

KATHERINE MANSFIELD: ART IN RELATION TO EXPERIENCE

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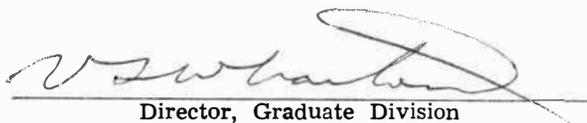
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PREFACE

Little scholarly work has been done on Katherine Mansfield. The Year's Work in English Studies mentions Alfred C. Ward's Aspects of the Modern Short Story, Dorothy Brewster and Angus Burrell's Dead Reckonings in Fiction, and Odette Lenoel's La Vocation de Katherine Mansfield. I have relied most heavily on Sylvia Berkman's Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study for critical comment and illumination and on Mansfield's own letters and journals for the chapters on her philosophy, aesthetic principles, and critical opinions of other writers. For bibliographical information not found in other sources I have drawn upon a thesis written at Southern Methodist University in 1940 by Boynton Stevenson. The content of the thesis itself has not influenced this investigation, however.

I wish to thank Dr. Autrey Nell Wiley for her kindness and patience in directing this thesis and Miss Mamie Walker and Dr. Gladys Maddocks for their suggestions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp was born October 14, 1888, in Wellington, New Zealand, the third of a family of six children, one of whom, the younger sister Gwen, who appears in "Prelude," died in infancy. For two centuries her paternal ancestors were prosperous London goldsmiths; one of them is mentioned in Pepys's Diary. Her great-grandfather, John Beauchamp, however, had little taste for business, preferring to write verses or go fox-hunting. His wife's sister married C. R. Leslie, a Royal Academician, and the family numbered Joseph Turner, Edwin Landseer, and Washington Irving among their intimate friends. Two of John Beauchamp's sons, Henry Herron and Arthur, went to Australia during the influx of gold prospectors, and it was there that Arthur married Mary Elizabeth Stanley in 1854. Having failed to do well in Australia, he moved his wife and three small sons to New Zealand in 1861, where he had inherited several tracts of land from an aunt. In 1884 his son Harold married Annie Burnell Dyer, the daughter of Joseph and Margaret Mansfield Dyer, the beloved grandmother of "Prelude," "At the Bay," and other New Zealand stories. She and another daughter, Bell Dyer, the prototype of the Beryl Fairfield of the same stories, lived with the

Beauchamps. All Katherine Mansfield's pseudonyms, except Julian Mark and Boris Petrovsky, and many of her favorite character names in the New Zealand stories are drawn from family names or derived from them by similarity of sound or meaning.

She started to the Karori Primary School in 1893 and won a prize for her composition, "A Sea Voyage," at the age of eight. She later won prizes in English, French, and arithmetic at the Wellington Girls' College, which she entered in May, 1898. During that year the editor of the school magazine praised her first story thus: "This story, written by one of the girls who have lately entered the school, shows promise of great merit."¹ She began and edited the magazine at Miss Swainson's school on Fitzherbert Terrace, which she entered in June, 1900. It was about this time that she studied piano with Robert Parker, who remembered thirty years later that she had drawn his studio correctly in every detail in "The Wind Blows." The Beauchamps moved several times during her childhood but always remained in Wellington or its suburbs. The house at 75 Tinakori Road is said to be the setting of "The Garden Party," standing as it does at the top of the hill above Saunders Lane, where very poor people lived. Here she may have played with the washerwoman's children who

¹Ruth Elvish Mantz and John Middleton Murry, The Life of Katherine Mansfield (London: Constable, 1933), p. 137.

appear in "The Doll's House," and here stands the pear tree used as a symbol in "Bliss." The setting of "At the Bay" all critics agree to be Day's Bay, where the Beauchamps maintained a summer home, and Jonathan Trout to be drawn from her cousin Frederick Waters. Young Barry Waters suggested Pip in "Prelude." New Zealand family life is well represented in these stories, for it is characteristic of that country that the parents themselves rear their children instead of leaving them largely to the care of nurses, as the British do.

There is some question concerning the date on which she left New Zealand to continue her schooling in England, but both Berkman and Mantz agree on January, 1903. Bell Dyer accompanied her three nieces, Vera Margaret, Charlotte Mary, and Kathleen, or "Kass," to London, where the girls enrolled at Queen's College in Harley Street. Miss Mantz quotes their cousin: "To see Vera was to love her, . . . to see Kathleen was to remember her."¹ The school had few rules; students might attend class when they liked and study if they liked. As a result of this lax discipline Katherine Mansfield made rather poor grades and later lamented that she had wasted much of her girlhood and learned little. Professor Walter Rippman frequently invited some of the girls to tea in exotically decorated surroundings which made the most of unusual lighting effects and flower arrangements; it was he who introduced the girls to Wilde, Symons, Pater, and Verlaine and

¹Ibid., p. 77.

the idea that life is something to be explored, that experience is the ultimate goal. He is caricatured, although probably unwittingly, as Reginald Peacock and almost certainly appears as The Wanderer in "A Fairy Tale." Recognizing her literary inclination, he asked her to write some simple verses to illustrate the exercises in his book English for Foreigners but later discarded them for classical quotations. The college magazine, of which she became sub-editor and later editor, accepted three of her stories, but only in "Carnation" does her mature work refer to her stay at Queen's. She debated against her friend Ida Baker, whom she met there, on whether or not students should be forced to read Shakespeare; she felt that being forced to read any great work blunts the keen edge of enjoyment and appreciation, but her opponent won on the argument that many would never read great works at all unless compelled to do so.

In December, 1906, she returned to New Zealand after having completed her course of study in England, only to find Wellington unbearably provincial after her life abroad. Very young, longing for fame and the excitement of European cities, she was miserable in her prosaic surroundings. She was also very much in love with a young cellist, Arnold Trowell, Wellington's musical prodigy, who had studied in Brussels during most of her stay in London. She had met him before going away to school and had written to him

regularly while in England. Most of her friends at this time were musicians; she, too, had gained some proficiency on the cello and enjoyed playing quartets and trios with friends. She was considered quite sophisticated upon her return and astonished people by her dress and conversation. Her writing during this period reflected her pose of sophistication. Upon showing "In a Garret" to a member of her trio, an older woman, she elicited shocked surprise:

'But Katie!' she said in consternation, '"In a Garret" is beyond words! How do you know such things?'¹
'I just know them,' Kass answered. 'That is life.'¹

Her typist commented, "This would never uplift anybody."²

Several of her stories were printed during these two years, however, when she wrote for the Native Companion under the pseudonym Julian Mark. She collaborated with her friend Edith Bendall on a little book of sketches and verses, but the publisher to whom they submitted it sent the manuscript back after long delay without the charming sketches. She later professed to regard the whole matter as a childish and absurd episode, but nevertheless, they collaborated again in April, 1908, on a prose work, The Thoughtful Child. It is not clear whether the novel Juliet was begun after her return to New Zealand or during the last weeks of her stay in England, but it is agreed that it is the story of her love for Arnold; Mantz asserts that two chapters of the

¹Ibid., p. 268.

²Ibid., p. 271.

unfinished fragment reflect the dawning of her realization that he did not love her.

Life in New Zealand became increasingly unpleasant, as her reading notes from this period show. She wished to experience the heights and depths of feeling, anything rather than the "placid middle line of life" which New Zealand seemed to offer. She missed her friends in England and longed for the atmosphere of London. Her grandmother died early in 1907 a few weeks after her return; and when the Trowells moved to London in September, she became more restless than ever. Her father suggested a six-week camping trip through the brush in the summer of 1907 (November-December), of which "Millie" and "The Woman at the Store" are the products. On July 9, 1908, she left New Zealand to live on an allowance of £100 a year and try her hand at writing.

Very little is known of her life between her return to London in 1908 and her meeting with John Middleton Murry in December, 1911. The Trowells welcomed her to their home in St. John's Wood, London, and she lived with them for several weeks; then she moved to Beauchamp Lodge, where she stayed for a short time immediately after her arrival. It is said¹ that she fell in love with Garnet, Arnold's brother. At the end of February, 1909, she sold her cello for £2 and gave up all thought of making music her life work; in reality,

¹Mantz, Berkman, Clark, and others make bare mention of her love for Garnet; it is not clear whether or not her love was requited.

she had persuaded herself that she must choose between music and literature when there was no choice to be made. At some time during the spring of 1909 she joined a travelling opera company, but whether as a singer in the chorus or an instrumentalist is not clear. She married a man named Bowden about this time and left him almost immediately. When her mother arrived in London for a visit and found that her daughter was to have a child, admittedly not Bowden's, she made arrangements for her to spend the summer in Woerishofen, Bavaria, where she wrote the bitterly satirical sketches collected in December, 1911, as In a German Pension. The first of these was printed by A. R. Orage in The New Age, February 24, 1910, and others were accepted in succeeding issues. The only revenue she received from the book was £15 in advance of royalties; Stephen Swift, the publisher, went bankrupt.¹ During 1910 and 1911 she had little success and later destroyed most of her work belonging to this period.

She met John Middleton Murry in December, 1911, after having submitted a story to Rhythm which he liked very much but did not fully understand; he asked her for another, "The Woman at the Store," which when printed caused a minor sensation.² They fell in love with each other but could not be legally married until May, 1918, because Bowden refused to

¹J. Middleton Murry (ed.), Introduction, The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield (New York: Knopf, 1941), p. vi.

²Ibid.

divorce her until late autumn, 1917. They lived in Grays Inn Road for a few weeks and then found a house at Runcton, near Chichester, in August, 1912. They edited Rhythm together for a time and suddenly found themselves in debt for £400 when Stephen Swift, who had assumed financial responsibility for the publication, went bankrupt. They returned to London and attempted to continue Rhythm, called the Blue Review for its last three issues, but it came to an end in the summer of 1913. In December, 1913, they went to Paris for a time but soon returned to London. For several years they were in financial straits, and her health was poor. They numbered among their intimate friends D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and, for a time, the sculptor, Henri Gaudier-Brzaska.

The shock of the First World War was intensified by the death of her younger brother in France in October, 1915, only a few days after his leave in England. Murry states in the collection of Katherine Mansfield's letters¹ that he had believed The Aloe to have been begun after her brother's death as a tribute to their childhood until he found a letter dated May 11 in which she refers to The Aloe. She wrote most of The Aloe, however, at the Villa Pauline at Bandol in southern France, early in 1916 during the happiest time of her life.² The better-known version, "Prelude," dates from

¹J. Middleton Murry (ed.), Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 85.

November, 1917. In March, 1915, she was working on Brave Love, a fragment of a novel now lost. The date for the unfinished novel Maata, about a Maori princess whom she had known in New Zealand, is uncertain.

She became seriously ill late in 1917 and went to Bandol in January, 1918, for the climate. The contrast between her suffering there in 1918 and her happiness two years before is tragic. The country was depleted by war, her food and lodgings were very poor, and her doctor was incompetent. When she tried to return to England, there were several long delays, and she finally arrived in Paris at the beginning of the siege. Her illness became steadily worse; and in constant pain, misery, and fear she wrote "Je ne parle pas francais" and "Bliss." Murry believes that she might have recovered had she not undertaken the journey to France, but the threat of tuberculosis materialized, and the rest of her life is a record of suffering and approaching death. She spent all her winters on the continent, lonely for Murry and exhausted by the strain of writing. During 1919 and 1920 she reviewed current novels for the Athenaeum, which Murry was then editing, but was forced by ill health to discontinue her articles. Although her stories appeared in various magazines, she did not attract wide attention until the publication of Bliss, and Other Stories in December, 1920. The second volume, The Garden Party, and Other Stories,

followed in March, 1922. Feeling an extreme need for spiritual purification before she could write as she longed to, she entered the Gurdjieff Institute at Avon, near Fontainebleau, in October, 1922. She died there January 9, 1923, and is buried in the communal cemetery at Fontainebleau. The inscription on her tombstone is from Henry IV, Part I, Act II, Scene 3: "But I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."

CHAPTER II

CRITICAL OPINIONS OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

The study of the aesthetic principles and literary methods of Katherine Mansfield can best be introduced by an examination of critical comment upon her literary reputation, attitudes, principles, and techniques. This examination, though not definitive, is of sufficient scope to present the significant viewpoints concerning her contribution to literature. Opinions of her merit range from C. J. Eustace's insistence that Katherine Mansfield was a genius¹ to Kay Boyle's vitriolic denunciation of her stories as "the awful, the speechless confession of her own inadequacy."² No two critics apply the same criterion; more often than not, one pronounces a defect the very quality which his colleague considers a stroke of consummate art. Most critics, however, arrive at the conclusion that she was a minor writer of unique sensitivity who might well have become a major figure had she not died at thirty-four.

Her stories attracted little attention until the publication of Bliss, and Other Stories in December, 1920, barely two years before her death on January 9, 1923, although

¹An Infinity of Questions (Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946), p. 53.

²"Katherine Mansfield: A Reconsideration," New Republic, October 20, 1927, p. 309.

her reviews for the Athenaeum in 1919 had already established her as a critic. Her instantaneous popularity, strengthened by the Garden Party, and Other Stories in 1922, led many devotees to make extravagant statements.¹ In fact, during the 1920's a cult flourished around Mansfield the woman, the romantic figure of a delicate, poetic mystic slowly dying of consumption and bruises suffered at the hand of an unfeeling world.² This school paid little attention to her creative work except insofar as it reveals the author and completely ignored her critical essays. It concentrated on the letters and journal, the publication of which was felt by many to be premature, partly as a matter of taste and partly because of the danger of fostering a colorful myth. During the 1930's, however, this wave of emotionalism began to subside in favor of a more sensible approach.

Despite this unfortunate distortion, however, serious critics in England and America have acclaimed her stories. In January, 1938, the Saturday Review of Literature printed her picture with pictures of O. Henry, Joseph Conrad, and Ernest Hemingway over the caption "Four major epidemics of

¹George McLean Harper, Literary Appreciations (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1937), p. 222: ". . . there are enough of her completed pieces to establish her fame as one of the great story-writers of the world."

²Edward Wagenknecht, "Katherine Mansfield," The English Journal, April, 1928, pp. 281-282: "Here was one of the most uncannily skillful of writers who understood as the poets do and thirsted after righteousness with the saints." H. M. Tomlinson, "Katherine Mansfield," Athenaeum, January 20, 1923, p. 609: "She was hardly corporeal. She was in this world, but she gave the uncanny impression of being a visitor who might make up her mind to go at any moment."

influence." Galsworthy, Wells, and de la Mare praised her warmly during her lifetime, and authors of such widely differing styles as Edith Sitwell, Willa Cather, Conrad Aiken, and T. S. Eliot have given her work favorable attention.

Her native New Zealand was somewhat slower than England and America to appreciate her gift, but Europe accepted her at once. Her work is now known in nine translations, including Danish, Czechoslovakian, Japanese, and Chinese. In 1936 and 1937 two German university students wrote theses on her philosophy and style; German recognition is chiefly scholarly. The French, however, have been even more enthusiastic than the English-speaking cultists. Their admiration is literary, not personal, although they have erected commemorative tablets at Mentone and at Fontainebleau, where she died. Henry Seidel Canby considers Andre Maurois her most discriminating critic and remarks that it takes a French intellect to appreciate her.

Maurois characterizes her stories as "feminine"; H. E. Bates, T. S. Eliot, and Katherine Anne Porter concur in the opinion that her very feminine emotional nature shaped them. Margaret Lawrence regards her as the author of the most feminine of all the writing done by women in English and observes that it is women who build a great deal from very little.¹ Bates feels that her delicate and rippling

¹The School of Femininity (New York: A. Stokes, 1936), p. 349.

style becomes monotonously breathless and gossipy¹; but Sylvia Berkman, who has written the most extensive critical survey to date, Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study, considers this judgment superficial and inadequate, agrees that the style is feminine, but takes issue with Bates's assertion of triviality.

Several critics have discussed the childlike quality of her emotional development. Berkman sums the discussion up very well: "The world Miss Mansfield has created is constructed by a woman's intellect out of the emotional apprehension of a child."² Clifton Fadiman speaks of her prose as "inescapably feminine" and sees her stories as a continuous striving to recapture her childhood; he also points out that the adult Burnells in The Aloe are all grown-up children, although they exemplify variant forms of reversion.³ Louise Bogan goes so far as to say, "It was not only childishness, but the neurotic's love of childishness which gave poignance to many of her effects."⁴ There is a distinctly Celtic charm in her careful attention to the miniature world

¹The Modern Short Story (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1941), pp. 122-133.

²Katherine Mansfield: A Critical Study (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), pp. 195-196.

³"Reversion to Childhood," The Nation, September 3, 1930, p. 249.

⁴"Katherine Mansfield," New Republic, March 25, 1940, p. 415. Although the alternate moods of gaiety and deep depression characteristic of tuberculosis and the profound spiritual conflict of her last years heightened her sensitivity, the adjective "neurotic" employed by two or three critics is, in my opinion, wholly unjustified.

of insects and flowers, the delightful vividness of detail, and the whimsical descriptive phrases scattered here and there, but there are those who, with Conrad Aiken, recognize these traits of the child in the freshness and sharpness of her sensations but nevertheless call her sophisticated.

Margaret Lawrence speaks of her "sophisticated guilelessness."

Again Berkman clarifies the controversy: "The enlargement of perception one receives from Miss Mansfield's finest work is of the kind one gains from association with an imaginative and gifted child, who sees, freshly and sharply, imponderables of meaning within the compass of the small."¹

S. P. B. Mais discusses her microscopic analysis of essentials to build the impact of implication, and George McLean Harper, biographer of Wordsworth, recognizes in her a creative spirit somewhat Wordsworthian: "She teaches not by fable but by direct presentation of experience. She teaches by causing us to love persons and things."²

It is evident that her writing is, to a great extent, a reflection of her own temperament not in the sense of confession or of author intrusion but in its effect on the reader. Her objectivity is frequently remarked³ and has, in

¹Op. cit., pp. 202-203.

²Op. cit., p. 234.

³Alfred C. Ward, Aspects of the Modern Short Story (London: University of London Press, 1924), p. 284: "She brought her material under so perfect control that often it seems as if she is herself no longer attached to it, in the way of exercising any directive influence."

fact, caused some to call her cruel in the presentation of certain characters, but the content of a story is necessarily determined by her reaction to people and her view of life. As Willa Cather says, "She chose a small reflector to throw a luminous streak out into the shadowy realm of personal relationships."¹ According to C. J. Eustace it is her preoccupation with the significance of existence that produced her art; her work is an attempt to discover herself. This preoccupation with the catharsis of her own emotions and the intensely personal nature of her search for ultimate truth has not, however, distorted her artistic control. As Robert Littell puts it, "Miss Mansfield was concerned with the substance of life, not its pattern."² Her character and philosophy are revealed in her art as a constant search for truth. Maurois classifies her attitude as instinctive happiness mingled with theoretic pessimism.

War and the spirit of the times combined to produce the attitudes expressed in her mature writing. The stories written before her brother's death in 1915 are, almost without exception, conceded to be inferior both in style and content, but with The Aloe, begun in 1915, and its revision "Prelude" the period of her important work begins. Every one of her close friends who fought in World War I was killed, but she was most deeply affected by the death of her beloved

¹Not Under Forty (New York: Knopf, 1936), p. 135.

