She had no idea that he was grey. And yet, as he stood up beside her and sighed and stretched, she saw him, for the first time, not resolute, not gallant, not careless, but touched already with age.³⁷

About another story, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," she wrote to Richard Murry (January 1, 1921): "it just unfolds and opens --"³⁸ Raoul Duquette, through his own words as he tells the story in "Je Ne Parle Pas Français" is exposed.

³⁶ Letters, I, 83-84.

³⁷ Collected Stories, p. 239.

³⁸ Letters, II, 87.

VIII

It is in tone and harmony with Katherine Mansfield's vision of life not to think favourably of the sentimental novel. In Novels and Novelists there are three reviews dealing with the sentimental novel. Reviewing Benjy by George Stevenson, Katherine Mansfield wrote:

Benjy's purity of heart pours over him such a pale flood of sentimentality that he is drowned before our eyes.³⁹

Reviewing Crabtree House by Howel Evans in July 1919, Katherine Mansfield defines the "sweetly pretty novel" which is another expression for the sentimental novel as the novel "where you are never out of sight of the happy ending from the first page."⁴⁰

The sentimental novel with its fake feelings and emotions is best reviewed and discussed by Katherine Mansfield while writing about Margaret Skelton's The Book of Youth. The review goes:

We are impatient with its sentimentality, its quaint, impossible views of the relationships between man and woman, and its determination that through woman only the wicked world will be saved. We find very hard to bear this trick of simplifying everything, not by making clear, but by family blurring -- not by taking away, but by adding to. . . . We have remarked, in these novels, that the hero is never over-strong. He is an artist,

³⁹ Novels and Novelists, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

in most cases -- a poet, a musician, a painter -- and he is pale with 'queer' eyes, easily pleased, easily hurt -- a child.⁴¹

In her own stories Katherine Mansfield avoided sentimentality. A sentimental ending to "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," or "The Garden-Party" or "Miss Brill" would ruin and falsify the vision of these stories.

IX

Among the novelists contemporary to Katherine Mansfield and whose fame has survived to this day are Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence and Conrad. As her reviews of their works show, Katherine Mansfield thought highly of them. Reviewing "The Story of the Siren" by E.M. Forster Katherine Mansfield mentions the "very delicate sense of the value of atmosphere, a fine precision of expression" present in all his work.⁴² In "The Story of the Siren" this sense of the atmosphere is successfully conveyed. Two young boys are left in a grotto in the Mediterranean. The notebook of one on the Deist Controversy has fallen over board, and the other is diving to get it back. The description of the water and the grotto are impressive:

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 196.

⁴² Ibid., p. 246.

We had been left together in a magic world, apart from all the common places that are called reality, a world of blue whose floor was the sea and whose walls and roof of rock trembled with the sea's reflection.⁴³

Although there had been moments of conflict and tension, Katherine Mansfield had a lasting affection for D.H. Lawrence. It should be mentioned that Lawrence himself encouraged her to go on writing after her brother's death. On December 20, 1915 he wrote:

Do not be sad. It is one life which is passing away from us, one 'I' is dying; but there is another coming into being, which is the happy, creative you. . . . But for us there is a rising from the grave, there is a resurrection, and a clean life to begin from the start, new, and happy. Don't be afraid, don't doubt it, it is so.⁴⁴

Katherine Mansfield and Lawrence shared a vision of life similar at certain points yet diametrically opposed at others. They both undertook faithfully the wandering journey of the consumptive in search of health as resumed by Keats and Chekhov. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield shared a love of nature and flowers and an eagerness for

⁴³ E.M. Forster, Collected Short Stories (Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1963), p. 181.