²"Katherine Mansfield," New Republic, February 28, 1923, p. 22.

younger brother scarcely a week after his leave in England. The shock of his death intensified her introspective turn of mind and magnified the falsity and corruption of a society that was unchanged in its basic attitudes by the cataclysm. It is about 1915, the time of his death, that the keenly felt need for spiritual purification began to emerge as a dominant theme in her letters and journals. Mansfield began to consider the external world evil and to long for simplicity and honesty. Introspection led her to desire solitude, and illness required of her a quiet life away from cities. Her increasing tendency toward mysticism culminated in her entry into the Gurdjieff Institute at Avon, Fontainebleau, a few weeks before her death.

In solitude she responded to intuition: "Her wisdom came through flashes of intuition, not as the slow garnering of sustained thought."¹ Her art makes use of these intuitive flashes to reveal the truth of momentary experience. As Brewster and Burrell have so aptly commented, a writer without a short story formula needs "exquisite intuition."²

Since she strove always to be true to her inner self, she finally set herself an impossible standard of perfection leaning toward morality of art rather than aesthetics. She regretted the immaturity of her early work and felt that she had still not achieved truth in her writing because her

¹Berkman, op. cit., p. 126.

²Dorothy Brewster and Angus Burrell, Dead Reckonings in Fiction (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1924), p. 85.

slices of life were "misleading and somewhat malicious."¹

A. R. Orage, editor of the New Age and the first to recognize her talent, discussed art with her at length shortly before she died. She had reached definite conclusions on the purpose of art: it must not only gratify and instruct, but also initiate and create. Instead of passively presenting life as it is, merely revealing the truth of a single situation, and thereby indirectly of the whole of life, art must make a positive constructive effort to create a desire for truth. In short, art must inspire.

It is well to remember that this conversation took place about two years before its appearance in print, and it is entirely possible that Orage might have misunderstood her ideas. Nevertheless, it seems safe to assume the validity of the foregoing interpretation in the light of her repeated statements that one must become more in order to write better and the assurance from many sources that she stopped writing several weeks before entering the Institute because of dissatisfaction with the kind of work she was then doing. It is also well to remember that she was desperately ill when she conversed with Orage; and it is, of course, impossible to surmise the result of this theory in actual practice. She might have abandoned it after a time or perhaps have developed it still further. Had she lived, she would almost certainly have experimented with it. Adele Kafian states unequivocally

¹A. R. Orage, "Talks with Katherine Mansfield," The Century, November, 1924, pp. 36-40.

that Mansfield already had in mind what she intended to write upon leaving Fontainebleau, but she does not explain her assertion. Although she is not a critic, Miss Kafian became rather well acquainted with Katherine Mansfield at the Institute.

Most critics who conjecture as to the sort of work she would have done had she lived fail to consider this abrupt change of attitude observed by Orage. Clifton Fadiman thinks she would have turned away from her mood of "almost Swiftian bitterness" found in "The Fly" and eventually written "the most beautiful, idealized pictures of childhood to be found in English."¹ Others make no attempt to predict her subject matter but presuppose her growth in stature. An anonymous reviewer two months after her death believed that ten more years would have sufficed to establish her name beside those of George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. Alfred Ward presumes that she would have become one of the most tragic writers of our time. Katherine Anne Porter makes no conjecture but points out her steady development, working toward depth and concentration, firmer handling of her material, flexibility of style, and concludes in regard to her dissatisfaction: ". . . that is the puzzle: that such a good artist could so have misjudged herself, her own capacities and directions."² Joseph Wood Krutch also dismisses her dissatisfaction with her work:

¹Op. cit., p. 249.

²"The Art of Katherine Mansfield," The Nation, October 23, 1937, pp. 433-436.

Unsatisfied though she was, she did succeed in communicating admirably so many and such subtle things that one may risk the statement that her fears were groundless and her feeling the result, not of any failure, but of the fact that her stories were too perfect to be translated into any other terms, and that only they could say what she wanted said.¹

Virginia Woolf is probably nearer right than anyone else:

"But her life was so short, her search so compressed that we cannot tell now how she would have developed . . . had she lived."²

Dissatisfaction was by no means, however, confined to her last years. She sometimes tore up completed manuscripts after the exhilaration of completion had worn off. Very few pieces remain from the period between 1911 and 1913. Her remarkable development in both insight and technique from the German Pension (1911), for instance, which one critic unkindly says shows no promise whatever of her talent, to such masterpieces as "The Fly" and "The Doll's House" was won only at the price of painful persistence to attain smoothness and subtlety. Occasionally a critic mentions a sterile period when what is actually meant is either a period of dissatisfaction or of exhaustion caused by illness rather than an actual cessation of effort. Mansfield is quoted as having said, "I have discovered that I cannot burn the candle at one end and write a book with the other."³ The effect of severe

¹"Imponderable Values," The Nation, February 20, 1924, p. 210.

²"The Journal of Katherine Mansfield," The Nation and the Athenaeum, September 10, 1927, p. 750.

³Margaret Bell, "In Memory of Katherine Mansfield," Bookman, January, 1933, pp. 34-46.

ill health during the last two or three years was to spur her to feverish endeavor lest she die with her work unfinished. Often troubled by a maddening inability to snare the ideas she glimpsed, she felt as if she raced to catch the vision before it disappeared. "She was writing with her life blood."¹

Despite the effort it cost her, she felt compelled to write. Critics agree that her life was inextricably bound up in her work, although hardly in the sense of her work as a vehicle for her search for truth, as one or two would have it, but rather as an expression of her being. The catharsis of a writer's emotions is in any instance a problem difficult of solution, but apparently only two of her stories are considered direct results of her effort to cope with a specific situation vicariously: "Prelude," in a measure to assuage her grief at the loss of her brother, and "Je ne parle pas francais," to utter a cry against corruption.

Her compulsion to write seems to be the natural outpouring of creativity intensified perhaps by her concept of the artist, the growth of which parallels her startling development as a writer. From 1907 until around 1913 the artist was to her a superior being, detached and decidedly aristocratic, who shuns the ugly world of the mob and lives in exotic surroundings of candle light, rose petals, and eccentric decorative touches dramatically arranged for maximum

¹Sylvia Norman, "A Word on Katherine Mansfield," The Fortnightly, April, 1948, pp. 278-284.

effect. It must be remembered that when she held this concept, she was extremely young and had been strongly influenced by her stay at Queen's College, where her German professor, a young literary dilettante, who had noticed her poetry, had introduced her to the aesthetes of the 1890's--Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, Paul Verlaine. She then, according to Berkman, delighted in her worldliness and was known in Wellington as ultramodern. Although she was very far from being worldly and her pose of sophistication thinly veiled her force of "raw emotion." Berkman quotes from "In a Cafe" (1907) written when its author was barely nineteen:

Life to a girl who had read Nietzsche, Eugene Sue, Baudelaire, D'Annunzio, Georges Barres, Catulle Mendes, Sudermann, Ibsen, Tolstoi, was, in her opinion, no longer complex, but a trifle obvious.¹

and adds that though her conception was mistaken, Mansfield was profoundly sincere in her faith in the artist and in herself as an artist; she was never either patient or moderate; she achieved acceptance and endurance only after long suffering and even then more in theory than in practice.

No one except Berkman mentions these first pieces in the Symbolist tradition, vignettes or simply sketches without plot. "They are," she says, "impressionistic explorations of mood, prose lyrics stressing musical rhythm and color harmony, fusing subjective emotion with natural scene." They make use of Symbolist devices such as intershifting of the senses and

¹Op. cit., p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 27.

affected phraseology leaning toward the epigrammatic style of Oscar Wilde studded with aphorisms. "The Death of a Rose" deals solely with exquisite floral decay. Some critics do, however, discuss this period of pseudo-sophistication without reference to specific examples. It is in this period (1907-1913) that her satirical gift is most evident, the period in which she was preoccupied with the clever turn of phrase. Almost everything written during this period, even though she had outgrown the Symbolist influence by 1910 or 1911, is wholly lacking in subtlety. In the first criticism of her work on record Alfred Randall in the New Age, May 4, 1911, annihilates "A Fairy Story" with "O, Shaw! Where is thy sting? O, Grimm! Where is thy victory?"

Around 1913 and 1914 she began to see the life of her circle as false and trivial, but it was not until the shock of war caused her to examine more closely the nature of life and art that her concept of the artist became more than mere romantic fancy. Even so, she always venerated the real artist as the highest expression human nature could achieve. The artist must be free from hypocrisy and self-interest in order to transmit the radiant beauty in the world; like Keats, she considered beauty and truth synonymous. In the closing years of her life the "transmission of beauty in itself, as commensurate with truth, was to serve as her moral protest, and she intensified to an extreme her demand for purity in the

transmitting instrument."¹ Thus it becomes clear why the revulsion at pretense and the thirst for simplicity and honesty came with such intensity.

Let it be noted at this point that in spite of her ethical theory of art, which is, after all, the only important one, since the decadent influence is not found in any of her significant work, she never stressed a moral point. The emotional content is implicit despite complete objectivity. Everyone from Katherine Anne Porter to T. S. Eliot agrees that she expounds no philosophy, preaches no sermon, states no beliefs, but only Frances M. Perry, considering this a fault, observes that her work lacks the power and completeness of "a great interpretation of life."²

The period immediately after the publication of the German Pension (1911), a period from which so few pieces remain, shows decided traces of the other predominant literary current of the time, naturalism. Skill and subtlety of implication are not yet present, but already the keen eye for detail, often sharply satirical, the emotionally charged moment, and lively dialogue serving a functional end are evident. The mastery of concentrated force in dramatic situation is gradually being achieved, and narration is moving toward the fluid combination of inner and outer view later so capably handled as shift from interior monologue to exterior scene. The typical thematic material of the best work appears here

¹Ibid., p. 140.

²Story-Writing: Lessons from the Masters (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1926), p. 208.

as concern with surface appearance begins to give way to deeper penetration: the attempted but impossible escape from oppressing reality, the sensitive apprehension of a child, often shocked, and the falsity and stupidity of "social herds." There is also some use of New Zealand material, but the treatment for the most part lacks the sureness and emotional impact of the stories usually thought of in the New Zealand group, although one or two are surprisingly effective.

The most profound influence upon Katherine Mansfield was, of course, Chekhov, as by far the largest weight of critical opinion agrees.

Whoever first said in public that Katherine Mansfield was a disciple of Tchekov, [sic] bears a heavy responsibility, since almost everyone has come to assume that without the Russian dramatist and story-writer there would have been no Katherine Mansfield. . . . The loose-end school of fiction is unlikely to control the English genius; but its curriculum is susceptible of interesting adaptation, and it is in this connexion [sic] that Katherine Mansfield is illumination.¹

Sylvia Norman insists that she must be considered as more than a mere offshoot of Chekhov. H. E. Bates sees her technique as a combination of Chekhov and Virginia Woolf. Frank Swinnerton believes her talent was overweighted by "an impulsive admiration" for Chekhov and bluntly classifies her as an imitator whose tales were mere records of mood, albeit done with keen sensitivity. Martin Armstrong is somewhat kinder in his observation that she "obviously studied Tchekov sic devoutly . . . but the method she derived from him she

¹Ward, op. cit., pp. 269, 282.

made entirely her own, for she was a fine enough artist to be a disciple with impunity."¹

Somerset Maugham is perhaps the least biased of the critics in his estimate of the Russian influence, despite the fact that he does not altogether approve her method. He includes some of her work in an anthology and comments in a prefatory note: "Probably of all the modern writers who have been influenced by Chekov [sic] Katherine Mansfield is the best."² He admires her delicate insight, her careful attention to detail, and her "lucid and easy English" but objects to what he considers formlessness in the longer stories. It seems to him that the stories of Chekhov and his followers consist of incidents without rhyme or reason trailing aimlessly into thin air; he feels that they record a mood or describe a character in a void, but he admits that their presentation of the vagueness and inconsequence of life attains admirable verisimilitude and makes consciously plotted stories seem outrageously stilted.

Joseph Warren Beach sees a very close relationship, although he acknowledges stylistic differences: "One is tempted to say that Katherine Mansfield was a Chekhov character--one of the strongest of his characters."³ She has

¹"The Art of Katherine Mansfield," The Fortnightly, March, 1923, pp. 484-485.

²Fifty Modern English Writers (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1934), pp. 317-320.

³"Katherine Mansfield and Her Russian Master," Virginia Quarterly Review, October, 1951, p. 604.

none of the Russian's sense of futility but resembles him in mood and technique. She and Chekhov have in common the power of evoking moods, particularly of loneliness and frustration, the contradiction of the apparent by the real being a recurrent theme. She learned from him the casual linking of incidents through which the meaning shines and an absence of interest in event as event or even in the primary emotion of the event, but rather in the emotional repercussions of the event. Both authors begin in medias res and cease at the climax. Her writing is more impressionistic than Chekhov's and, as already indicated, it reflects to a large degree her own temperament. Mansfield has no critical view of society or human nature. Her most distinguishing innovations are the use of flashback, interior monologue, and more vivid imagery often leaning toward the miniature.

Brewster and Burrell regard this type of short story as a new literary form having neither plot nor climax but illuminating the significance of a single event to reveal the subtlety of the human being. They quote Henry Seidel Canby in the New York Evening Post to the effect that her mastery of technique has elevated the short story to the dignity to which it is entitled as an artistic medium. The choice of this right moment requires keen psychological insight and sound aesthetic equipment to avoid the merely trivial, but the process of selecting exactly the right moment defies

analysis. "The distinguishing mark of such moments of insight is the reciprocal relation of the inner and outer--a kind of chemico-mystical synthesis. Chekhov and Mansfield must have caught these flashes."¹

Alfred Ward conceded that much evidence might be adduced from Bliss, and Other Stories (1920) for proving strong Russian influence, but he feels that by the time of The Garden Party, and Other Stories (1922) she had developed beyond Chekhov. The difference between Chekhov and Mansfield is that he acts as an operative and directive agency while she acts as a propulsive agency, winning at last a unique intensity by amazing concentration. One effect she has on the reader is to make him realize suddenly that the world is teeming with situations she could have utilized. Dorothy Hoare ranks her alongside Chekhov as a story-teller, with whom he has much in common, but thinks the similarity is not one of discipleship.

Berkman acknowledges Chekhov's influence in clarifying Katherine Mansfield's attitude toward technique, but is not inclined to stress it to any considerable degree. She says the Romantic poets had a decided effect on her, as well. She also discusses at some length the hitherto apparently unnoticed similarities between the Mansfield stories and those of James Joyce, her intent being not to propose an influence but merely to set forth parallels in many

¹Brewster and Burrell, op. cit., p. 87.

respects. Mansfield and Joyce shared some of the same concepts of the short story, notably in the moments of insight and in structure and reader participation in the experience of the characters by means of interior monologue and dramatic rather than expository narration. Like Chekhov, she does employ oblique revelation and implication with consummate skill.

Surprisingly enough, at least two critics compare her with O. Henry instead of Chekhov. Both Edward Wagenknecht and George Stevens mention the trick ending, which O. Henry employed objectively, as being a characteristic device of Mansfield in several stories in which she employs it subjectively: ". . . . her stories are not the slices of life, trailing off into vagueness, that they once seemed to be; they are tours de force, perfectly designed to arouse a particular response."¹

According to H. E. Bates she learned casual and oblique narration from Chekhov, the ability to tell a story as much by what is left out as by what is left in; but in the Russian one notices a certain grayness of tone, as if he worked in "pencil and pastel," while she is vivid and clearly colored like stained glass. Her designs have a quality of transparency. She attempted to bring the "fancy, delicacy, shape, and coloured conceit of the Elizabethan lyric" into the prose of the short story form.²

¹George Stevens, "On Second Thought," The Saturday Review of Literature, October 2, 1937, p. 11.

²Op. cit., pp. 122-133.

Bates is by no means the only critic who has compared her technique with that of the poets. Harper considers her equal to Dickens or Chekhov in poetic freshness and keenness of perception. Armstrong, on the other hand, describes her method as opposite to that of Dickens. He says she evokes sensations by her impressionism and strong feeling for significant detail:

She is like a fine draughtsman for whom the vital matter is not to copy nature indiscriminately but to produce a definite reaction on the spectator by a careful arrangement of certain stimuli . . . Her method is, in fact, the poetic method.¹

Even Louise Bogan concedes that as an artist Mansfield was the forerunner of a new kind of sensibility in English prose. C. J. Eustace, aware of her keen sensitivity to the stimulus of nature, comments thus on her "special prose" (her own phrase describing "Prelude"):

This 'special prose' of which she speaks constitutes her genius. We find it not only in her poems, which are not quite poems, but in her notebooks and letters, which have the mysterious quality of fluent prose, the almost personal genius of poetic exposition.²

He then touches on her almost metaphysical insight laying bare the motives of her characters:

Metaphysics and poetry are almost at opposite poles in regard to the aspect under which they isolate being, and it happens but rarely that a single person will combine the specific qualities of both in art. We speak of metaphysical poetry, and I suppose we can boast, in a sense, of the poetry of metaphysics It would be more accurate to claim, perhaps, that most artists and poets are in reality pre-occupied with metaphysical problems in their poetry and art.³

¹Op. cit., pp. 486, 488.

²Op. cit., p. 60.

³Ibid., p. 62.

Joseph Wood Krutch relates mysticism and poetry: "The secret of Miss Mansfield's power lies in her possession of that poetic vision which is close to mysticism."¹ David Daiches has something to say on the same point. For fable literature plot is by far the most important element; it is the action that illustrates the supposition. The expression of vision, however, becomes lyric poetry, as for example in Blake.

Paul Dinkins remarks upon her superb faculty for conveying a sense of space and speaks of her intoxication with surfaces.² This faculty of observation, the vivid detail of keen sense impressions and their transfer or the transfer of physical properties to the immaterial, is one of her delightful characteristics, according to Wagenknecht.³ Her use of poetic method in conveying emotion by means of concrete detail, quite an innovation in the short story, is the subject of a brief but illuminating article by Conrad Aiken. Her inquisitive sensibility, he says, makes use of the short story form as a

. . . . means for the presentation of a 'quintessence,' a summation of a human life or group of lives in the single significant 'scene' or situation or episode; and, by implication, the illumination, thus, against a somber background (the somberness being given by absence of values, in the objective world; absence of express concern on the part of the author) of life itself. This, one observes, is the method of poetry.⁴

¹Op. cit., p. 211.

²"Revisions in a Portrait," Saturday Review of Literature, October 26, 1951, p. 10.

³Op. cit., p. 277.

⁴"The Short Story as Poetry," The Freeman, May 11, 1921, pp. 210-211.

Her prose has "shimmer and iridescence, a chromatic vividness (the vividness of dream rather than the vividness of life)." He considers "Escape," "Sun and Moon," "Prelude," and "The Man Without a Temperament" perfect examples of their type, but the poetry has escaped in "Bliss," "Feuille d'Album," and the comparatively trivial "Psychology" and "Dill Pickle." In reviewing The Garden Party, and Other Stories (1922) nearly a year later and The Doves' Nest, and Other Stories (1923) a few months after her death he is less kind, evidently having tired of her "narrative lyrics." He avers that her stories cannot be read the third time: "One cannot dine on the iridescent."¹ George Stevens, on the other hand, upon rereading them after fifteen years finds that each has made an indelible impression.² Conrad Aiken calls "I seen the little lamp," which George McLean Harper compares in its effect to "And never lifted up a single stone" from Wordsworth's "Michael," a "clever touch" in which the author intrudes her own personality and speaks for Our Else.³

Katherine Anne Porter describes her sure choice of words as "delicate as a surgeon's scalpel." John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield's husband, remembers in his autobiography that she described her own power of noticing as "searching through leaf after leaf of a wood and finally

¹"The Short Story as Colour," The Freeman, June 21, 1922, p. 358.

²Op. cit., p. 11.

³"The Short Story as Confession," The New Republic, August 8, 1923, p. 308.

discovering what she sought--the word of perfect significance."¹ Berkman details this use of concentrated sensuous experience, or poetic imagery, at the end of the discussion on the influence of Chekhov. He is general; she is specific: "When Chekhov writes of the freshly fallen snow he describes the first fall of snow at any time, in any city Miss Mansfield, describing a snowfall, emphasizes distinctive detail in localized scene."²

Through energetic verbs her prose conveys motion and color and takes on a "buoyant, iridescent quality." Berkman notes³ that bird wings and the sea supply recurrent images of agitation, fluttering, feathers, certain birds, flight, or shells, tide, and the like. Mansfield relates details of setting to the emotional mood of her stories through season and weather or light. Usually this device is not obvious as an overt symbol. Remoteness or detachment is conveyed by moonlight, fear or desolation by dark, cold, rain, snow, or frightening shadows for children, warmth of love and security by the glow of firelight or lamplight. Danger is often a frightening animal; Raoul Duquette in "Je ne parle" is repeatedly characterized as a sharp-nosed fox terrier before whom Mouse is helpless. Linda Burnell sees Stanley as a Newfoundland dog. Familiar, commonplace objects are sometimes

¹Between Two Worlds (New York: Julian Messner, 1936), p. 308.

²Op. cit., p. 157.

³Berkman, op. cit., pp. 187-195.

used to characterize or to intensify an unpleasant atmosphere, as when Ma Parker notices through the dirty window the clouds in the winter sky "frayed at the edges, with holes in them, or dark stains like tea."¹

The bird, the tree, and the insect recur as symbols. The two doves in "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" parallel the relationship of Reggie and Anne in their flight, as the title indicates. The identification of the pear tree with Bertha Young in "Bliss" is not quite so obvious. The aloe in "Prelude," dangerously thorny but blooming once in every hundred years, symbolizes Linda Burnell; originally the story was planned to allow the plant a larger role. It was to have been cut down when Linda was ill; also Mansfield had planned to have the birth of the infant son, who was to be the object of Linda's one selfless love, in the last chapter. The insect is created in multitudes only to be born, to exist briefly, and to suffer destruction at the mercy of some capricious force. The fly, particularly the fly fallen into a milk jug, recurs from time to time in the letters and journals. Berkman supposes the image was refreshed by Chekhov's "Small Fry" or by Mansfield's reading of Shakespeare late in 1921, where the following lines from King Lear are marked "The Fly";

As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods.
They kill us for their sport.²

¹The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), p. 486.

²Act IV, Scene I.

The symbolism in "The Fly" is confused, however. The boss evidently stands for the superior capricious force of fate or destiny impersonally torturing the helpless insect, but at the same time he himself has suffered at the hand of this fate through the death of his only son in the war. The symbolism is further complicated by the secondary theme of the "atrophy of feeling the poor of heart eventually experience."¹ This results in much confusion in trying to interpret the story symbolically. Joseph Wood Krutch, from an entirely different viewpoint, says he feels that the old man admires the fly's fortitude: "A deeper meaning dawns as one realizes that the old man is cruel not for the sake of cruelty, but in order to give himself courage, and that the death of the fly reverberates in his mind as the death knell of his own life."² In my opinion no critic interprets the story satisfactorily.

Imagery is the integration of subject and object, according to Brewster and Burrell. Since emotions probed are likely to be elusive, the indirect approach becomes extraordinarily effective. Implication built up by the linking of the vague with the concrete conveys a suggestion to the reader, who comprehends or elaborates it by his own intuition or experience. Or, as Willa Cather puts it, the author "communicates vastly more than she actually writes."³

¹Berkman, op. cit., p. 195.

²Op. cit., p. 211.

³Op. cit., p. 137.

Often exposition by oblique reference is handled in the same way, interlacing the past and present by assuming a vantage point just outside the scene and slipping in and out of the character's consciousness. Bates does not think character building one of her strong points because she catches only moments of self-revelation in passing. Deft blending of interior monologue and exterior dramatic action is obtained by maintaining one persistent note throughout the story, a technique resembling that of Virginia Woolf but reversing Woolf's method by casting the whole narrative in the tone used for the interior consciousness of the character on whom the interest is focused. Mansfield speaks in the character's own idiom, thereby ensuring appropriateness of tone to subject matter and at the same time avoiding author intrusion, since the character is presented by the way in which he reacts to the situation in which he finds himself. Conrad Aiken, however, believes that all her characters are herself in different disguises and insists that frequently the author and not the character speaks. The use of interior monologue permits dramatic action within the character. Collins calls this device transformation of mental states, Armstrong sees the course of action marked by mental revelations, and Katherine Anne Porter refers to it as conveying a sense of living on many planes at once.

Effective use of dialogue is recognized by Maurois. Berkman also acknowledges this ability, but in regard to

Mansfield's obvious inclination to write plays during the period preceding her mature work, considers her unable to create and sustain the complex situations characteristic of the stage. Also, her interest shifted more and more toward interior action and exploration of the subjective. She developed an almost Proustian blending of dramatic scene by shift of focus from one character to another, particularly in "Prelude," where apparently casual interlinking of episodes is not really casual at all. All the time, however, "Prelude" gathers together dissociated elements and concentrates them in Kezia. Herein lies the chief difference in narrative technique between Mansfield and the Joyce of Dubliners: his focus is primarily on the situation; hers on an individual character.

Her chief themes are loneliness, frustration, maladjustment, purposeless suffering, the falseness, ostentation, and sterility of modern sophisticated life, and the denial of emotional fulfillment. The apparent versus the real, the lonely one, and immutable beauty of nature in the face of human disaster are more specific forms of the foregoing. Also the Proustian theme recurs: no relationship remains unchanged.¹ Robert Littell says of "The Wind Blows": ". . . . it gathers into a few pages all the restless homesickness of man on his planet, the unbearable pressure of elements which made someone cry out long ago, 'For I am a

¹Op. cit., pp. 82, 85, 196.

stranger here, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were."¹ He adds that one remembers the feelings her characters had, if not what happened to them. Malcolm Cowley sums up her thematic material thus: ". . . life is a wonderful spectacle, but disagreeable for the actors."² He points out that throughout The Garden Party, and Other Stories (1922) two situations recur: a woman tormenting a man and a woman destroyed by someone else. He considers all her characters neurotic or psychopathic; and, although he grants that her observation of people is extensive and accurate, he believes that when sympathy does not lead her to understanding, hate does. He describes the portrait of Reginald Peacock as "venomously meticulous."

The stories discussed in the ensuing paragraph are most often mentioned, but fifty or more are cited by one critic or another as illustrative of some trait or device. Berkman is the critic most thorough and widest in range. A few of the unfinished stories are discussed at length, since the longer fragments define character sufficiently well enough for the critic to predict a trend of development or to confirm a characteristic present elsewhere.

Although J. Middleton Murry considers "A Married Man's Story" her most nearly perfect story of its kind, and Sylvia Norman chooses "Honeymoon" as "the perfection of Katherine Mansfield," most critics cite the stories drawn

¹Op. cit., p. 22.

²"The Author of Bliss," The Dial, August, 1922, pp. 230-232.

from New Zealand material as her best work. More has been written about "Prelude" and its companion piece "At the Bay," one is tempted to say, than about most of the others put together, but this is not strictly true. The vivid characters of the Burnell family, freely adapted from her own, have attracted much attention. Kezia, the child most prominent in the New Zealand group, is one of Mansfield's most memorable characters. Whenever the action centers about her, the reactions are always those of the child, not those of the author; Kezia's world is seen through her own eyes. Several have identified her with Mansfield herself and one with the longed-for daughter she never had, although the letters and journals usually specify a wish for a son. All Mansfield's children live half in the adult world and half in the world of their own secret reality; the barrier of taste which separates childhood from the adult world has been carefully observed. Our Else in "The Doll's House" is identified by George Hubbell with the child in "The Woman at the Store" and "The Child-Who-Was-Tired," not as the same character but as having the same elements. Linda and Stanley Burnell, based largely on her own mother and father, have also been analyzed, as has Beryl Fairfield, who is less convincing than either of them primarily because she bears less resemblance to her prototype, Mansfield's aunt. The grandmother manages the household, as in the author's own

experience. Linda is pictured as languid and dissatisfied, Stanley as likeable but insensitive and rather egotistical, Beryl as young and restless, the grandmother as the calm force which holds the family together.

Among the earliest pieces dealing with New Zealand subject matter are "The Woman at the Store," presumably inspired by a six-week camping trip through the brush, "Millie," and "Ole Underwood," all three dealing with crime and insanity. "The Woman at the Store" caused a minor sensation among the staff members of Rhythm, but all three stories are noteworthy only for their indication of technical development.

"Je ne parle pas francais" has caused perhaps more disagreement than any other Mansfield story, although a great deal of her work has excited comment both for and against it. It is "one of her most characteristic," "one of the most psychological," "diabolically clever," or else "a complete failure." Perhaps the mildest comment upon it is "not a complete success." The New Zealand stories are based on firsthand experience; but "Je ne parle" is the projected anxieties of a fearful mind, according to Berkman, and well it might be, having been written during the siege of Paris in 1918 while its author grew steadily worse after becoming ill at Bandol, where she had gone for the winter to escape the English climate. The character of Raoul Duquette is supposedly drawn from Francis Carco, of whom it is a cruel

portrait, but no more so than his of her in Les Innocents. Murry considers the story almost as interesting as a success because it has an equivocal and mysterious atmosphere of undefined evil lurking near the heart of life. She herself called it "a cry against corruption." "Bliss" is almost as controversial. It is considered an excellent example of short story form or unsuccessful because of its artificial structure. It is a failure because of its half-sophisticated tone and too-obvious hysteria, or it is a masterpiece of subtlety. T. S. Eliot says¹ that no story of any considerable structure could move so fast and most stories would begin where it ends. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" also caused a storm at first; many critics denounced her as merciless in holding up the two poor old sisters in the story to ridicule. She was shocked and hurt at being so much misunderstood. Not everyone, of course, shared this view. Thomas Hardy even suggested that she write more about them, but very few understood her deep sympathy and pity for wasted lives because her artistic objectivity was mistaken for cruel mockery.

"The Garden Party" juxtaposes a scene of social gaiety with one of sudden death nearby, revealing the effect of the incongruity upon the sensitive young girl, Laura. Of course, there is one critic, F. M. Perry, who refers to the girl's "amusing little petition to the dead," feeling that

¹After Strange Gods (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1933), pp. 38-39.

the reader "leaves the story in a spirit of indulgence, sighing, 'Oh, the pity of it.'"¹ Most critics, however, treat it seriously as an excellent study of the girl brought face to face with death for the first time. Ma Parker's reaction to the death of her grandson takes on additional poignancy when contrasted with the attitude of her employer, the "literary gentleman." Her isolation is complete and inescapable. "Miss Brill" is a study in emotional starvation which some critics say does and others say does not achieve maximum effectiveness. No one who mentions it considers it a failure, but opinions vary as to whether or not it ranks as one of her best works. Miss Ada Moss in "Pictures" is in somewhat the same position. Isolation is a favorite theme, whether at a moment of crisis or during the whole of a lifetime. "The Child-Who-Was-Tired," called one of the most terrible of stories, is another illustration of the same theme. It is not often evaluated, but it is almost always compared to Chekhov's "Sleepy," from which it was perhaps consciously adapted; or more probably, as suggested by Elisabeth Schneider, its resemblance to Chekhov's story was a phenomenon of unconscious memory. Outline, mood, and much detail bear close resemblance to its Russian predecessor. In support of this theory the similarity between the unfinished "Dove's Nest" and the latter half of Henry James's The

¹Op. cit., p. 211.

Wings of the Dove is cited. Edward Shanks in March, 1922, said that "The Stranger" is one of the best stories in the English language.

Mansfield the critic is scarcely mentioned by her biographers and critics, who merely note that she so established herself by her reviews for the Athenaeum (1919-1920). Edith Walton calls her "bitterly contemptuous" of artists who betrayed their gifts, but my examination of the reviews themselves fails to confirm this statement. Again, Berkman is the only source of extensive evaluation, and even she has comparatively little to say. Mansfield the creative writer shines through the reviews in characteristic lively humor, clever turn of phrase, and vision of life. Mansfield the critic was "completely subjective." In the opinion of Berkman she showed very little interest in contemporary writing during her last years (1919-1922). In turning away from the contemporary world she also rejected the expression of the modern spirit in literature. Social and psychological realism and Shaw's social moralism were, to her, completely sterile. Self-consciousness resulting in ostentation, pretense, and perversity disgusted her. Although her comments were perceptive, they were "lukewarm." True enough, she was called upon to review quantities of inferior work, but nevertheless she was never more than mildly enthusiastic.

Although there is actually very little critical comment upon Katherine Mansfield in comparison with the criticism of better known figures, for the most part she is considered fairly and with penetration, despite occasional lapses of judgment on the part of a few critics. Most critics consider her a minor writer because of her narrow range of subject matter, albeit an excellent one. George McLean Harper, however, feels that there are enough of her completed pieces to establish her as one of the great story writers of the world: "The reader forgets that this is fiction. He observes, as if with his own eyes, what is going on."¹

¹Op. cit., p. 229.

CHAPTER III

KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE

The relation between the literary art of Katherine Mansfield and her experience may be studied in an examination of her attitude toward life, her philosophical speculations, and her reactions to people. Her delineation of both character and scene as well as her choice of themes is dependent to an unusual degree upon this background.

Her Journal, Scrapbook, and Letters are unusually revealing. She never expected them to be published, however, and more than once wrote to her husband, "Burn these letters." Virginia Woolf says of the Journal, "We feel that we are watching a mind which is alone with itself."¹ Scattered throughout the letters and journals are vivid descriptions of her surroundings. She concerns herself comparatively little with interiors except insofar as they affect her ability to write; one is chiefly impressed by an occasional deft character portrait and by her strong feeling for Nature. She was fond of gardening, and she frequently mentions her delight in flowers. Her descriptive passages are rich in metaphors and similes drawn from weather, the sea, and plant or animal life; she speaks of recognizing a fellow sufferer

¹"The Journal of Katherine Mansfield," The Nation and the Athenaeum, September 10, 1927, p. 750.

from tuberculosis by his slightly too-bright smile, "the faint glitter on the plant that the frost has laid a finger on."¹ Her identification with Nature became intensified after the fright of her first certainty of the disease:

I wonder if you would feed on this visible world as I do. I was looking at some leaves only yesterday-- idly looking and suddenly I became conscious of them but not as something outside oneself, but as part of one--as though like a magician I could put forth my hand and shake a green branch into my fingers from . . . ? And I feel as though one received--accepted--absorbed the beauty of the leaves even into one's physical being.²

Dawn and sunset were her favorite times of the day. Of evening she wrote some fifteen months before her death: "One feels half disembodied, sitting like a shadow at the door of one's being while the dark tide rises."³

She felt the same ravenous hunger for life that she felt for Nature. Her surrender to experience began in her girlhood with the Wilde influence. Even though life to her was in some respects loathsomely ugly and people were often cruel, she felt that if she understood the reason behind life, it would be indescribably beautiful because there were so many glimpses, "divine warnings," of beauty. Life was bitter-sweet, "an anguish and a joy," a "mystery made up of love and pains," a relationship of giving and taking. There was no escaping the glory of it; the haunting beauty triumphs over the ugliness, and that triumph she longed to express. She

¹Katherine Mansfield, Letters, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1929), p. 332.

²Ibid., pp. 332-333.

³Ibid., p. 409.

believed that one must give oneself up to life in order to live; she never wanted to be merely resigned. "I'm rooted in Life. Even if I hate life, I spring from it and feed on it."¹ The things she had not seen and felt but passed by unheeded she regretted keenly: "Life is only given once, and then I waste it."² Finally she came to the conclusion that one must turn away from what might have been and submit to life so utterly that no personal self with its griefs remains and forgive the wrongs life has dealt; this surrender was being true to one's deepest self. She clung tenaciously to life, loving it more as time went on, in spite of grave illness. She wrote to a friend a little more than a year and a half before her death: "One must live for the moment, [sic] that is all I feel now."³

Always she felt that her purpose in life was to write. To waste time preyed upon her conscience, especially when there was no chance to work. Stories waited on the threshold, grew tired, wilted, faded, as she said, and still she did not come to them. Sometimes, unable to achieve calm, she read whatever was at hand and refused to meet her "obligation" to write. At Montana in Switzerland she wrote to a friend that time was becoming shorter and shorter, whisking around the corners, condensing into all Saturday to Monday: "Alas! what a plague is Time. No sooner has one begun to

¹Ibid., p. 258.

²Ibid., p. 438.

³Ibid., p. 385.

appreciate what the other is seeing than he is whirled away."¹ The main reason for this concern about wasted time, of course, was her strong premonition of approaching death. One sees death in life, she said, as in a freshly unfolded flower and praises the flower's beauty. She could not tell anyone how she felt about the "deserts of vast eternity" except by writing, perhaps about a boy eating strawberries or a woman combing her hair on a windy morning, but the feeling was there.

Apparently preoccupation with death began in October, 1915, when her brother was killed in France. The journal entries at this time mirror a mood of deepest despair. She was no longer afraid of death but would have welcomed it and believed in immortality because she longed to join him. She says at this time that her life had been over for a long time, but that she only acknowledged its end when he died; she did not commit suicide, because she had a duty to perform to the time when they were both alive--to write about New Zealand. This dissatisfaction with life was very likely not strong until brought to the surface by her grief. Of course, she recovered her natural desire for life, but illness soon turned her thoughts to death. Bad weather in particular brought about depression, mainly because it worsened her physical condition. In October, 1919, she wrote that a year ago she had thought she was going to die, and a month later she wrote to

¹Ibid., p. 365.

her husband, "Once the defenses are fallen between you and Death they are not built up again. It needs such a little push, hardly that, just a false step, just not looking, and you are over."¹ In December of that same year her journal records a moment of numb surrender; after two years of obsession with the fear of death, she gave up caring. It made no difference. In November, 1920, she thought she had scarcely any time to live, and a year later she remarked that she was troubled every day by the inevitability of death.

In October, 1920, she reviewed a novel by R. O. Prowse, A Gift of the Dusk, for the Athenaeum, in which the main character, a consumptive, had to face the prospect of death in the near future. She prefaced her remarks on the novel itself with a brief essay, the substance of which is that it is a very different thing indeed to contemplate death as inevitable at some vague future time and to know that "the train is going to rush into a black hole"² almost immediately. It is then for the first time that the future is contained in the present. She then observes that however rich the present may be, it is still only a preparation. The writer discovers what he wants to say only upon finishing his book; the painter expects to begin where he left off with his

¹Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1951), pp. 400-401, November 21, 1919.