Katherine Mansfield, it is of interest to note here, enjoyed The Tempest because of the atmosphere. In October 1920, she wrote to Middleton Murry: "I do think The Tempest is the most radiant, delicate, exquisite play. The atmosphere is exactly the atmosphere of an island after a storm." (Letters, II, 51)

⁴⁴ The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, I, 401.

living. They both shared a dislike of the war and society. While the festivities marking the end of the war were under preparation, she wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell (November 1918):

Life is almost too ignoble to be borne. Truly one must hate humankind in the mass, hate them as passionately as one loves the few, the very few. . . . I keep seeing all these horrors, bathing in them again and again (God knows I don't want to) and then my mind fills with the wretched little picture I have of my brother's grave.⁴⁵

For Lawrence too the world was unpleasant. However, for him there lay a cure in annihilation, destruction, to be followed, he believed by a rebirth. As Miss Sylvia Berkman mentions in her work Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study, "Miss Mansfield could not accept Lawrence's view, nor could she yet produce one more satisfying to herself. She could only look outward and condemn, look inward and weep."⁴⁶

Katherine Mansfield pencilled notes about two of Lawrence's works: The Lost Girl and Aaron's Rod. She disliked thoroughly The Lost Girl and wrote in her Scrapbook in 1920:

Lawrence denies his humanity. He denies the powers of the imagination. He denies life -- I mean human life. His hero and heroine are non-human. They are animals on the prowl. They do not feel: they scarcely speak. There is not one

⁴⁵ Letters, I, 219-220.

⁴⁶ Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study, p. 113.

memorable word. They submit to their physical response and for the rest go veiled, blind -- faceless, mindless. This is the doctrine of mindlessness.

He says his heroine is extraordinary, and rails against the ordinary. Isn't that significant? But look at her. Take her youth -- her thriving upon the horse-play with the doctors. They might be beasts butting each other -- no more. Take the scene when the hero throws her in the kitchen, possesses her, and she returns singing to the washing-up. It's a disgrace. Take the rotten, rubbishy scene of the woman in labour asking the Italian into her bedroom. All false. All a pack of lies!

Take the nature-study at the end. It's no more than the grazing place for Alvina and her sire. What was the "green hellebore" to her? Of course, there is a great deal of racy, bright, competent writing in the early part -- the "shop" part. But it doesn't take a writer to tell all that.

The whole is false-ashes. The preposterous Indian troupe of four young men is -- a fake. . . .

Oh, don't forget where Alvina feels a trill in her bowels, and discovers herself with child. A TRILL. It's a kind of sinning against art. . . .

.
. . . All I know is: this is bad and ought not to be allowed.⁴⁷

The novel is about an insurrection. Prior to publication, in fact, Lawrence had entitled the work "The Insurrection of Miss Houghton."⁴⁸ Alvina Houghton herself commits the insurrection, as she rises up against her provincial society. In Chapter X entitled "The Fall of Manchester House" Miss Pinnegar cried: "you're a lost girl," and affirms "on a final note of despair":

⁴⁷ The Scrapbook, pp. 182-3.

⁴⁸ The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, I, 209.

"'yes, you're a lost girl!'"⁴⁹ In the first part of The Lost Girl there is a successful and lively rendering of English provincial life. Later, Alvina marries Cicio a young Italian peasant who had acted in a troupe in Woodhouse. They leave for his native village in Italy. Conditions are very poor there, "no shop," "no post," and "an hour's heavy road up deep and rocky, wearying tracks."⁵⁰ In this comfortless and difficult environment is "found nature unbesmirched"⁵¹ as Kenneth Young calls it in his work D.H. Lawrence. Unbesmirched in the sense that it is pure and not soiled. Cicio is not soiled, he is from nature, "leaning deep over the plough, in his white shirt-sleeves following the slow, waving, moth-pale oxen across a small track of land turned up in the heathen hollow, . . ."⁵²

Katherine Mansfield's opinion about the novel is very radical. She disapproves of the characters' submission "to their physical response. . . ." Furthermore, I think Katherine Mansfield dislikes the novel because it reminds her subconsciously of her own brother's death. As noted in her Journal

⁴⁹ D.H. Lawrence, The Lost Girl (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 260.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 371.

⁵¹ Kenneth Young, D.H. Lawrence (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), p. 28.

⁵² D.H. Lawrence, The Lost Girl, p. 372.

in October 1915, Katherine Mansfield's brother had an "absolute confidence" that he would return from the war. "I couldn't come back"⁵³ he had said before leaving for the front. At the end of The Lost Girl Cicio will be leaving for the war, but they hope that on his return they will go to America. The novel ends:

'You'll come back to me', she whispered, in an ecstacy of pain and relief. It was not her affair, where they should go, so long as he really returned to her.