²Novels and Novelists, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 292.

last picture. Then she asks, "What is the present when the future is removed?"¹

She by no means feared death because she could not know what might lie beyond, but because she could not bear to think that her work might be left unfinished. To her, work and life were indivisible; only by being true to life could she be true to art, and to be true to life was to be good, sincere, simple, honest. She longed for goodness, that is, to live by what is permanent in the soul:

Honesty (why?) is the only thing one seems to prize beyond life, love, death, everything. . . . 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.²

This was the truth she dedicated her life to expressing.

Although she was deeply religious, and although she searched always for something she could honestly believe in, she drifted farther and farther from an orthodox belief in God. To her, a personal deity who would permit evil, ugliness, and insensitivity was utterly incomprehensible. The "amorphous God of modern optimism," as she phrased it in a book review, was abhorrent to her. Not speaking as a conventional Christian to a personal divinity, but to that which lives in Beauty, she begged, "I believe (and VERY MUCH); help thou mine unbelief."³ She questions herself in her journal

¹Ibid.

²Journal, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 135.

³Letters to Murry, p. 573.

as to peace of mind, replying that she had it fully when she wrote "Miss Brill." Otherwise, peace of mind seems to have been a very elusive thing indeed. Desiring calm, she often wished that she could suffer only so far and then collapse or become exhausted, but unhappily, the more she suffered, the more strength she had to endure her distress. Nevertheless, she believed that suffering could be overcome by submission to it, her creed of acceptance.

Some sort of faith was absolutely necessary, and for a time she sought it in love--not merely a personal love, but a greater love, to give the whole of life this love. She wrote to Murry in 1919, "No, there's no God. . . . There is no God or Heaven or help of any kind but Love. Perhaps Love can do everything. 'Lo, I have made of love all my religion.' Who said that? It's marvellous."¹ By 1921 she thought even this faith inadequate. In the spring or early summer of that year she copied the following quotation from War and Peace into her notebook:

Life is everything. Life is God. All is changing and moving, and that motion is God. And while there is life there is the joy of the consciousness of the God-head. To love life is to love God. The hardest and the most blessed thing is to love this life in one's sufferings, in undeserved suffering.²

She believed that if one were always true to one's vision of life, out of evil good would surely come, and the greatest failing of all was to be frightened.

¹Ibid., p. 378. The quotation is from a poem of Murry's.

²Scrapbook, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1940), p. 199.

She was greatly troubled during these last years. Her work almost took the place of a religion; she says as much and adds that she was tempted to kneel before it. The necessity of purpose made her speak at one point in the Journal of feeling unable to pray because she had done no work and was therefore not in an active state of grace. She felt actual guilt at not writing on the days when she rested or merely amused herself instead. Failure was a sin. Upon one occasion she reproved herself thus: "The reason why [sic] you find it so hard to write is because [sic] you are learning nothing."¹

Always the silence, or inability to find the right word or phrase or to begin writing at all, troubled her. The journals record many such moods of disquiet when the words refused to come, when she knew exactly what she wanted to say and how to say it, when, upon being written down, the wonders faded. At times she could hardly bear the silence haunted by thoughts. This term "silence" apparently meant more than the mere absence of expression; she speaks of it often, once as comparable to the hush immediately before the curtain rises at the theater, the moment of breathless expectation just as the creative impulse is felt and begins to take form as a work of art. It is, then, doubly oppressive to be unable to capture the impulse properly when it begs expression, for a complete absence of ideas would require nothing to be released.

¹Journal, p. 244.

She once called silence the ultimate blackness.¹ Eustace explains her state of mind thus:

She had reached the dilemma of all true artists. Desiring to know herself, and yet unable to do so except through the creation of a work produced, overflowing from the fullness of her spirit, she suffered the feeling of frustration which precedes creativity.²

In October, 1920, she wrote to Murry that she had lately felt the silence to have a greater meaning; that if one yielded to it, one might be received into a whole new world. The passage ends with the question, "What is this mysterious something that beckons?" The preceding paragraph refers to a friend³ as one who shared her joy in the "silent world," the word "joy" being used for lack of a better to mean a "stillness, a remoteness," and "because there is a faraway sound in it."⁴ The term seems a trifle obscure at first glance, as though possibly used in two different senses. The only elucidation is offered by Murry in a footnote in the 1951 edition (the letter appears in both the 1929 and the 1951 collections), referring the reader to the end of "A Married Man's Story," a fragment which breaks off at the moment in which the man finds himself. Examination of the last few paragraphs, however, resolves the obscurity, and the letter appears to refer to the rich reward of acceptance, even of suffering:

¹Letters to Murry, p. 366.

²Op. cit., p. 65.

³Walter de la Mare.

⁴Letters to Murry, p. 566.

Then the shrivelled case of the bud split, and fell, [sic] the plant in the cupboard came into flower. . . .
 . Everything lived, everything. . . . I had come into my own world!

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.... [sic]¹

Religious conflict led to varied philosophical speculations belonging to no single school of thought. Although she read widely, she sought truth more from within than from philosophers. She never felt it necessary to evolve a complete system, believing many things to be unverifiable. The Scrapbook records an interesting question in 1921: why are thinking and existing always on two different planes, and how can one reach apparently true conclusions by false hypotheses?²

To be truly alive, she insisted, one must have ample time for contemplation, but the love of reverie must never exceed the love of action. Again, what is the use of thought if it is not the outcome of feeling? A writer must feel before he can think, but expression is the outcome of neither alone. Less than a year before her death she wrote to her friend Dorothy Brett that she aimed at the state in which the soul and mind are one. "It's only when the soul irradiates the mind that what one does matters."³ A few days before, she had written to Richard Murry on the same subject. The

¹Short Stories, pp. 621-622.

²P. 233.

³Letters, p. 460.

mind, she said, is only the slave of the soul, the instrument whereby the soul makes itself known. One cannot really live without acknowledging both, and great art is achieved only when the proper relationship between the two is found.

She believed psychology and mysticism incompatible and never wholly accepted either. She disliked the methods of the psychoanalysts then becoming popular and particularly objected to the usually clumsy use of the new discovery in current novels. In 1912 she denounced mysticism in no uncertain terms:

Mysticism is perverted sensuality; it is 'passionate admiration' for that which has no reality at all. It leads to the annihilation of any true artistic effort. It is a paraphernalia of clichés. It is a mask through which the true expression of the poet can never be discerned.¹

The popularity of autobiography, confession, and recollection of earliest childhood could very possibly be explained by the persistent belief in a continuous and permanent self one finds in a Scrapbook entry of July, 1920, under the heading "The Flowering of the Self." On the subject of being true to oneself she asks, "Which self?" Then she observes that there always seem to be so many selves, but that the one real self, untouched by traits acquired and shed, flowers at last: "This is the moment which, after all, we live for,--the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least

¹Katherine Mansfield, untitled review of The Triumph of Pan, Rhythm, August, 1912, p. 129.

personal."¹ About two weeks before her death she was still concerned with the problem of selfhood. Her question had always been "Who am I?" Now it had become "Is there a Me?" It now seemed to her that the intellectual life to the exclusion of all else had been responsible for her dilemma. She saw the only hope of escape to be in learning to balance the emotional, instinctive, and intellectual. Her one cry was to be real, that is, to be one with life, not separate. She did not believe in the conventional interpretation of personal immortality but was never definite, in her published papers, at least, as to her attitude toward the question. Neither did she accept the limitations of man. She once remarked that the very fact that man rebels at his imprisonment is proof that freedom is his real element and observed elsewhere that it is amazing how soon one accepts blessings but never becomes accustomed to curses.

Severe ill health and increasing preoccupation with the problems of selfhood and spiritual purification brought her literary career to an end in July, 1922, with "The Canary." In October she withdrew to the Gurdjieff Institute at Fontainebleau, planning to stay about three months,² and died there January 9, 1923. It is not possible to determine how much of the Gurdjieff philosophy she accepted, but it seems clear that she was grasping at straws after the X-ray

¹Scrapbook, pp. 160-161.

²Letters, p. 507.

treatment of Manoukhine in Paris failed to benefit her. Her husband was very much opposed to her entering the Institute, but she replied: "I merely feel I've heard ideas like my ideas, but bigger ones, far more definite ones. And that there is Hope--real Hope, not half-Hope."¹ A. R. Orage, who had been the first in England to publish her stories, introduced her to this mixture of yoga and Western mysticism and "almost promised that she would be cured."² At the Institute she was assigned living quarters in the loft above the cow shed in order that the spiritual exhalations of the cows might benefit her.³

Georgy Gurdjieff, a Russian Buriat, claimed to have travelled extensively in the East and to have collected from many sources esoteric knowledge long forgotten by all but the inmates of certain Oriental monasteries. Ouspensky, his disciple, attracted a great many people, chiefly intellectuals, to his secret meetings; he recognized only two predecessors to his book Tertium Organum, the works of Aristotle and Francis Bacon.⁴ Gurdjieff preached the doctrine that the universe consists of "a network of vibrations passing in all directions, reinforcing each other, impinging on each other, opposing each other, and imparting to each other the shocks required for the full development of the octave [symbol

¹Ibid., p. 500.

²Denis Saurat, "A Visit to Gourdyev," Living Age, January, 1934, pp. 427-433.

³Kafian, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴Saurat, op. cit., p. 428.

of completeness."¹ This network of vibrations constitutes the Ray of Creation in which everything feeds upon everything else and is in turn fed upon, life on earth being necessary to the welfare of the planet and having no other purpose:

'Individual man,' he [Ouspensky] began, 'is so small that he cannot be said to exist in the scale of things we have been studying. He exists only as a constituent of organic life, as a tiny part of that thin film of living creatures that covers the surface of the earth. Now, when you look upon the Ray of Creation as an octave, you will notice that organic life is situated at a very significant place in it. It is situated in the interval that exists between the planetary world and the earth, in other words, just where the diminution in the frequency of the vibrations traveling down the ray is being retarded. Here some outside shock is required to allow these vibrations to pass from the planetary world to the earth, and this necessary shock is provided by the presence there of organic life. The existence of life on this planet is no accident. The film of living creatures spread over the earth plays an important part in the economy of this planet, yes, and in that of the moon also.'²

Everything, even energy, is material; even what is commonly referred to as spirit is considered to be only a delicate and highly refined form of matter. All matter is alive in some degree, and no line of demarcation is drawn between organic and inorganic forms of life; even a table possesses some degree of intelligence, or capacity to adjust itself to its environment.³ Walker remarks: "No, astounding as the cosmology of the system might be, most of the ideas

¹Kenneth Walker, Venture with Ideas: Meetings with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952), p. 68.

²Ibid., pp. 55-56.

³Ibid., p. 70.

contained in it could be found, in a less exact form, in other philosophical writings."¹

There is no single permanent "I," but a succession of innumerable "I's" ungoverned by a sovereign self. Man, according to Gurdjieff, is a chain of reactions to impressions reaching him from the outside world. The artist, who is only a finer machine than other men, discerns no more than they since all men are in reality asleep. "The whole of Ouspensky's system rests on the acknowledgement of the truth that man is not conscious but asleep, but that he can awake."² There are four states of consciousness: sleep, or subjective dream state; the waking, or objective dream state; self-consciousness; higher consciousness, or state of complete awareness.³ "Our ultimate goal is an objective consciousness in which all our former inner limitations cease to exist."⁴ Mankind lives in the first two; a permanent soul can be acquired only by achieving the highest state. The first step toward this end is to "register everything as it happened, to become a spectator of one's various reactions,"⁵ a necessary preliminary to the acquirement of will. Then one must become aware of oneself sitting in a room or walking

¹Ibid., p. 74.

²Rom Landau, God Is My Adventure (New York: Knopf, 1936), p. 221.

³Eustace, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴Landau, op. cit., p. 222.

⁵Walker, op. cit., p. 14.

down a street or performing any other action as if one were a spectator watching a stranger but consciously grasping one's own identity. This state is known as "self-remembering." "To try to self-remember is to try to stir in your sleep. It is an effort to awaken and become self-conscious."¹ This state can also be attained artificially by the use of hashish and other drugs.² The third step is called "non-identifying," that is, maintaining one's conscious identity apart from any emotions which one is expressing and trying to control these emotions. The fourth step, "non-considering," is attained by patience toward every living creature and by refraining from any attempt whatsoever to alter the consequences of the evil deeds of others.

Things vary in accordance with our knowledge. They are just as much or as little as we know about them. . . their reality being merely the expression of our own understanding. . . . Good or bad can only exist if there is an aim. Without aim they are non-existent, and we merely accept conventional versions of them, created in the past by people who were as much asleep as ourselves. Reality can only be known in a state of waking.³

The reason for setting up schools and holding meetings was that Gurdjieff and Ouspensky believed that truths were evolved by discussion, not by working alone: "The truths contained in an esoteric doctrine cannot be realized as long as there is no school."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 46.

²Ibid., p. 42.

³Landau, op. cit., pp. 217, 222.

⁴Ibid., p. 223.

It seems highly unlikely that Katherine Mansfield could have accepted the whole of this philosophy. "It was Gurdjieff's personality rather than his doctrine that so strongly affected many people in France, England and America."¹ Landau suggests that the man's exuberance and the mystery attached to him contributed to his fascination. He quotes Llewellyn Powys in support of his contention that there was something hypnotic about his manner: ". . . there was something about his [Gurdjieff's] presence that affected one's nerves in a strange way. Especially did one feel this when his pupils came on to the stage, to perform like a hutchful of hypnotized rabbits under the gaze of a master conjurer."² The performance referred to was a public presentation of symbolic Eastern dances. Landau also notes: "I have never heard the word 'possessed' used so often in connection with any other teacher."³

A letter to Murry referred to above, written less than two weeks before her entry into the Institute, seems to indicate that Mansfield accepted only a few points of the system or was unfamiliar with many of its major premises. The latter supposition is the more likely in the light of Landau's account of an interview with Gurdjieff in which he shocked one of the pupils by asking questions about basic

¹Ibid., p. 231.

²Ibid., pp. 229-230, quotation from The Verdict of Bridlegoose.

³Ibid., p. 248.

principles which many followers had waited years without daring to ask, fearing to incur their master's displeasure by inquiring after knowledge reserved for the elect.

Further evidence that she did not adhere to all the basic tenets of this philosophy is found in her last letters and Scrapbook entries. An undated entry after May 28, 1922, showing clearly her tendency toward Christian, rather than Oriental, mysticism, quotes Dunning's Cosmic Anatomy:

'The doctrines of the Church may be divided into two parts; one deals with data so transcendent as to be for ever uncomprehendable by the intellect of man; the other with data so material that to the trained intellect they are distasteful, and give real satisfaction only to the most easily satisfied of the unintellectuals. The third part which should be present in all complete religious doctrines is lost, and it is the most important of the three, at any rate for the present moment, as it is the vital one--in fact, it is the Christ. Some will perhaps understand this better if they consider the first as symbolized by St. John, the second by St. Peter, and the third by St. Paul.'¹

In August she returned to London from Switzerland and sought out A. R. Orage, who had been instrumental in sending the book to her.² Orage was at this time a prominent member of Ouspensky's circle of followers and later taught new groups in America. She noticed a "great similarity"³ between the ideas of Dunning and Orage and soon joined Ouspensky's group. On October 13 she wrote Murry:

I am going to Fontainebleau next week to see Gurdjieff.
 . . . Why am I going? From all I hear he is the only man who understands there is no division between body and

¹p. 237.

²Letters to Murry, p. 659.

³Ibid., p. 662.

spirit, who believes how they are related. You remember how I have always said doctors only treat half.¹

A writer's reaction to people determines the viewpoint from which characters will be presented. Katherine Mansfield greatly prized solitude and often felt that there were many things she enjoyed far more by herself than with others. Privacy was a prime requisite for writing and had much to do with the effect of environment on creativity; distracting noises from downstairs, constant interruptions, the presence of Ida Baker, who often cared for her abroad, annoyed her out of all proportion to their importance. She could not reach the inner calm necessary to writing, the sense of "equilibrium," without suitable surroundings. And solitude, of course, also meant far more than merely a place in which to work unmolested.

To balance her love of solitude was a devotion to her friends, all of whom could be classified as "her people," the phrase she ordinarily reserved for artists, for people who "understood." Her reaction to people in general, on the other hand, was almost invariably one of dislike. Insensitivity in others was well-nigh unbearable. It was not merely a lack of certain qualities but a kind of positive unknown thing. She could never understand it and had no sympathy with it whatever. There was no limit to human suffering, she believed; but neither was there a limit to human dignity, and anything that offended against it was repellant to her. The excessive

¹Ibid., p. 671.

coarseness and vulgarity of current books disgusted her. Indifference, triviality, and pretense she classified as corruption; to be false and insincere was intolerable, and to find that the gardener was positively dishonest hurt her very much.

She commented that it was rather trite to say so, but most of the world's ills are attributable to the absence of love, gaiety, and warmth, the qualities she valued in people and which, when lacking, made her say, "It's not the slightest use pretending I can stand people [sic] I can't."¹ Being a writer, however, she was keenly interested in them. She loved to sit and watch the life of a busy street, for instance; her letters overflow with small descriptions of the people, often highly humorous. If the truth were known, she said, we are all curious about everyone we meet, but she could never abide the author who confesses everything in a novel. To her the greatest tragedy that befalls almost everyone is that no sooner is youth done than growth stops. At the very moment when people should gather themselves together and take control and become adult, they exchange their wish for maturity for innumerable little wishes. "Or the image that suggested itself to me was that of a river flowing away in countless little trickles over a dark swamp."²

Nevertheless, she strongly felt the need of human companionship. Even though dedicated to her work, she, like

¹Ibid., p. 200.

²Novels and Novelists, p. 247.

anyone else, often enjoyed passing the time away in idle chat, and once complained that she had no one to talk to (during the ill-starred stay in the south of France, 1918). Birds and flowers and dreaming seas, she said, were no substitute. It goes without saying that for her companionship was presumed to be that of people who felt deeply. She loved gentleness and sensitivity. For the devoted Ida Baker she came to feel, at times, only hatred. To be dependent upon someone who constantly annoys by blunders resulting from failure to sense another's moods or whose temperament continually jars is hard enough for someone in the best of health. Mansfield did not often give way to fits of temper, but when she did, they were violent. Hatred, "that other passion," produced in her only a wish to destroy.

The stale atmosphere of society, particularly among those of literary predilections, was oppressive in the extreme. She satirized it many times in various short stories as well as in reviews of books in that vein. The veneer of sham intellectualism was most irritating, and her many references to intellectual snobbery show her annoyance. In regard to the cultivated mind she writes:

No, no, the mind I love must still have wild places, . . . the chance of a snake or two (real snakes), a pool that nobody's fathomed the depth of . . . It must also have real hiding places . . . And I have never yet met a cultivated mind that has not had its shrubbery. I loathe and detest shrubberies.¹

¹Journal, p. 173.