'I'll come back', he said.

'Sure?' she whispered, straining him to her.⁵⁴

However, Katherine Mansfield was less strongly opposed to Aaron's Rod. To Koteliansky she wrote on July 17, 1922:

There are certain things in this new book of L.'s that I do not like. But they are not important or really part of it. They are trivial, encrusted, they cling to it as snails cling to the underside of a leaf. But apart from them there is the leaf, is the tree, firmly planted, deep thrusting, outspreading, growing grandly, alive in every twig. It is a living book; it is warm, it breathes. And it is written by a living man, with conviction.⁵⁵

A few days later, writing to Sydney Schiff she mentioned that "there was growth in Aaron's Rod."⁵⁶ What Katherine Mansfield

⁵³ Journal, p. 35.

⁵⁴ D.H. Lawrence, The Lost Girl, p. 400.

⁵⁵ Letters, II, 229.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

disliked in the book is this man and man relationship (Lilly and Aaron) which in real life, Lawrence's and Middleton Murry's relationship is not irrelevant. The relationship is that of the leader to the disciple. In the novel there is a clash between the old world and the new world. Kenneth Young writes in his work mentioned earlier that the Christmas scenes and the description of Novara in Northwest Italy represent the old world.⁵⁷ The doom is in the possessiveness of marital love. Katherine Mansfield disapproved of the many long discussions about whether or not to live alone, and women. These discussions, I feel, slow down the pace of the novel. Furthermore, at a certain point, Lawrence, intrudes into his work and tells us:

Don't grumble at me then, gentle reader, and swear at me that this damned fellow wasn't half clever enough to think all these smart things, and realise all these fine-drawn-out subtleties. You are quite right, he wasn't, yet it all resolved itself in him as I say, and it is for you to prove that it didn't.⁵⁸

Aaron Sisson, the checkweighman, is a weak character. He lacks what Lilly, at the end of the novel, calls "life submission." Lilly says to Aaron:

You, Aaron, you too have the need to submit. You, too, have the need livingly to yield to a more heroic soul, to give yourself. You know you have. And you know it isn't love. It is life-submission.⁵⁹

There still remain two points which Katherine Mansfield did not like: Aaron's leaving his home for ever with no specific reason. About the reason of his leaving he says: "I like being by myself -- I hate feeling

⁵⁷ Kenneth Young, D.H. Lawrence, p. 28.

⁵⁸ D.H. Lawrence, Aaron's Rod (London: The Harborough Publishing Co. Ltd., 1960), p. 152.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 268.

and caring, and being forced into it. I want to be left alone -"⁶⁰
The second point for Katherine Mansfield's dislike is the direct references to the horrors of the war. Two illustrations will suffice to remind one of these impressive instances: a sergeant with both his feet off, "clean at the ankle." A still more impressive instance is that of the buried lieutenant who "sat up."⁶¹

However, it is fit to remember here that as noted in The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield left in her will "a small remembrance"⁶² for the author of The Prussian Officer.

Katherine Mansfield reviewed two of Conrad's novels: The Arrow of Gold, and The Rescue. Both reviews show how much she liked the novels. About The Arrow of Gold she wrote:

Mr. Conrad, a pioneer, surveying the rich untravelled forest landscape of his mind, is extraordinarily revealing.⁶³

Besides being "a pioneer," Katherine Mansfield liked Conrad's "fine economy of expression, his spare use of gesture, and his power of conveying the mystery of another's being, . . ."

About The Rescue published a year later Katherine Mansfield wrote:

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 108.

⁶² The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, I, 621.

⁶³ Novels and Novelists, p. 64.

This fascinating book revives in us the youthful feeling that we are not so much reading a story of adventure as living in and through it, absorbing it, making it our own.⁶⁴

Katherine Mansfield liked the "blending of the thrilling narrative of why Captain Tom Lingard of the brig 'Lightning' fails to keep his promise to recapture for the young Rajah Hassim . . . and the equally thrilling narrative of the capture of Tom Lingard's soul by a white woman."⁶⁵

X

As revealed through the pages of this work Katherine Mansfield was an exacting writer and for that matter reviewer too. She refused the reprinting of her first collection of stories In A German Pension because it was "not good enough." A few days before her death, on December 19, 1922, she wrote to Middleton Murry "Present day literature nauseates me, excepting always Hardy and the other few." Moreover, still in the same letter about her own work in the future she expressed her wish to write "different books."⁶⁶ We may guess what these "different books" would be: they would be "'simple' enough, as one would be simple before God." . . .