About two years earlier she had observed, "Our friends are only a more or less imperfect embodiment of our ideas."¹

Women, especially young women, were so often callous, vapid, egocentric, and shallow. She could not bear "charming women," with whom she felt like a "cat among tigers" and had nothing to say. The pettiness and narrowness of their interests she often bitterly criticized:

It is astonishing how violently a big branch shakes when a silly little bird has left it. I expect the bird knows it and feels immensely arrogant. The way he went on, my dear, when I said I was going to leave him. He was quite desperate. But now the branch is quiet again. Not a bud has fallen, not a twig has snapped. It stands up in the bright air, steady and firm, and thanks the Lord that it has got its evenings to itself again.²

She sometimes had little charity for men, either. The vague, effeminate poet at the fashionable party is ridiculed in Eddie Warren in "Bliss," whose favorite poem was "Why Must It Always Be Tomato Soup?" because tomato soup was "so eternal." Reginald Peacock is perhaps the best example of a fop in any of her stories. The unconsciously cruel and the exuberant but unperceptive are also frequently presented. Although the father of Josephine and Constantia in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is already dead when the story begins, his character is as well drawn as theirs; his stern hand continues to rule their lives. Stanley Burnell in "Prelude" is the typical brisk but rather insensitive man.

¹ Ibid., p. 84.

² Ibid., p. 70.

Very bitter about the war and its lack of effect on her countrymen, she never understood how any woman could send her husband off to fight without a murmur, hear of his being wounded with pride, and confide that if he were killed, she would "just have to carry on." Men who considered the war "the greatest of all garden parties" and went off to be heroes merited sharp reproof, and she did not withhold pungent comment on the flood of insipid novels built around these types. What grieved her was that such characterizations were all too true to life. The coming of spring in 1918 made the war seem very real by contrast with the season's loveliness, and again the immensity of corruption struck her. One day while out walking she found a delightful little house set in a particularly lovely place, but with her sudden recollection of the war its charm vanished. The war affected her so deeply that she did not see how human beings could settle down again afterwards and pick up the old threads of their former existence as if nothing had happened. Somehow she felt that they should have had a change of heart.

How can that be the same life? It doesn't mean that life is the less precious or that 'the common things of light and day' are gone. They are not gone, they are intensified, they are illumined. Now we know ourselves for what we are.¹

The drunken revelry in celebration of the armistice was a further evidence of public indifference to the meaning of

¹Letters to Murry, p. 393.

the events that had taken place. Although she was very much disturbed by the war, she by no means agreed with Murry, who believed that his generation would never recover from the war, that a part of man's soul was now forever numbed. She wrote him a very long letter in December, 1919, disagreeing with his views expressed in The Evolution of an Intellectual: "You see, I don't believe that the war has done these things to you (Your generation I mean that you speak for If man were an intellect it would do, but man ISN'T. [sic]¹ She wanted to forgive Germany and set about rebuilding, but not without learning from the mistakes which had brought on the conflict.

When very young, she longed for the color and glitter of city life. Even in 1914 she dreamed of Paris and money. But during and after the war she began to dislike cities, feeling alien even in London. She never liked the English countryside at all,² but very much loved the south of France because it reminded her of her native New Zealand. For the French themselves, however, she had very little liking. If possible, the French bourgeoisie disgusted her even more than their English counterparts. Her dislike of the Germans colors every page of the German Pension (1911), but she eventually came to decide that they were really much like

¹Ibid., p. 435.

²She wrote to Anne Estelle Rice in December, 1918: "This cursed country would take the spirit out of a Brandied Cherry." Letters, p. 196.

the English, of whom she was never especially fond. Swiss peasants were ugly, stolid, and dull, but the Italian villagers of Ospedaletti seemed pleasant enough. As to Russia, although she never travelled there, it seemed like "an enormous hole letting in Asia."

Her development as a writer, both in technique and content, reflected to an unusual degree her attitude toward life. As this attitude took firmer shape, her stories showed deeper penetration, keener insight, a viewpoint no less pronounced but more mature, and a surer grasp of the method of implication by significant detail.

CHAPTER IV

KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S COMMENTS ON ART

Katherine Mansfield was unusually explicit on the subject of aesthetics. She had a great deal to say about art, chiefly the literary art, but one finds in her writings a few observations on other arts as well. Her concept of the artist and of such general considerations as beauty, creativity, and the relation of art to life applies equally well to all arts. Beauty is everywhere and cannot be escaped; although not an absolute, it is untouched by ugliness and triumphs over it. Unchanged beauty in the face of human disaster is a recurrent theme in her short stories.

Her response to Nature was, no doubt, largely the result of a keen sensitivity to color, which, although not often specifically mentioned, is obvious in vivid descriptive passages. It has already been noted that one effect of tuberculosis is to make the world seem incredibly beautiful, but, of course, this sensitivity to color was already highly developed before the disease became evident. Upon receipt of a gardening magazine she wrote to her husband of her excitement and delight over the flower pictures and described some of them. She also praised some of the flower drawings of her friend Dorothy Brett for their delicacy and grace.

The art of painting, however, despite her constant use of imagery involving light, color, texture, and pictorial detail, is infrequently mentioned. She disliked the modern pattern-mongers, as she called them, preferring the older realistic style of art. It was the spirit which fascinated her in the faces and gestures rather than the form or composition of the paintings. She once wrote to Dorothy Brett in regard to a certain picture she disliked that a picture must have charm, or else why should anyone look at it? This charm she identified with the fine tone produced by the best musicians and the quality she called tenderness in writing. To her husband's younger brother Richard, himself an aspiring young artist, she observed that the more one lives with the old masters, both painters and writers, the better it is for one's work. It is almost living into the ideal world that one is trying to express. The old masters such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Marlowe were to her a kind of "essential nourishment."

To young Murry again in May, 1922, she sent a letter about her stay in Paris. The Greek statues in the Louvre had caught her eye; the Roman in comparison were nothing. The drapery impressed her with its suggestion of movement even though the lines appeared to be straight, a kind of suppleness making one conscious of the living, breathing form beneath. She wondered how the sculptors accomplished this effect and added that they seemed to have been able to

draw a line with a chisel as easily as though it were a pencil. She noticed the softly buzzing swarm of people around the "marvellously beautiful" Venus de Milo delighting in the recognition of something they knew.

She loved the venerable beauty of the cathedral of Notre Dame, even the saints with their crowns on their collars and their heads in their hands. Watching the little birds flying in and out among the towers, she wanted to write a sonnet using the tower and the birds as an image of old age and the thoughts of old age flying out and returning. Apparently she never did write it, however; at least it is not in the collected poems.

After literature, music is the art most often referred to in the letters and journals. Besides having become proficient on the cello, Katherine Mansfield also studied piano as a child, and the image of a faraway piano occurs frequently in her writing. She complained of not being able to work during one stay in Paris because of nearby pianos; again, a piano next door sounded as if it were being played under the sea. A Journal sketch of a shabby street at twilight pictures a stray dog as the spirit of the street against a still scene of half light accented by a "silly piano" which "is overcome and reels out waltzes--old waltzes spinning, drunk with sentiment" ¹ The effect of an unseen piano she described thus: "I feel about an unknown piano, my dear,

¹P. 96.

what certain men feel about unknown women--no question of love--but simply 'an uncontrollable desire to stalk them.'¹

The aesthetic effect of music itself was very strong:

It's like being gloriously dead--if you know what I mean. One is not any more--one is wafted away, and yet there's a feeling of refoicing and a kind of regret--ah, such regret--mixed together that, I feel, disembodied spirits must know. But to tell the absolute truth, though Beethoven does that for me, so does Caruso on a really good gramophone. . . . [sic]²

She loved the "grunting cellos, flying fiddles," and "wonderful pianos" of St. John's Wood, where she stayed for a short time after her return to London from New Zealand. In March, 1914, after attending a poor performance at Albert Hall, she noted in her journal that all the while, in spite of the dullness of the concert, she kept thinking she would rather be with musical people than any others and ended, "I ought to be able to write about them wonderfully."³ Four years later a Journal entry records general dissatisfaction, concluding with the half-formed desire to take up the cello again and find "salvation" in music.

The stringed instruments occur almost as often as the faraway piano. A brief note for a story reads as follows: "Miss Todd and Miss Hopper were second violins. Miss Bray was a viola."⁴ Miss Bray appears in the unfinished "Second Violin" as an orchestra member, but neither Miss Todd

¹Letters, p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 406.

³Journal, p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 124.

now Miss Hopper is mentioned. Elsewhere she reminds herself of just how a certain fiddle runs lightly up and then swings sorrowfully down, how it searches. Next door a poor little violin goes on tearing up note after note. One of her reviews for the Athenaeum appraises the book thus: "The technique is so even, it is as though a violinist were to play a whole concerto in one stroke of the bow."¹ In another review of two books, the first extolling the glories of war and the second the story of someone who just missed "the fineness of everything," she introduces the latter with the remark that after so much wind and brass the second book is like a solo for viola, the low, throbbing note setting the tone of the story.

Immediately below the note on Miss Bray one finds a sentence on the different qualities of midday bells and the introduction of an unnamed character who feels an affinity for one of them. She often pauses in the middle of a letter to describe her surroundings, noticing in Switzerland, lovely little bells sounding from across the mountains at evening, and taking comfort in the thought that some peasant must have loved to play the gay little melody over and over. In Paris she writes that a man is playing the zither so gaily just outside her window that it makes her want to dance. On another occasion a chamber maid sings "a most improbable song" which runs along about five notes and then suddenly drops an

¹Novels and Novelists, p. 165.

unexpected distance--somewhat like a fifteenth century French Provincial Ride-a-Cock-Horse, she imagines. A house painter across the way has been singing ancient church music all morning and returns after lunch to break into Elizabethan airs.

She uses a musical metaphor to convey the feeling produced by the sudden awareness of a hitherto unrecognized truth:

Whenever I have a conversation about Art which is more or less interesting I begin to wish to God I could destroy all that I have written and start again [sic] it all seems like so many 'false starts.' Musically speaking, it is not--has not been--in the middle of the note--you know what I mean? When, on a cold morning perhaps, you've been playing and it has sounded all right--until suddenly, you realize you are warm--you have only just begun to play.¹

Critics sometimes use the term "the middle of the note" in praise of her work as a whole or of a particular story which conforms to their standards of aesthetic perfection.

Even though her chief interest was the literary art, her aesthetic principles apply, for the most part, to all art. She deplored the attitude of the fashionable and the dilettante toward art. Those who profess to live by feeling but ridicule feeling in others she thought poisonous; when one is very young, she said, a sneer can nearly kill. Art was to her a religion; there was to her no separation between art and life. Victory, or the attainment of one's goal, she felt to be the reward of long and arduous struggle both in art and in life: "Art is a perpetual striving towards an ever

¹Journal, p. 97.

more adequate symbolic expression of the living realities of the world."¹ Or, as she phrased it in a letter eight years later:

But what I do believe with my whole soul is that one's outlook is the climate in which one's art either thrives or doesn't grow. 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. There's no substitute.²

One reason for the great poverty of Art today is, she thought, that artists have no religion. She meant, of course, the religion of Art itself.

Artistic experience to her was instinctive, not intellectual. One finds in the Scrapbook a quotation from Cosmic Anatomy to this effect,³ and this conclusion is further borne out by her expressed opinions. It was always a joy to her to find a new book, a living book, and to know that it would remain with her while life lasted. Literature formed an integral part of her daily existence. The vineyard below was the vineyard in the Song of Solomon, and the song of the men hoeing it was a part of her. She would never be the same after hearing it, just as she would never be the same after reading the death of Cleopatra. Her identification with Art was much like her identification with Nature: "One has willingly given oneself to all these things--one is

¹Katherine Mansfield and J. M. Murry, "Seriousness in Art," Rhythm, July, 1912, pp. 46-49.

²Letters, p. 353.

³Pp. 242-243.

the result of them all. Are you now saying 'intellectual detachment'? But I've allowed for that."¹ Intellectual reasoning was never the whole truth, never the artist's truth.

At first her concept of the artist was that of a superior being untrammelled by the mob, proudly aristocratic, and bitter indeed was her satire on pretenders to that honor. The sketch "Sunday Lunch," which appeared in Rhythm in 1912 and may now be found in the Scrapbook, is far more acid than, say, Aldous Huxley.

Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry defined their concept of the genuine artist in no uncertain terms in 1912 for their magazine:² The confession of the majority of their failure to comprehend the artist is the word inspiration, for it denies the supremacy of personality by asserting that "the triumph of individuality" is a gift and not a conquest. Intuition, and not inspiration, is the source of art, and it is a "purely aristocratic quality." Intuition is the power of divining the individuality of other persons and things, which connotes boundless admiration for that individuality. "It is the utter understanding of one perfect individual by another, and only by this understanding does the artist create, for in this admiration alone does he realize himself." Thereby the artist finds reality, the ultimate essence of life; therefore, he is conscious of his

¹Letters to Murry, p. 640.

²"The Meaning of Rhythm," Rhythm, June, 1912, pp. 32-33.

superiority because he is creative. Creativity implies surrender to experience: "The more absolute his conscious surrender to life, the more powerful and intimate his impulse toward self-assertion." Freedom in the work of art demands the immediate rejection of "all that does not help to make the expression the adequate symbol of the idea," and is most emphatically foreign to the "machine-made realism" of modern literature. Reality in the work of art is created by the artist by the exercise of his intuition. This is not to be misinterpreted as mere selection, "for there are not a thousand things from which the artist may select, [sic] there is always only one." The essay concludes thus: "Art and the artist are one. . . . Their unity is the essential movement of Life. It is the splendid adventure, the eternal quest for rhythm."

This concept, formulated at the age of twenty-three, underwent considerable modification, of course. The artist, however, always remained an individual gifted with a keener sensitivity than others and dedicated to the revelation of the truth which he discerned. In October, 1920, the value of sincerity and humility is stressed; a comment on a rather long quotation from Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare shows complete agreement with the ideas expressed in it. Coleridge speaks of the close connection between taste and morality and asserts that without acquaintance with the heart of man and the modesty produced by this acquaintance, no man, no

matter how learned, can possibly understand, or be worthy to understand, the writings of Shakespeare. The artist must be pure and honest, and above all, he must renew himself and grow. ". . . one's vision of what one possesses is constantly changing into something rich and strange, isn't it?"¹ Toward the end of 1921 she summed up the basic concept of her mature philosophy from which her significant work is written in a journal note:

Art is not an attempt of the artist to reconcile existence with his vision; it is an attempt to create his own world in this world. That which suggests the subject to the artist is the unlikeness to what we accept as reality. We single out--we bring into the light--we put up higher.²

When she stopped writing some six months before her death because she felt unworthy or unable to pursue her work until she had achieved peace of mind through self-purification, she developed still further her theory of art and concept of the artist. Although it is generally agreed by those who were around her at the Gurdjieff Institute that she at last knew what she wanted to write when she became sufficiently well to leave, apparently the only source of information regarding her ideas at this time is A. R. Orage, who visited her there and has recorded the substance of their conversation. The function of the artist is now seen somewhat differently; the effect upon the reader has become the pre-eminent consideration:

¹ Letters to Murry, p. 511.

² Scrapbook, p. 233.

'[sic] An artist communicates not his vision of the world, but the attitude that results in his vision; not his dream, but his dream-state; and as his attitude is positive, negative, or indifferent, so he reinforces in his readers the corresponding state of mind.¹

According to Orage, she went beyond the merely moral concern that art must uplift. The moral must be fused with the aesthetic experience in such a way that the art work itself becomes a motivating force:

'The greatest literature is still only mere literature if it has not a purpose commensurate with its art. . . . Minor literature has a didactic object. But the greatest literature of all--the literature that scarcely exists--has not merely an esthetic [sic] object, nor merely a didactic object, but, in addition, a creative object; that of subjecting its readers to a real and at the same time illuminating experience. Major literature, in short, is an initiation into truth. . . .

'Life would undergo a change of appearance because we ourselves had undergone a change in attitude.²

One can only regret that she did not live long enough to experiment with this ultimate vision of Art.

Many times while reviewing for the Athenaeum she lamented the degrading influence of public taste on writers: If only this or that author could forget his public and let himself be carried away into places where he thinks they do not care to follow! She was very hard indeed upon anyone who betrayed his gift, once remarking that it was melancholy to remember looking forward to a new book by a certain author. It was always a keen disappointment to read the second or later novel of someone who did not fulfill his promise. She expected every novel to be an advance upon the author's last

¹Orage, op. cit., p. 39.

²Ibid., p. 37, p. 39.

and suggested that it might be well to attach the dates of beginning and completion to all novels. It was incomprehensible to her that a writer should be content to do less than explore his own country. She wished fervently that there were six or seven writers who wrote for themselves and paid no attention to public opinion.

Many times she observed that precious little is needed to amuse and divert people and that sometimes it seems that the staler the entertainment the better its reception. Nevertheless, she did not hesitate to heap coals of fire upon the heads of those who insulted their readers' intelligence or held public taste in such contempt that they deliberately served up a mixture of sensationalism and indecency without literary merit. The novel which attempts anything short of truth is doomed; of one book she asked why it was not half as long and twice as honest. But she had no patience with crudity: "Better a half-truth, beautifully whispered, than a whole so solemnly shouted,"¹ the word truth, of course, being used in the sense of fact.

She had a positive horror of triviality. She acknowledged that the reading public is not difficult to amuse, but in this age she wondered if there is time to spare for trite novels which do not enlarge the reader's experience. She neatly summed up one such insipid book by characterizing the heroine as "the Social Paragraph blown into two hundred and

¹Novels and Novelists, p. 201.

ninety-four pages." She begged for a change from false sophistication to simplicity, recognizing that true simplicity is the result of much painful effort, even though lack of polish, which is often mistaken for simplicity, is the easiest thing in the world to attain.

Although she was always looking for promising young authors, she realized that far too many of them were expert in the art of not taking pains and acclaiming this failing as a new form. They merely jotted down random observations with little attempt to produce a work of art: "The note-books of young writers are their laurels; they prefer to rest on them."¹ Young authors were also inclined to model their works on those of some established novelist instead of developing their own individuality. As to the prevalent assumption that the nation was on the eve of a literary renaissance, she was not at all sure, but she did not think that it would come about during her day.

Many times she asked why a book was written. She believed that all too often both reading and writing became mere entertainment. Real writers are thinkers, she asserted; they are explorers of life and must probe beyond surface impressions. Even though she was more inclined to deal leniently with a book that showed its author's literary longing, she knew that the compulsion to write is not necessarily an indication of genius: "We have not seldom remarked the curious

¹Ibid., p. 39.

naive pleasure that many women take in writing for writing's sake. The mind pictures them half wonder, half joy, to find that they can put these lovely tender-coloured words together."¹

It was by no means necessary to exclude humor from writing. Far from it. Sometimes she was annoyed with the English for demanding that if a young writer were to be taken seriously, he must be prepared "to father fiends hid in clouds."² Poets and short story writers might be as gay as they liked, but a novelist must be serious in order to be noticed, and she greatly appreciated well-done gentle humor or flashes of wit. ". . . exuberant fancy is rare, love of life is rare, and a writer who is not ashamed of happiness rarer than both."³

She recognized the fact that creativity might spring from different types of inspiration. Emotion might grow out of deliberation, as, for instance, Richard Murry might be inspired by a long, steady look at the subject matter for a painting. Her inspiration, however, rarely if ever came from contemplation. She wrote in flashes of varying lengths, but she always worked as long as they lasted, even if she stayed up all night in defiance of illness, almost exhausted with fatigue.⁴ She lost herself so completely that other considerations vanished. "I've been writing of a dance this

¹Ibid., p. 105.

²Ibid., p. 92.

³Ibid., p. 112.

⁴J. M. Murry, Introduction, Scrapbook, vii.

afternoon and remembering how one polished the floor was so thrilling that everything else was forgotten."¹

The achievement of this state was not always easy. The silence before beginning to write has already been discussed in connection with the relation of her work to her life. She suggested that her husband write a poem about this silence some time. "It is so peculiar--even one's whole physical being seems arrested. It is a kind of dying, before the new breath is blown into you."² She jokingly remarked in a letter that yesterday the Muses descended in a ring "like the angels on the Botticelli Nativity roof," and she began her first novel.³

She felt deeply the inherent tragedy of a great work of art and the unspeakable thrill of creativity, but like any other writer, she often found that the wonders she envisioned fled upon being committed to paper. "(And yet--when the idea was still an idea--before a word had been written--were there not mysterious moments when you felt that naught save a new world could contain your creations?)"⁴

She could never just sit down and begin to write in a business-like fashion as Murry could. There must be inspiration, for to be really inspired was to be possessed.⁵

¹Letters, p. 362.

²Letters to Murry, p. 16.

³Ibid., p. 26. Murry declares in a footnote that the novel referred to was almost certainly not The Aloe. He believes it to have been an abandoned fragment now lost, entitled Brave Love.

⁴Novels and Novelists, p. 274.

⁵Letters to Murry, p. 149.

Of the ecstasy of creation she says, "Isaiah (or was it Elisha?) was caught up into Heaven in a chariot of fire once. But when the weather is divine and I am free to work, such a journey is positively nothing."¹ In regard to her need for solitude in order to write she laughed that her Graces sic were very shy, and she must humble herself and wait for their knock. Environment always affected creativity. She wrote to her friend Koteliansky in March, 1915, that she simply could not write her book living in two sordid little rooms; and again in cold, unpleasant surroundings, she tried to write about hot weather and happiness and broad bands of sunlight--"all the things that make life to me."²

She wrote from two entirely different states of mind, the best examples of the products of each being, of course, "Prelude" and "Je ne parle pas francais."

One is joy--real joy that state of being in some perfectly blissful way at peace. Then something delicate and lovely seems to open before my eyes, like a flower without thought of a frost or a cold breath--knowing that all about it is warm and tender and 'ready.' And that I try, ever so humbly, to express.

The other is an extremely deep sense of hopelessness, of everything doomed to disaster, almost wilfully, stupidly a cry against corruption Not a protest--a cry³

She was amazed at the mushroom growth of cheap psychoanalysis in popular novels; at that time it was the fashion to analyze the chief character or characters at the

¹ Journal, p. 112.

² Letters to Murry, p. 149.

³ Letters, p. 8.

denouement in pseudo-technical language in much the same way as a detective thriller unravelled the clues to the crime. This approach was appalling to her, for it turned life into a mere case. She was convinced that any good novel could be proved scientifically correct in its portrayal of human reactions to situations without its author's having resorted to books on human behavior. "With an artist--one has to allow--Oh tremendously--for the sub-conscious element in his work. He writes he knows not what--he's possessed."¹ After painstaking acquisition of technical proficiency in writing, the inspired artist finds this subconscious wisdom, the "divine flower" of his labor, to be the accurate interpretation of his observations and insight. Those who had taken up the fad of analysis seemed to her to write to prove, not necessarily to tell the truth. Their impulse was entirely different from that of the real artist, who, of course, would not be guilty of such obvious presentation of the motivation of his characters. She called these novels "studies in explanation."

Problem literature she saw as a nineteenth century invention. After all, Shakespeare and Chaucer had no problem. Her criterion of a novel or short story was its effect on the reader: does it quicken perception or increase the "mysterious response" to Life? With the end of a great novel one feels that nothing is over. She says of Jane Austen, as she might well have said of any great author, "For the

¹Ibid., p. 560.

truth is that every true admirer of the novels cherishes the happy thought that he alone--reading between the lines--has become the secret friend of their author."¹

She understood, however, that little or no effect could be produced upon insensitive readers. It is vain to seek adventure without the capacity for adventure. One pointless and inconclusive work she recommended for girls only, whether of thirteen or eighty-five; it would give them a good cry, but it was not solid fare for grown men and women. Usually she was not so concerned with immaturity in readers as in writers. She often reprimanded a novelist for pointing an unnecessary moral or for failing to stop at the proper moment or for adding a happy ending; she credited serious readers with sufficient discernment not to need these things.

The effect on the reader of the formless stringing together of incidents meaningless in themselves and unrelated either to life or to each other is only bewilderment. The author must subordinate his material in such a way that the meaning becomes clear. She does not refer to any particular trend or style but only to the reluctance or inability of a few inexperienced authors to distinguish between what is significant and what is not, to evaluate both detail and incident in order to build a coherent structure, an unwillingness to part with some cherished but unnecessary element. The value of detail lies in "the life of it"--its relation

¹ Novels and Novelists, p. 316.

to the story, its ability to convey the author's idea. Excessive and minute description for the sake of description alone or in the hope of producing a realistic atmosphere becomes an unwieldy mass to be waded through. Mere anatomy of description results from a weakness of creative power, as if the effect could be achieved by an infinite piling on.

Most of the books she had to review for the Athenaeum were "digestible snacks" or pastime novels. In a column on the fifty-ninth book of one G. B. Burgin she writes: "By far the greater number of them aim at nothing more positive than a kind of mental knitting--the mind of the reader is grown so familiar with the pattern that the least possible effort is demanded of it."¹ She undoubtedly would have agreed with her earlier sentiment that the craft of letters in England was rapidly becoming a trade instead of an art. In October, 1920, after finishing her column she wrote Murry that she detested novels; they were all simply rubbish.

Here and there she touched on a novel of manners, a mystery thriller, an experimental novel. As to the novel form itself, in answer to those who insisted that it was dying she asserted that if it did die, it would give way to some form then in an experimental stage, but if it did survive, the novel would have to adjust itself to changing times.

The peasant novel was fairly popular during the early part of the century. The pitfalls of such a work were

¹Ibid., p. 170.

dialect and accurate understanding of the peasant, but most dangerous was the tendency to stress his identification with the soil, to make him a natural, though unpolished or inarticulate, poet, and to overload the story with threadbare conventional symbolism of weather and the seasons.

One fantasy of the future (2074 A. D.) pictured life in England as coming slowly to a stop and the somewhat wooden characters as reverting gradually to savagery. She dismissed this effort with the comment that its author had neglected an excellent opportunity to represent life as a thousand times more complicated than at present.

During these years there was also a plague of novels of confession revealing the inmost thoughts of their chief characters from early childhood, usually of a thinly disguised autobiographical nature. These almost always failed by reason of their isolation of their subjects from the life around them and the spotlighting of only one phase of character at a time so that quiescent elements were lost sight of until they came to the fore, making a view of the character as a whole well-nigh impossible.

She held a rather low opinion of the novel written with a definite purpose, considering its author neither an artist nor a preacher, but rather a brilliant lawyer defending his case. Such a viewpoint must be prejudiced. It would be far better for him to accept life and by this acceptance present his problem.

She was very fond of poetry but disliked most of that being written during her lifetime for the same reason that she disliked contemporary novels; one never could be quite sure that the poem really belonged to the man who wrote it. She always wanted to write poetry and did write a few verses now and then, but apparently she never took them very seriously. Critics either do not consider them at all or consider them negligible. Even though some of them do have a certain charm, it is evident that poetry was not her field. She found an outlet for her love of imagery, implication, and the poetic method of composition in the short story.

She was most pleased with Arthur Waley's first book of translations of Chinese poems, which Murry sent to her during one of her stays abroad. She saw no reason why a translation skilfully done should not be a work of art. In a review of an anthology of modern Bohemian poetry for Rhythm in 1912 she declared:

A good translation is not unlike a good reproduction of a drawing. It is dependent for success upon many of the same qualities--simple and sure treatment, directness of purpose, very clear treatment of the subject, preferably on a broad scale. Granted these, there is no reason whatever why a translation should be a paper rose without perfume or color.¹

In 1920 she wrote to Sydney Schiff of her annoyance at poor translations from the Russian: "The peculiar flatness of them

¹Katherine Mansfield, review of P. Selver's An Anthology of Modern Bohemian Poetry, Rhythm, August, 1912, p. 129.

is so strange and it's just that flatness which the story or whatever it is mustn't have" ¹

She knew French, German, and Russian, although it is not clear how fluent her Russian was. She and her friend Koteliansky translated several letters of Chekhov and Gorky's Reminiscences of Leonid Andreyev, but she also studied Russian at the Institute; it may be safely assumed that her speaking knowledge was slight.

The Oxford Book of English Verse she thought very poor. Except for Shakespeare and Marvell and a few others, no one seemed to understand "the middle of the note." When she turned from it to a book of French verse, however, she promptly became enraged. It was an endless gallery of salon furniture, candelabra, and porcelain cupids. She had a very low opinion of everything French anyway. The language, style, attack, and point of view of French literature seemed tainted, dishonest:

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

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. . . . I adore the English language, and that's a fact. ²

Upon another occasion she was much disturbed about falsity and wanted everything to "ring like Elizabethan English" and to be as true as her favorite poets, the Elizabethans and the

¹ Letters, p. 355.

² Letters to Murry, p. 188.

Romantic school, who seemed to be linked with each other in her mind; but as for French short stories, they could all go "up the chimney" after Chekhov's "Misery," which she considered one of the masterpieces of the world. But perhaps the most perfect phrase in all literature she commended to Murry's attention: "Reverence--that angel of the world."¹

Although her comments on music and the visual arts are interesting only insofar as they reveal her powers of observation and her taste, her remarks on art in general and literature in particular leave little to conjecture: Art, she believed, is a revelation of life; she came at last to the conclusion that art must motivate and inspire the beholder, for it is an initiation into truth. The inherent tragedy which she felt in great art arises from this inseparability of art and life, for life to her consisted of inextricable beauty and suffering. She was convinced that artistic experience is grasped instinctively, not intellectually, just as creativity is a state of possession, not an intellectual process. She recognized more than one type of inspiration, however; it might appear slowly as a result of contemplation, or it might come in flashes of insight, although her work was almost without exception produced by the latter type. She considered the artist to be one who sees more clearly than others and should therefore be dedicated to his art. He must be pure and honest, and above all he must grow, for

¹Ibid., p. 600.

his art is the product of his outlook, and a failure to develop is a failure to fulfill the promise of his gift. She abhorred triviality and falsity and lamented the annual crop of "pastime novels," which were nothing but travesties on literature; but upon turning to any of her favorite authors, she felt refreshed and sustained. And, although she loved the Russian masters, the English language remained her favorite, both for its literature and for the beauty of the language itself.

CHAPTER V

KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S COMMENTS ON ARTISTS

Katherine Mansfield expressed an opinion on such a large number of writers and other artists that it seems wise to examine her comments in order to gain a fuller understanding of the basis of her critical judgment. Rather surprisingly, although she mentions music more often than any other art besides her own, she almost never mentions a particular musician, while on the other hand, she has very little to say about painting but expresses an opinion on more painters than musicians.

She uses the general term "Wagner opera" in connection with a columnist's pro-German articles in an English newspaper in 1915 and scarcely mentions Beethoven except to record that she and J. W. N. Sullivan, who contributed to the Athenaeum and was much interested in Beethoven, had a long conversation one evening, chiefly about that composer. There are also one or two other references to him in passing. The pianist Busoni appears in one letter, and a reminiscence of her New Zealand home in another letter describes the drawing room in some detail and adds that someone was usually playing Chopin. She does not express any opinion on any of them.

Most of the painters to whom she refers are modern, but she does mention two Renaissance masters, Rubens and

Dürer. She liked the Rubens paintings in Antwerp much better than the ones in London and preferred the small ones to the large, which seemed a little too large. She does not mention Dürer's paintings, but two or three times she compares something to the delicacy of a Dürer etching, once in particular when she looked down upon a tiny village set on a little knoll with high mountains for a background. A Dürer etching hung in her bedroom at Hampstead.

Van Gogh was one of her favorites among the moderns. In answer to Dorothy Brett's inquiry she remembered seeing a certain picture some years before. The yellow flowers "brimming with sun," a still life, had seemed to reveal something to her, and the picture lived in her memory afterwards. Another of a sea captain taught her something about writing, a "shaking free" of the narrowness of vision that comes from working too long without refreshment. Not long before, she had written to Richard Murry that a certain quotation from Van Gogh was very fine, and that she would quote a twin sentence from Chekhov if she had a copy of his letters at hand. The quotation is as follows:

Nevertheless I find in my work a certain reverberation of what fascinated me. I know that Nature told me something, that she spoke to me, and that I took down her message in shorthand. Perhaps my transcript contains words that are undecipherable; belike there are faults and omissions in it too,--still it may possess something that the wood, the beach or the figure said.¹

¹Letters, p. 353.

She was chiefly interested in modern French painters. She considered Utrillo sensitive and delicate and thought it a great loss to art that he should be insane. She remarked that tragedy seemed to dog the footsteps of the young French artists and cited Modigliani's suicide and the early death of the young poet Jean Pellerin. Renoir had done some lovely things, she said, but in his later paintings he was often "muzzy." "I can't appreciate the queer woolly outline, and I feel it was so often like as not rheumatism rather than revelation."¹ About a month later she wrote, "Renoir--at the last--bores me. His feeling for flesh is a kind of super-intense feeling about a lovely little cut of lamb."² Upon turning through a book of Cezanne reproductions sent her by Dorothy Brett, she was shocked to discover that one of them might easily have been a portrait of Jonathan Trout in "At the Bay." She wished she could cut it out and put it in her book. She did not express an opinion on Cezanne, however, nor on the Gauguins and Picassos she saw at a friend's home. Manet, she wrote in 1921, meant more to her than any other French painter. She saw a real maturity, a rich heritage in his work, and he satisfied something deep within her.

As might be expected, she had a great deal to say about literature, chiefly that of the modern period. She gave little indication of familiarity with the ancients,

¹Ibid., p. 391.

²Ibid., p. 398.

preferring to turn her attention to European writers of the last four centuries. One day early in 1914, however, she wrote Murry that she had spent the morning reading Theocritus and in the same letter quoted a line of Sappho from the Wharton translation. "The Festival of the Coronation," which was printed in The New Age, June 29, 1911, evidently a parody, bears the subheading "with apologies to Theocritus." It is not included in the collected works, either the short story volume or in either the Journal or Scrapbook. She evidently did not regard Plato very highly, judging by a Scrapbook notation in 1921:

Dogma: absolute and unquestionable truth.

Hypothesis: possible truth (Darwin's doctrine of descent).

Fiction: is impossible but enables us to reach what is relatively truth.

The myths of Plato have passed through these three stages, and passed back again, i.e. they are now regarded as fiction.¹

This mention of Plato is preceded by speculations drawn from Vaihinger's Die Philosophie des Als Ob and succeeded by a question as to why Hegel's attempt to transform subjective processes into objective world-processes will not "work out." The extent of her familiarity with philosophy is not clear, but it may be stated that she showed keen interest in it. Immediately beneath a quotation from Chekhov's letters expressing his wish that he might meet a philosopher like Nietzsche somewhere on a train or steamer and spend the

¹Scrapbook, p. 233.

whole night talking to him she voices her hearty agreement. Her idea of friendship coincided with that of Santayana, whom she mentions a number of times. He contributed to the Athenaeum, and although it is not clear how well she knew him, he was at least a speaking acquaintance. She also suggested to Murry that he ask Bertrand Russell, another acquaintance, to contribute some articles or some "fabulous tales," perhaps an account of his journey to China and discussions with Chinese philosophers.

In February, 1914, she made a note in her journal to read Goethe's "Poetry and Truth" immediately because she was not familiar with any of his works except a few poems. He soon became one of her favorite authors, for he renewed her longing to become a better writer. In February, 1922, one finds this note: "Wrote at my story, read Shakespeare. Read Goethe, thought, prayed."¹ It was about this time that she spoke of Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe. It was surprising to her that such a fascinating book should be so little talked of. The two men seemed so alive and so delightfully human that she would not even have done away with Eckermann's slight absurdity and sentimental bias, and the details of the Weimar church bells in the evening and the neighbors' children added to her enjoyment. Goethe had marvellous things to say, and he was sufficiently great to be simple enough to say what everyone feels but does not say. His

¹Journal, p. 231.

attitude toward art she thought noble. She was so much interested in the book that she even took it along to read in Manoukhine's waiting room and wrote to Richard Murry that she wished he knew German in order that he might read it.¹ She recommended it as one of those books which become part of one's life and enrich it.

Of all foreign literatures she placed the Russian first. She refers to Russian authors in letters and journals more often than to those of any other language except English. To Koteliansky she confided that she thought Bunin had immense talent but just missed being a great writer because of a certain limitation, a quality of hardness and inflexibility; in short, he lacked tenderness.² Of his short stories she thought "The Gentleman from San Francisco" good but did not care for the others in the volume which had recently appeared in English; he tried too hard.³ In 1922 she read a French translation of Bunin on contemporary Russia. Appalled by the suffering of the Russian people, she remarked that whoever upheld Bolshevism had much to answer for. She once met Bunin in Paris, anticipating a long talk about her beloved Chekhov, whom Bunin had known; but he dismissed Chekhov with a polite phrase or two. She never quite forgave him.

¹In that letter by a slip of the pen, she called it "Goethe's Conversations with Eckermann."

²Letters, p. 434.

³Ibid., p. 473. Katherine Mansfield to William Gerhardt, June 14, 1922.

Upon receipt of a letter from Dorothy Brett she answered that she was glad to hear from her because her letter sounded so far away from Hampstead and London, far away like a novel of Turgenev. Quoting a Chekhov letter in the Scrap-book, she observed: "When one thinks of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina all these young ladies of Turgenev's, with their seductive shoulders, fade away into nothing."¹ Six years before, in August, 1914, she had recorded her own sentiments concerning Turgenev: wonderfully talented, but a hypocrite and a poseur. She simply could not believe that there had been a time when she cared about him.

In 1914 she consoled herself when she longed to be a better writer with the feeling that she was already far ahead of people like Gorky, but by 1918 she had either changed her mind or turned to content rather than style, for she began translating his Journal of the Revolution and found him wonderfully sympathetic. It made her feel that anything was preferable to revolution. By 1922 she was becoming increasingly disturbed by the political situation, and she scanned the newspapers conscientiously for the latest happenings. She had begun to feel, as Gorky did, that it was a writer's duty to the remains of civilization to care about such things, and those who did not were traitors. She wearily hoped that perhaps tomorrow she would stop reading the papers "or caring a fig."²

¹p. 157.

²Letters, p. 465.