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 223.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 223.

⁶⁶ Letters, II, 266.

APPENDIX

KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND CHEKHOV

In the last chapter of this work it was mentioned that there exists a similarity, or compatibility of vision between Katherine Mansfield and the Russian masters and Chekhov in particular. This statement, I feel, is best explained by the fact of Katherine Mansfield's dislike of all sophistication. She had an affection for humble people and servants. In her literary achievement too she preferred the praise of the humble and simple to that of the more learned. Middleton Murry writes in his introduction to her Journal: "It was characteristic of her that she preferred the praise of simple, 'unliterary' people to that of the cultured and the critics; . . ." ¹ Chekhov and the other Russian masters too seem to have in their works a sympathetic attitude towards the poor. The characters in most of Chekhov's stories are poor.

There hardly is a work about Katherine Mansfield which neglects the admiration Katherine Mansfield had for Chekhov.

¹ Journal, p. x.

In the realm of the short story there have been no two authors so much compared and contrasted as Anton Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield. In other words, it is generally agreed upon that Katherine Mansfield was influenced by the Russian master. Middleton Murry in his introduction to the Journal of Katherine Mansfield admits this fact with reservations and writes:

There is a certain resemblance between Katherine Mansfield's stories and those of Anton Tchekhov. But this resemblance is often exaggerated by critics, who seem to believe that Katherine Mansfield learned her art from Tchekhov. That is a singularly superficial view of the relation, which was one of kindred temperaments. In fact, Katherine Mansfield's technique is very different from Tchekhov's. She admired and understood Tchekhov's work as few English writers have done; she had (as her Journal shows) a deep personal affection for the man, whom, of course, she never knew. But her method was wholly her own, and her development would have been precisely the same had Tchekhov never existed.²

Chekhov did exist and Katherine Mansfield did read and reread his works several times. It is pointless to argue now that

² Ibid., p. xiii-xiv.

"Katherine Mansfield's development would have been precisely the same had Chekhov never existed." The truth of the matter is that there is much evidence that Katherine Mansfield liked Chekhov very much. In an entry in her Journal (July 5, 1918) she writes:

Ach, Tchekhov! Why are you dead? Why can't
I talk to you, . . .³

In her Scrapbook, too, there are many references to the Russian writer, and quotations from his letters and stories. Katherine Mansfield liked Chekhov very much, but her work remains essentially her own.

The general trend of belief is that there are reverberations or echoes of Chekhov in Katherine Mansfield's stories. Upholders of this point of view validate their judgement by citing examples from a few stories. Mr. Gilbert Phelps in his work The Russian Novel in English Fiction writes after mentioning a few instances of parallels between Katherine Mansfield's and Chekhov's stories: "For these cases and many more like them we cannot help feeling that the echoes are too insistent, the correspondences of theme, situation, tone, and treatment too pat."⁴ The instance in "Prelude" where Miss Beryl Fairfield says: -- "I am so miserable -- so frightfully miserable. I know that I'm silly and spiteful and vain; I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a

³ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴ Gilbert Phelps, The Russian Novel in English Fiction (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 190.

moment."⁵ -- is thought of as a reminder of Anna Sergeyevna in "Lady with Lapdog" saying: "'How can I justify myself? I am a bad, despicable creature. I despise myself and have no thought of justifying myself. I haven't deceived my husband, I've deceived myself. And not only now.'"⁶ Another parallel drawn is between "Bliss" and again "Lady with Lapdog." Bertha Young, at the end of "Bliss" notices that "the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still."⁷ Gurnov, in Chekhov's story reflects that "when you came to think of it, everything in the world was really beautiful, everything. . . ."⁸ Furthermore, Katherine Mansfield's "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day" has been thought of as an echo of Chekhov's "The Schoolmistress" due to the fact that both protagonists are thought of by others as being very contented but in reality they are very far from being so.

Miss Sylvia Berkman in Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study writes that Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly" "has several close similarities" with Chekhov's "Small Fry." I will disagree with that statement. It seems to me that although there exists bet-

⁵ Collected Stories, pp. 58-59.

⁶ Anton Chekhov, Lady with Lapdog and Other Stories, trans. David Magarshack (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964), p. 269.

⁷ Collected Stories, p. 105.

⁸ Anton Chekhov, Lady with Lapdog and Other Stories, p. 270.

⁹ Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study, p. 194.

ween the two stories a parallel, in essence they are different. Whereas Nevyrazimov, in Chekhov's story "felt better"¹⁰ after killing the cockroach, the boss in Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly" feels wretched. The passage goes: "But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened."¹¹ As revealed in her Journal, Katherine Mansfield "finished" "The Fly" on February 20, 1922¹² although she had the "idea" of the story much earlier. This fact is revealed, again in her Journal, where she writes in an entry entitled "The Fly" on December 31, 1918:

Oh, the times when she had walked upside down on the ceiling, run up glittering panes, floated on a lake of light, flashed through a shining beam!

And God looked upon the fly fallen into the jug of milk and saw that it was good. And the smallest Cherubim and Seraphim of all, who delight in misfortune, struck to their silver harps and shrilled: "How is the fly fallen, fallen!"¹³

"Small Fry," translated by Constance Garnett in the collection entitled "The Schoolmistress and Other Stories," appeared in 1920. But, as revealed from the entry in the Journal Katherine Mansfield had the germ of the story before she had a chance to read Chekhov's.

¹⁰ Anton Tchekhov, The Schoolmistress and other Stories, trans. Constance Garnett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), p. 222.

¹¹ Collected Stories, p. 428.

¹² Journal, p. 233.

¹³ Ibid., p. 101.

Besides the stories mentioned above two others by Katherine Mansfield can be compared with Chekhov's: "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" with Chekhov's "Sleepyhead," and "Prelude" with "The Steppe." "The Child-Who-Was-Tired" seems to be a free adaptation of Chekhov's tragedy of a maltreated child. Antony Alpers in his book Katherine Mansfield, A Biography writes:

"The Child-Who-Was-Tired," provides, at one and the same time, the first intimation that Katherine Mansfield had discovered the Russian writer, and the most convincing proof, or rather confirmation, that she had no need to become his imitator.¹⁴

Further down, still in the same context Mr. Alpers writes that "the plagiarism itself -- . . . -- is indisputable."¹⁵ The scene of the action is shifted from Russia to Germany. However, it is possible and there is room for comparison between "The Steppe" and "Prelude." It must be mentioned at the start that "Prelude," among other things, concentrates on a child's journey to a new home. Chekhov begins his story with an exterior description. Follows the opening paragraph of "The Steppe":

Early one July morning a springless bone-shaking britchka -- one of those antediluvian ones in which only commercial travellers, drovers, and the poorer clergy drive nowadays in Russia, clattered out of N --, the chief town of the government of Z--, on to the country road. The vehicle screeched and

¹⁴ Antony Alpers, Katherine Mansfield, A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 129.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

uttered a loud scream at the slightest movement; the bucket fastened on behind sullenly chimed in. By these sounds, apart from its woefully torn leather-lining dangling on the inside of its peeling interior, you might arrive at a conclusion as to its antiquity and readiness to fall to pieces.¹⁶

Katherine Mansfield, on the other hand, drops the reader in the middle of a scene; she starts in medias res, presenting us the story through the eyes of one of her characters. "Prelude" starts:

There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled; the grandmother's lap was full and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance.¹⁷

Chekhov starts his story with a full exterior description whereas in Katherine Mansfield's "Prelude" we learn something about the character of Mrs. Burnell. Something about her is revealed to us. Chekhov gives an objective description of his characters. When the merchant of N., called Ivan Ivanitch Kuzmitchov and Father Christopher Siriski are introduced he proceeds to give an exterior description of both:

Ivan Ivanitch Kuzmitchov, a clean-shaven man wearing spectacles and a straw hat, . . . and Father Christopher Siriski, . . . a long-haired little old man in a grey linen caftan, a wide brimmed black hat, and an embroidered coloured belt.¹⁸

¹⁶ The Stories of Anton Tchekov, ed. Robert N. Linscott (New York: Random House, 1932), p. 328.