She jotted down three significant quotations from Leon Shestov. The first was: "Perhaps it is only upon the approach of an outside soul that another's soul becomes invisible, and if she be caught unawares she will not have time to disappear."¹ Upon this she commented: "That is what Tchehov sic aimed at." The substance of the second is that sooner or later writers will decide that any kind of artificial completion of a story is superfluous, and the third is an observation on Tolstoy. Tolstoy took no notice of anything which did not concern him; anything else that occurred had no existence for him. This ability to be oblivious to everything outside himself Shestov considered the prerogative of a great man in which was a deep and hidden meaning.

Having read War and Peace many times, she regarded it as great art and copied long passages of it into her notebook. Complaining that modern novelists could not sustain life in their characters, she cited the old Tartar waiter in Anna Karenina as a persistent part of the book, whereas the cooks, waiters, aunts, strange gentlemen, and other characters who are present only momentarily in a contemporary novel fade out of memory the minute the author's pen leaves them. They drop down a hole, so to speak. Elsewhere she refers to Anna herself as an especially vivid character. She wanted to obtain an inexpensive English edition of his diaries but did not know whether or not one was available. She did not always agree

¹Scrapbook, p. 26.

with Tolstoy, however. She called his essay on "The Darling" Chekhov a "small masterpiece of stupidity." She sharply disagreed with his statement that there are no heroes, only people; she thought there most definitely are heroes. Agreeing with Chekhov, she believed Tolstoy's denial of immortality to mankind a personal matter and, like Chekhov, thought him insufferably stuffy at times. On the other hand, she copied Tolstoy's reprimand to Chekhov: "You can invent anything you like, but you can't invent psychology."¹

Scenes from her everyday life kept reminding her of scenes from Dostoevsky, another of her favorites. She compared a widower and his four sons to a Dostoevsky sixth floor family and a man entering a theater to a character in Crime and Punishment. During her miserable stay in France in 1918 the French police behaved exactly like those in his novels, and one night when a gale burst open the window, flapped the shutters, and blew out the candle, she thought of the moment when Kirillov rushed at Pyotr Stepanovich in The Possessed. She took notes on both The Possessed and The Idiot, notes principally on technique and character presentation.

In a review of the Garnett translation of An Honest Thief: and Other Stories she noted that Dostoevsky's humor sometimes jars when it is only disguised exasperation or nostalgia or bitterness and that he was entirely wanting in a sense of fun, but she pointed out the exquisite humor of

¹Ibid., p. 170.

such characters as Stepan Trofimovitch and Prince K. It is not always comfortable for one's pride to laugh with him, however. He describes the state of some poor wretch's mind as if intimating that the reader has often felt the same way himself. She believed that Dostoevsky more than any other writer sets up a relationship with his reader in which he shares the tale, not writing at or for him. "An Honest Thief," "The Peasant Marly," and "The Dream of a Queer Fellow" she called wonderful stories with a quality of stillness that takes the breath.

Remembering that Dostoevsky spent four years in prison and yet did his best work afterward, she nevertheless could not achieve a feeling of continuity in her own life. In moments of despair she was overwhelmed by a sense of finality: "What is in this world? Nothing. Just a blank. . . . The feeling that one goes on, just as the sea does for hours and days after a storm, presenting an appearance of agitation and activity, but it's really all over."¹ She was evidently thinking of her imprisoning illness. Dostoevsky's letters were quite a disappointment to her because they revealed nothing of the man himself. Hardly a single statement that was not matter-of-fact could be found, and it was hard for her to reconcile the Dostoevsky of the letters with the writer. She wrote to her friend Koteliansky, "Yet this was a

¹Letters to Murry, p. 447.

noble, suffering, striving soul, a real hero among men-- wasn't he? I mean from his books. [sic]¹

Chekhov's letters, on the other hand, confirmed her impression of the man derived from his works; there are about thirty brief excerpts from them recorded in the Scrapbook, mostly observations on life and writing with which she agreed. She felt much closer to Chekhov than to any other writer because she understood him better. Not only are her stories acknowledged to bear a resemblance to his, but her life at the end was much like his. Both suffered from consumption and died at a fairly early age, he at forty-three and she at thirty-four; both disliked incessant travel but had little choice in the matter; both shared much the same attitude toward life and toward their work. In the first stage of consumption he was possessed by a passionate longing for ordinary everyday life, for mental tranquillity, health, fresh air, good food; and, becoming a dreamer, he did not know exactly what he did want.² By the end of his life he had given up hope. "If you de-sentimentalize those final letters," she wrote, "they are terrible. There is no more Tchekhov [sic]. Illness has swallowed him."³ Like her, he was tormented by a sense of the shortness of time, and he felt guilty at not writing, yet unsatisfied with his achievement when he did write. She likened the feeling to that of a singer who has

¹Letters, p. 502.

²Scrapbook, p. 221. Paraphrase of quotation from an anonymous story by Chekhov.

³Journal, p. 254.

no chance to sing the song over again now that he can sing it. In October, 1922, she wrote to Murry, "We know he felt his stories were not half what they might be. It doesn't take much imagination to picture him on his deathbed thinking 'I have never had a real chance. Something has been all wrong.'"¹ In 1917 on the fly-leaf of a volume of Chekhov's stories she inscribed the following rhyme:

By all the laws of the M. and P.
This book is bound to belong to me.
Besides I am sure that you agree
I am the English Anton T.

In 1920, remembering the rhyme, she wrote, "God forgive me, Tchekhov [sic], for my impertinence."²

She believed that Chekhov and perhaps Keats shared her vision of the world, but when Murry wrote that Chekhov saw the hopeless, indescribable beauty of the infinitely weary pattern of life, she reproved him for exaggeration tinged with insincerity. She thought Chekhov pure of heart and spoke of wishing to be able to sit in a large room in the late evening talking to him. She wrote to Koteliansky of hearing several people talking at once in Russian in Manoukhine's waiting room; she loved to hear the Russian tongue, for it reminded her of Chekhov. Indignantly she assured Murry in October, 1922 that she had not given up her beloved

¹Letters to Murry, p. 674.

²Scrapbook, p. 189.

Russian for Ouspensky and the Gurdjieff group; he was nearer to her than ever.¹

After reading his works she felt justified in her choice of uneven lengths for her stories, some very long, some very short. He became her standard for judging other literary efforts and taught her a great deal about how to write. One excellent quotation among the excerpts from his letters is as follows: "You may weep and moan over your stories, you may suffer together with your heroes, but I consider one must do this so that the reader does not notice it. The more objective, the stronger will be the effect."² She also copied a sage observation on the implacable vanity of the author: "An author's vanity is vindictive, implacable, incapable of forgiveness."³ From him she learned the necessity of a careful choice of words, as well as restraint in writing. One night when Murry was reading some Chekhov stories aloud to her, she discovered to her surprise that one story which she had thought to be inferior seemed a masterpiece when read aloud. To her his genius seemed to lie not in solving the question but in asking it, and that ability became for her the dividing line between true and false writers.

She did acknowledge the fact that Chekhov had faults, however. She felt that only the difficult thing is worth

¹Letters to Murry, p. 655.

²Scrapbook, p. 157.

³Ibid., p. 108.

deliberately choosing to do, but that Chekhov was not so aware of that fact as he should have been; some of the stories in The Horse-Stealers were "rather a shock."¹ She also thought he would have written more fully, more descriptively. She believed that one could only get so much into a story, that one must always sacrifice something that one knows and longs to use. She did not know why this was true, but it was always a race to catch as much as possible before it disappeared.² Nevertheless, in spite of these minor criticisms, Chekhov remained her favorite writer. She was convinced that on the whole, people did not understand or appreciate him because they persisted in looking at him from the wrong viewpoint; one must see him as a whole to become aware of his genius. In commenting on one of Murry's published criticisms of Chekhov, she said that Murry had made him greater than he was generally seen, but not greater than he was. "A critic must see a man as great as his potentialities but NOT sic greater."³

Although she mentioned a good many French authors, she expressed a favorable opinion of very few. Most frequently her references to them are mere allusions, as for instance, when she compared Murry to The Man with a Golden

¹Letters to Murry, p. 640.

²Journal, p. 221.

³Letters to Murry, p. 618.

Brain in a Daudet story or said that her cook is the kind of cook Anatole France might have had. The appearance of one of her doctors also reminded her of Anatole France, and elsewhere she speaks of his charming smile as probably hiding a complete lack of feeling. She approved of Murry's critical portrait of Baudelaire and enjoyed Sainte-Beuve's essay on Theocritus; she thought Rachilde more interesting than Colette. Otherwise, she made no mention of any of them. Surprisingly enough, although she was much influenced by Verlaine and the other Symbolists in her youth, one finds in her letters only that his statue looked just as she had expected him to look.

For the most part she disliked French writers very much. In 1920 she decided to reread de Maupassant, whom she had not thought about for several years. Shortly afterwards she stated flatly that she would give every word he ever wrote for one story by Chekhov, and in speaking of the French newspapers, she said: "There's practically no police news. True, they did write about Landru's execution, but so well it might have been de Maupassant!"¹ She was stronger in her denunciation of others. In 1918 she read two books by Octave Mirbeau and recorded in her journal that the French were a filthy people and their corruption was so pronounced that she would never go near them again. The English could not stoop so low. Again her dislike of the French made her consider life "ignoble" in France. She wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell

¹Letters, p. 451.

in 1921: "Everything is money. When I read Balzac I always feel a peculiar odious exasperation because according to him the whole of life is founded on money. But he is right. It is--for the French."¹

There were, however, some French authors who pleased her greatly. She was charmed by La Fontaine's fables and delighted to find a copy of Tissot's Litterature Francaise, which contains examples of French literature from the ninth century to the end of the eighteenth, each section followed by a survey of the state of the whole world, one country at a time, in order to place the works in their proper historical setting. Toulet's "Le P'Tit" she considered well done and "Nausicaa" charming; his "Coeur de Fraise" also appealed to her. She remarked that if he had not been a Frenchman she might have liked him very much, since her dislike was based on the French habits of style that clung to his work. Sometimes after reading the newspapers she found herself inclined to turn to "Flaubert or another," feeling that she did not quite belong to her own day. Coeur Simple was among her favorites. As for George Sand, one cannot decide precisely what a cryptic journal entry means: "Had a strange dream. 'She is one with the moonlight.' George Sand--ma soeur."² This sentiment becomes more puzzling in the light of a letter: "He the doctor made me feel like an old writing

¹Ibid., pp. 361-362.

²Journal, p. 147.

woman--a sort of old George Sand tossed up by the tide last night."¹

Duhamel she discovered to be the most sympathetic Frenchman she had ever read. He had dignity of soul, and his world, like that of the Russians, seemed very near her own. It is not clear whether Duhamel himself or a critical article about him presented her with another interesting idea: that an artist must surrender something of his personality.

It gives me another critical point of view about an artist and quite a new one. I mean--to find out what the man is subduing, to mark that side of him being gradually absorbed (even as it were without his knowing it) into the side of him he has chosen to explore, strengthening it, reinforcing it even while he thinks it is subdued away.²

About two years later (1921) she read Proust for the first time. "I certainly think he is by far the most interesting living writer. He is fascinating! It is a comfort to have someone whom one can so immensely admire."³ For his work there is only unqualified praise with no mention of his nationality. However, there are virtually no other references to him.

She reviewed translations of four other foreign novels that she thought noteworthy. The Four Horsemen by Vicente Blasco Ibañez she called distinguished in spite of a poor translation, lacking subtlety, but simple and direct.

¹Letters, p. 151.

²Letters to Murry, p. 412.

³Letters, p. 421.

A Japanese novel by Futabatei seemed remote from the commonplace of London, the "delicate net of the story" touched with faery. The Growth of the Soil by Knut Hamsun, a Norwegian, is one of those books which lets the reader escape from himself and form an invisible part. The series Small Souls by Couperus, a well-known Dutch novelist, a delicate and profound study of a family, cannot be ignored, she asserted. It enlarges one's experience of life.

Turning now to the field of English literature, one finds Chaucer high among her estimates of great men. The first four lines of the Prologue to Canterbury Tales heads the letter of March 11, 1918, followed by a word on the season. She was fond of reading critical essays on her favorite authors and thought Alexander Smith on Chaucer very good. She especially liked Troilus and Cressida, but the story of Chanticleer and Pertelote, erroneously identified as the Pardoner's tale, from the Canterbury Tales was perfect in its way. The personality of Chaucer himself seemed to ring through it.

During the last two or three years of her life she steeped herself in Shakespeare, taking copious notes, only fragments of which appear in the Journal and a few excerpts from Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare in the Scrapbook. She did not believe Shakespeare wrote The Taming of the Shrew because she thought it badly constructed and "silly." She credited him with only bolstering up certain speeches. On

the other hand, she considered The Tempest a "most radiant, delicate, exquisite play" and regarded the love of Ferdinand and Miranda as quite perfect. The atmosphere, she said, is that of an island after a storm; there is a superfluity of desert islands but dream islands are rare. She loved the songs from Twelfth Night and Camillo's speech from the end of the Winter's Tale, which seemed to her to belong to the nineteenth century. She also noted that the First Lord in All's Well that Ends Well is a definite character; his speeches are not interchangeable with those of the Second Lord. All the notes recorded in the Journal¹ concern either character or beautiful lines, in some of which she saw possibilities for development as short stories. She saw the envious Malvolio coveting his master's possessions and aping his master's expressions in the mirror. She compared Miranda and Juliet, disagreeing with those who thought them similar. Quoting the lines "In praising Anthony I have dispraised Caesar... [sic]/I am paid for it now," she observed: "A creature like Cleopatra always expects to be paid for things."²

She meditated on Coleridge's observation on Hamlet:

He plays that subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near being what he acts.

So do we all begin by acting and the nearer we are to what we would be the more perfect our disguise. Finally there comes the moment when we are no longer acting; it may even catch us by surprise. . . .

¹pp. 203-209.

²Ibid., p. 209.

And then Hamlet is lonely. The solitary person always acts.¹

She did not like Ophelia's mad scene nor the Queen's speech after her death, she added. Although she sometimes disagreed with Coleridge, to the following passage she gave her heartiest approval:

In his very first productions, Shakespeare projected his mind out of his own particular being, and felt, and made others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself, except by force of contemplation and that sublime faculty by which a great mind becomes that on which it meditates.²

She seconded his dislike of excessive stage setting in the attempt to create "the highest delusion possible," noting a scene from Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard where the whole effect of dawn is produced by blowing out the candle. She would, no doubt, have objected strenuously to the use of more setting than necessary for the production of Shakespeare.

She had much less to say of the sixteenth and seventeenth century poets. She confessed herself quite charmed by both Thomas Randolph and Sir Thomas Wyatt, who was "extraordinarily good!"³ She quoted several lines of each to Murry in March, 1918.⁴ Somewhat surprisingly, although Marlowe was one of her favorites, she mentioned none of his plays and quoted only a few lines of the "incredibly lovely" Hero and

¹Ibid., pp. 204-205.

²Scrapbook, p. 178.

³Letters to Murry, p. 205.

⁴Ibid., pp. 204-205, 213.

Leander in the Scrapbook.¹ She referred to Milton once:

"There are times when Milton seems the only food to me. He is a most blessed man. . . . But the more poetry one reads the more one longs to read!"²

She did not often mention the eighteenth century in her letters and journals, but she recommended Congreve's The Way of the World to Lady Ottoline Morrell for the sake of the character Mrs. Millimant, who is "exquisitely done," especially at her first appearance and in a later scene. The play is best read aloud, she believed.

What a brilliant strange creature Congreve was--so anxious not to be considered a writer, but only a plain gentleman. And Voltaire's shrewd reply, 'If you had been only a gentleman I would not have come to see you' . . . I love reading good plays;³

As for Swift, she once described a certain house as the kind in which one finds Gulliver's Travels on a shelf and is immediately lost to the world. She also compared life at the Institute to something out of Gulliver's Travels; one had the feeling of having been in a wreck and been washed ashore in some strange new land. She was rather fond of Dr. Johnson, from whom she recorded a number of pungent comments in the Scrapbook. "When I read Dr. Johnson, I feel like a little girl sitting at the same table. My eyes grow round. I don't only listen; I take him in immensely."⁴ She did not,

¹Scrapbook, p. 197.

²Letters, p. 140.

³Ibid., p. 438.

⁴Journal, p. 126.

however, refer either to him or to Swift again in her published papers.

She often felt very close to the Romantic poets. Wordsworth seemed so "honest, living, and pure." Whenever she was in the South of France she turned to him, perhaps because her always-strong sense of identification with Nature was increased by the resemblance of that countryside to her beloved New Zealand. She wrote to Murry that she agreed with every word of the sonnet beginning: "Great Men have been among us: hands that penned."¹ She would have liked very much to lead the same kind of quiet life that he and his sister led; she greatly enjoyed Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, despite the editor's omissions of such "trivial details" as the mending of shirts, the gathering of sticks, and the like, which he thought there was no need to include. Mansfield wrote angrily: "There is! Fool!"² In a letter to her cousin, the Countess Russell, she described the little clouds glittering the folds of the mountains "like Dorothy Wordsworth's sheep."

She sometimes disagreed sharply with Coleridge, but nevertheless admired much of his work. She felt that the world had advanced so much since his day as to invalidate some of his opinions on Shakespeare and that he would have been far more enlightening had he lived a century later.

¹Letters to Murry, p. 121.

²Scrapbook, p. 167.

Recovering from a severe attack of illness, she wrote that she was well except for extreme weakness, "the albatross around my neck." Again, during a raging storm, she lay awake thinking how many Ancient Mariners and lost souls were crying in the wind; she thought it must have been just such a storm when Shelley died.

She became more and more attached to Keats and Shelley as time went on. She memorized several of their poems, as she always did with any author whom she particularly liked. She alluded to both, but Keats was clearly her favorite. One reason for her strong attraction to Keats was that he, too, was a consumptive and knew the terrible depression and longing for life. Several excerpts from his letters to Fanny Brawne appear in the Scrapbook as having been gleaned from her notebooks. "These letters written during his fatal illness are terrible to one in my situation,"¹ she wrote in January, 1921, a scant two years before her own death. In March, 1921, she discovered the Keats Memorial Volume, which she considered "indescribable in its vulgarity," but it included a letter by Keats himself which seemed to her to mock the book as he would have mocked it. As for Mary Godwin Shelley, she wrote that she was completely disgusted with her after reading in The Times that Shelley left on his table a scrap of paper with a blot on it and a flung down quill, which Mary Shelley had encased in glass and carried all the way to London on her knees.

¹Ibid., p. 195.

Mansfield commented: "Did you ever hear such rubbish!!"¹
She had evidently not greatly liked her to begin with.

She enjoyed both Lamb and De Quincey immensely, although she did not refer to either more than once or perhaps twice. Asking Murry to buy a copy of Charles Lamb (the E. V. Lucas edition), she added playfully that her mouth watered at the thought of all those new treasures she would soon fondle. Upon receipt of the book she wrote that she could not resist such a lovely travelling companion across France, and upon her eventual arrival in Paris (this was in 1918), she wrote that Lamb was a comfort to her, even though she read him in a state of mingled fever, dread, and dismay. She once described a certain house as a perfect setting for a De Quincey murder and elsewhere included him among her "special set," the Elizabethans and Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, De Quincey, but otherwise did not mention him.