¹⁷ Collected Stories, p. 11.

¹⁸ The Stories of Anton Tchekov, p. 328.

Katherine Mansfield's story is strongly based on autobiography. The name Burnell was Katherine Mansfield's mother's middle name. Harold Beauchamp's mother before her marriage was Mary Elizabeth Stanley. These two names are conjoined in Stanley Burnell. The name Fairfield is the Englished form of the French Beauchamp. Aunt Beryl is not far removed from Aunt Belle, Mrs. Beauchamp's younger sister. The names of the children too are taken from the names of the children in the family.

Chekhov's "The Steppe" is not as strongly autobiographical. It need not be. Sometime in his medical career, he may have had the occasion to cross the steppe and meet these types of people which he later used as characters in his story. Kuzmitchov, the business-minded merchant, Father Christopher Siriski, Moses Mosevitch the taverner, and Panteli are representatives of types of people. Katherine Mansfield's story, on the other hand, is based on her people, her own family. Another difference between the two stories lies in the handling of the horror theme. In "Prelude" the note of horror is struck more strongly than in "The Steppe." Pat, the gardner in part IX of "Prelude" beheads the white duck with a little tomahawk. The children are frightened as they see the blood, they scream "the blood! the blood!" The passage has been quoted in extenso in the second chapter of this work. One sentence suffices to remind us of the whole context. Kezia "sobbed: 'Head back! Head back!' until it sounded like a loud strange hiccup."

We have in this scene the effect of the beheading on a child's mind. Kezia is a sensitive child and she has been deeply moved and horrified by this scene. As said before, in "The Steppe" the note of horror is not so powerfully struck. In part VI¹⁹ of "The Steppe" everybody is assembled by the fire, and old Panteli relates some horrible incidents. He tells how on one journey he and a merchant fell among a gang of thieves. On another journey, Panteli and the merchant were going to be slain by the taverner and his wife. Although Panteli relates several horrible incidents, the over-all atmosphere is not a very impressing one. In other words, the one incident in "Prelude" is far more impressing than the ones Panteli narrates.

In general, "The Steppe" is a sadder story than "Prelude." Its ending, especially, leaves an effect of sadness on the reader. Egoroushka is left alone and watches his uncle and Father Christopher leave. The last paragraph of the story runs:

His eyes were so full of tears that Egorooshka did not see his uncle and Father Christopher leave the room. When he rushed to the window, they had already left the yard, and the chestnut-coloured dog was running back from the gates with the air of having fulfilled his duty of barking at someone. Egorooshka himself, not knowing why, tore from the window and fled from the room. When he got to the gates, Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher, the one waving his crooked stick, and the other his staff, were vanishing round the corner. Egorooshka felt that when these two

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 397.

people went, all that phase of life which he had known up to now was gone for ever, like smoke. . . . In sheer impotency he returned to the house, greeting with bitter tears the new unknown life which was now beginning for him. . . . What will that life be?²⁰

The ending of "Prelude" is not as sad. The top of the cream jar rolled but fortunately it did not break. Kezia, in Aunt Beryl's room, had put the top of the cream jar and "stuck" it over the ear of the "calico cat." The story ends:

But for Kezia it had broken the moment it flew through the air, and she picked it up, hot all over, and put it back on the dressing-table.

Then she tiptoed away, far too quickly and airily. . . .²¹

It is worthy of mention that Katherine Mansfield liked "The Steppe" very much, and in a letter to S.S. Koteliansky dated August 21, 1919, she wrote:

I have re-read "The Steppe." What can one say? It is simply one of the great stories of the world -- a kind of Iliad or Odyssey. I think I will learn this journey by heart. One says of things: they are immortal. One feels about this story not that it becomes immortal -- it always was. It has no beginning or end. Tchekov just touched one point with his pen (-----) and then another point: enclosed something which had, as it were, been there for ever.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 437.

²¹ Collected Stories, p. 60.

²² Letters, I, 242.

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