The novels of Jane Austen delighted her immensely. Late in 1921 she and Murry began reading all of them, starting with Emma. She wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell that she enjoyed every page. She couldn't have enough of Miss Bates or Mr. Woodhouse's gruel or "that charming Mr. Knightly." It was a great comfort to escape from the modern novels she had been reviewing. A little later she wrote to her cousin that Jane Austen's management of plot could not be admired too greatly: "She makes modern episodic people like me, as

¹Letters to Murry, p. 607.

far as I go, look very incompetent ninnies. In fact, she is altogether a chastening influence."¹ She noted in her journal that what she chiefly admired in Jane Austen is that what she promises, she performs; in other words, if a character is to arrive, she has his arrival at length: "and it's excellent and exceeds our expectations. This is rare; it is also my very weakest point. Easy to see why."²

She loved Emily Bronte's poems but did not mention her novels. She wrote to Murry in 1915 of an interesting dream in which the Brontes appeared, but otherwise said nothing about them. Mrs. Gaskell, however, pleased her to such an extent that she called the second story in Cranford, "Moorland Cottage," a little masterpiece.

From time to time when abroad she would ask Murry to send another Dickens, Edwin Drood, Bleak House, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist. She thought John Forster's biography of him fascinating. She liked the satire in Our Mutual Friend and the character Ma Wilfer. "I have a huge capacity for seeing 'funny' people, you know, and laughing, and Dickens does fill it at times quite amazingly."³ In reviewing a modern sequel to Dombey and Son she remarked that she could think of no other author who took a final farewell of his characters more reluctantly than Dickens and noted his delight in the

¹Letters, p. 425.

²Journal, p. 211.

³Letters to Murry, p. 141.

exuberance of life, in its endless possibilities and complications. A journal entry declares that there are moments when he was possessed by his power of writing, carried away by it, a bliss not shared by present day writers.

The death of Cheedle: [sic] dawn falling upon the edge of night. One realises exactly the mood of the writer and how he wrote, as it were, for himself, but it was not his will. He was the falling dawn, and he was the physician going to the Bar.¹

Whenever a reviewer for the Athenaeum failed to appraise his subject justly she did not hesitate to discuss the matter with Murry; conversely, she was quick to commend an especially good critical article or review. In November, 1919, she objected to what she considered an ungenerous criticism of George Eliot which hardly mentioned her "English warm ruddy quality." Her pictures of country life, she said, have breadth and the feeling of warm sun on the barns and of the animals, particularly horses. She mentioned the scene in which Maggie Tulliver and her lover are walking up and down the lane, he leading his horse, and he asks her to marry him. Mansfield pointed out "the beast is the man, one feels she feels in some queer inarticulate way."² Mansfield was always quick to note any affinities, symbolic or otherwise. She by no means liked everything George Eliot wrote, however. "I think Amos Barton is awful and there is nothing to say for

¹Journal, p. 151.

²Letters to Murry, p. 411.

it."¹ This discovery was quite a disappointment, since she had always heard it was one of George Eliot's best.

She admired the craftsmanship of Samuel Butler; he put an expert surface on everything. She remarked the crisp little frills of the second half of The Way of All Flesh and wished she might see the letters of the woman who was the original of Alethea Pontifex.

The Victorian poets and essayists are scarcely referred to at all in Mansfield's published papers. She spoke of Macaulay, Arnold, and Ruskin only in passing. She quoted a fragment of Macaulay, took issue with a review representing Ruskin as overconfident, and criticized Matthew Arnold for failing to convey the peculiar quality of whomever he passed judgment on. She hardly noticed Browning and Tennyson at all. There is one allusion to a Browning poem and one mention, albeit indirect, of Tennyson: "Sullivan is all right, don't you think, but undistinguished. I always feel he's on the point of choosing The Idylls of the King as his great poem."²

Of the decadents, she mentioned only Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. She asked Murry to send Pater's essays but gave no opinion on their merit. She commended Murry's critical article on Wilde and elsewhere said, "I am sure O. W. was negligible but he is an astonishing figure."³ A few days

¹Ibid., p. 658.

²Ibid., p. 357.

³Letters, p. 319.

later she dreamed she met him, and like all dreams, nothing was quite logical, but he behaved in a typical affected manner.

Most of her comments pertain to modern novelists, partly because she was called upon to review and criticize current novels for the Athenaeum and partly because she often read whatever was at hand when she was too ill to work. Although she liked Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga very much, it made her feel very strange to read that his Saint's Progress was one of the masterpieces of all time, as some extravagant reviewers for The Times and other papers would have it. Her own review for the Athenaeum expresses her distaste for what she considered undue sentimentality and unreal characters. She thought it very weak, and her judgment seems to be borne out by contemporary opinion.

In 1915 her journal records the purchase of a book by Henry James.

It was not very interesting or very good, but I can wade through pages and pages of dull, turgid James for the sake of that sudden sweet shock, that violent throb of delight that he gives me at times. I don't doubt this is genius: only there is an extraordinary amount of pan and an amazingly raffiné flash--¹

She goes on to say that James' character, Bernard Longueville, enjoyed himself most when alone. So, too, did she.

On the whole she did not really care for Meredith, but The Egoist seemed very good in its way; upon picking it up she noticed that she had forgotten how much he enjoyed

¹Journal, pp. 30-31.

writing: "It's delightful how this enjoyment comes through-- he shares your laugh, catches your eye, sees the point just as you do."¹ Then, however, she read Rhoda Fleming and thought it odious, false, and preposterous. She took a somewhat milder but no less definite view of George Moore, who was rather popular at that time. In an article for the Athenaeum she pointed out that excessive detail does not necessarily make for interest and condemned Esther Waters as dull in the extreme.

She did not ordinarily like adventure tales, but she thought highly of Conrad's novel, The Rescue, because of its response to the significance of everything, even the slightest detail arising from a heightened state of awareness, an atmosphere of mysterious implication: "This fascinating book revives in us the youthful feeling that we are not so much reading a story of adventure as living in an through it, absorbing it, making it our own."² She was equally quick to pronounce The Arrow of Gold an immature work, trite and wordy. In August, 1920, she was called upon to review Island Tales, by Jack London. The only thing, she said, that kept him from being a real adventurer was his sentimentality: "there was always the moment when his heart went to his head and he was carried away by passions which were immensely

¹Letters, p. 192.

²Novels and Novelists, p. 223.

appropriate to the occasion, but which suffered from a histrionic tinge."¹

She loved the poems of Thomas Hardy: he was one, she felt, who understood. His offer of a poem to the Athenaeum greatly pleased both her and her husband, who also was very fond of Hardy. Some of his poems affected her very deeply. "They are almost intolerably near to one. I mean I always long to weep ... that love and regret touched so lightly--that autumn tone, that feeling that 'Beauty passes though rare, rare it be.'"² The Dynasts was one of those things which elude one for a time and then suddenly open and become clear. The point of view was "like a light streaming from the imagination," and it made her believe that the poetic drama as a form would be in the future like The Dynasts--written as if for the stage and yet not to be played. Her enthusiasm for Hardy, or anyone else, did not obscure her critical judgment to such an extent that she was incapable of sharp disappointment upon occasion. The Well-Beloved she thought appallingly bad, overpretentious, and stilted. She sometimes noticed a "snobbish, schoolmaster vein" and hoped he was ashamed of the book by then. The style was "preposterous." She wanted him to be always at his best.

She wasted few words in reducing a writer to his proper status. She was polite to E. M. Forster in a review

¹Ibid., p. 256.

²Letters, p. 411.

of The Story of the Siren in August, 1920, calling him one of the few younger writers who sense the value of atmosphere and precision of expression. Nevertheless, he seemed not to have exerted quite enough imaginative power to create his world for the reader. In her journal three years earlier she was more blunt: "E. M. Forster never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea."¹ She was very hard on Hugh Walpole, this time in print. A week later she answered his letter, explaining that she had not detested his book at all. She had merely found certain things about it that did not quite attest his ability as a writer. She did not retract anything that she had said in the review but did carefully explain her remarks. She did not often resort to parody; but the Irish movement proving too great a temptation for her to resist its invitation to satire, in 1912 instead of writing a review of Synge's play, The Well of the Saints, she and Murry parodied Irish speech in a sketch of two people attending the performance. Yeats, perhaps the most prominent figure in the group, she considered pompous and negligible as a writer. She did not approve of Gertrude Stein, either. Her review of Three Lives is not quite a parody of her style, but it has something of the flavor of it. The life of Melanctha the negress is

¹Journal, p. 71.

written in syncopated time, in rag-time to be exact. She concludes, "Heaven forbid Miss Stein should become a fashion!"¹

T. S. Eliot, among others, contributed to the Athenaeum. As a reviewer he was not all she could have hoped for; his patient always died under the operation. She was sorry Murry asked him to review Ezra Pound one week, for she had no doubt that Pound was a minor figure and to review him made Eliot look a bit foolish. She did not like Eliot's article, either. As to his creative work, she felt that he was finding himself in writing poetry. "I feel he is seeing why he fails, and how he can separate himself from Sweeney through Sweeney. But this may be sadly far-fetched."² She thought "Prufrock" by far the best and most interesting modern poem; it stayed in the memory as a work of art.

Very different in that respect was her reaction to Ulysses. Her first impression was one of shock. Although it contained many fine things, she preferred to do without them than to take what went with them. She tried a little later to be entirely fair to Joyce, but she never lost her distaste for his work. Also, she did not think it art because the author himself seemed entangled in it; the "act of projection" had not been made. She considered Proust far superior to Joyce.

One can stand much, but that kind of shock which is the result of vulgarity and commonness, one is frightened of

¹Novels and Novelists, p. 285.

²Letters to Murry, p. 398.

receiving. It's as though one's mind goes on quivering afterwards....It's just exactly the reverse of the exquisite rapture one feels in for instance that passage which ends a chapter where Proust describes the flowering apple trees in the spring rain.¹

Somerset Maugham was not a favorite of hers, either, although, of course, for very different reasons. She felt no active distaste for his work but did not like The Moon and Sixpence because of technical faults. Of his story "Rain" she said that he "lays it on too thick." It was a little too perfect as a story, and the rain kept stopping. She thought the whole story should have been soaked or steamed with the tropical heat after the rain, but it was not.

George Bernard Shaw, in her opinion, was very fine as a reviewer but wholly uninspired as a creative writer. She did not think him an artist. His plays, she admitted, were extremely amusing at times, but he seemed to be writing at his audience instead of with them. She always found a flatness in his work, as if he observed everything that was going on but did not take part in it.

Literary allusions interlard the letters and journals, such as a comment here and there parenthetically, "as Lamb would say," or "Shelley's moonlight may" in a description of a scene. She usually told her correspondents what she had been reading lately, sometimes adding her opinion, sometimes not. Upon examination these scraps of poetry, phrases quoted from one or another, and definite opinions corroborate her

¹Letters, p. 435.

theories on art and the artist; she judged by a definite standard from which she rarely departed. Occasionally it is difficult to understand her omission of comment on a writer or her opinion of another, but it is always clear that when an opinion is expressed it is the result of the application of her standard of judgment and not a haphazard remark later to be contradicted.

CHAPTER VI
KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S COMMENTS
ON HER OWN WORKS

Katherine Mansfield saw story possibilities in almost every situation but laid tentative plans for several stories which she either tore up or never wrote at all. Her only consolation during one stay at Cornwall was that even though she loathed the people, they would some day serve as good story material.¹ She once wrote Koteliansky that she longed to write a story about her kitten, who was playing nearby.² Asking Richard Murry if he dreaded dentists as much as she did, she told him she planned a story, "Killing the Nerve," that he would have to tie up his face to read.³ Early in May, 1922, she wrote to Dorothy Brett that she was embarking on a short novel:

It's rather an important day for me. I am beginning my long serial...half of which has to be finished in a month from now. . . . The serial is very exciting. It is 24,000 words, a short novel in fact. I want it to end with a simply scrumptious wedding, rose pink tulle frocks for the bridesmaids, favours on the horses' heads, that marvellous moment at the church when everyone is waiting, the servants in a pew to themselves. The Cook's hat! But all, all divinely beautiful if I can do it...gay, but with that feeling that "beauty vanishes beauty passes, Though rare, rare it be...."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 167.

²Ibid., p. 212.

³Ibid., p. 468.

⁴Ibid., p. 466.

Writing to schedule was well-nigh impossible, however. Late in June she lamented: "Oh, my story won't go fast enough. It's got stuck. I must have it finished and done with in 10 days' time. Never shall I commit myself again to a stated time. It's hellish."¹ The Journal records her commitment to Clement Shorter on May 3, 1922²; she was to write twelve chapters of approximately two thousand words each. The entry contains her opening paragraph and a rough idea for the untitled story, which was to center about the Sheridans, who appear in "The Garden Party." The novel was never finished and does not appear among the fragments included in the edition of her complete works.

Although really too ill to write during the last year of her life, she was probably motivated not only by her inner compulsion but by the need of money as well. She was usually pressed for funds and frequently had trouble collecting what was due her: "I've written Rutter 3 [sic] times for the money for my story and I've not had a penny nor have I had a cheque from the paper this month."³ She always felt, however, that she should be able to sell her work profitably: "Personally, I want to make money by my stories now--I can't live poor--can't worry about butter and cabs and woollen dresses and the chemist's bill and work too."⁴ She was

¹Ibid., p. 474.

²P. 237.

³Letters to Murry, p. 527.

⁴Ibid., p. 614.

furious with Constable's advertising of Bliss, and Other Stories (1920),¹ but since they offered more money in advance than the other firms with whom she negotiated, they remained her publishers. She expressed her opinion of the price and appearance of novels rather tartly in a review for the Athenaeum in November, 1920:

The price of novels is a mystery. Why is it that some publishers are compelled to print their books on grey, black-haired paper, to squeeze them between the covers that used to contain 'ninepennies' in the old days and to price them at nine shillings? We are certain that the book which is adorned with the enigmatic couple in coloured margarine and plaster-of-paris on a white icing background starts its career with a severe handicap.²

She was always a trifle apprehensive at sending her darlings to the lions, as she said, partly for fear of rejection and partly for fear of severe criticism after their appearance in print. The first volume of her mature work, Bliss, and Other Stories (1920), apparently did not meet nearly so much adverse comment as did its successor, The Garden Party, and Other Stories (1922). In September, 1920, she thought the stories in the first book trivial and did not believe that she had yet begun any real creative work.

Of all stories in The Garden Party, and Other Stories (1922), one might say of all the stories she ever wrote, none was more widely misunderstood and bitterly criticized than "The Daughters of the Late Colonel." On New Year's Day, 1921, she wrote to Richard Murry:

¹Ibid., p. 614.

²Novels and Novelists, p. 307.

I have written a huge long story of a rather new kind. It's the outcome of the Prelude method--it just unfolds and opens--But I hope it's an advance on Prelude. In fact, I know it's that because the technique is stronger--It's a queer tale, though. I hope you'll like it....¹

She was frequently a little dubious about a recently finished story, calling more than one of them "a queer tale." When she read the printed version in the London Mercury in May, 1921, she became more dubious still and thought it might fall "dead flat." It seemed to her plain and unadorned, and she asked Murry to let her know if anyone liked it. "It's just a queer feeling--after one has dropped a pebble in. Will there be a ripple or not?"² Tomlinson and De la Mare were the ones she wanted especially to please. There was quite a ripple indeed, but not the kind she had hoped for. The Saturday Review called her story "a dismal transcript of inefficiency."³ The storm of adverse comment from every quarter discouraged her to such an extent that she conceded that perhaps, living alone, she had gotten "out of touch" and that what seemed to her lively was no more than "ghostly glee."⁴

She wrote a very warm letter to William Gerhardi, who understood and liked the story. She explained that while writing it she lived for it and after finishing, hoped very much that her readers would understand what she was trying to

¹Letters, p. 359.

²Ibid., p. 372.

³Ibid., p. 374.

⁴Ibid.

say. Very few did; they thought it was cruel. She was very much upset that anyone should think she was "sneering" or "poking fun at the poor old things." Some thought the story "drab."

It's almost terrifying to be misunderstood. 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.¹

In November of that year Dorothy Brett sent her a very favorable review of the story. It was evidently a piece of extravagant praise, for although she was glad the reviewer liked it, she wished nobody would write that kind of article "for another five years at least." She told her friend that she had put her all into the story and implied her disappointment that so few saw her meaning. Even Hardy had asked her to write more about the sisters. "As if there was any more to say!" She then went on: ". . . . I could do with a great deal less praise than I get. It's...frightening, and I feel with all my heart I want to have another two years' work done at least before I am worth talking about."² This and similar remarks were not false modesty, but sincere expressions of her stringent standards of art.

¹Ibid., p. 389.

²Ibid., p. 414.

Early in 1922 when she had written all but the last two completed stories, she declared that the only story which satisfied her to any extent was "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and, she added, parts of "Je ne parle pas francais."¹ "Je ne parle" is usually referred to as "a cry against corruption" because it is the story in which she was absorbed in February, 1918, when she explained the two states of mind from which she wrote,² the second being the cry. She made it clear that "Je ne parle" is an expression of the second, as is, of course, evident from the story itself, although she did not apply the term specifically to it. Many others would also fall into that same classification.

The story familiar to readers of today is not the original version. The publisher (Constable) insisted that she change the ending, to which request she replied that she would not agree to the excisions specified if there were "500,000,000" copies in existence. "I'm furious. No, I'll never agree. I'll supply another story but that is all. The outline would be all blurred. It must have those sharp lines."³ She was later persuaded, however, to make some alteration; just how much it is not possible to say without comparison, and the original version, printed by Murry and his brother in the summer of 1919 on a hand press, is now a

¹Ibid., p. 444.

²See page 85 of this thesis.

³Letters to Murry, p. 515.

collector's item and not available to me. This version she sent in two installments to Murry, who praised the first half highly. She wept for joy upon reading his letter because she felt so strongly about it:

I did feel (I do) that this story is the real thing and that I did not once (as far as I know) shirk it. Please God, I'll do much better for us--but I felt: There, I can lay down my pen now I've made that, and give it to Bogey.¹

That joy was darkened by the sudden apprehension lest he not like the second half; in fact, he was not so enthusiastic as before, and it was perhaps his persuasion which induced her to change it for inclusion in Bliss, and Other Stories (1920). She herself was not quite satisfied with the change.

The group of New Zealand stories, on the other hand, were written almost altogether from the joyful state of mind. As has been mentioned, there is some question as to the date of composition of The Aloe, but Murry identifies the following as a reference to it: "Ça marche, ça va, ça se dessine--it's good."² The letter from which it is taken is dated May 8 in the 1951 edition of her letters and March 27 in the 1929 edition. A letter of December 10 (so dated in both) mentions her work "shaping up for the first time today. . . . It has only been a dim coast and a glint of foam before."³ In the earlier edition Murry's

¹Ibid., p. 163.

²Ibid., p. 33.

³Ibid., p. 47.

footnote unheritatingly identifies the work in question as "Prelude," but his footnote to the later edition states flatly that it refers to a second attempt at The Aloe.

There seems to be no question, however, that "Prelude" was written at the Villa Pauline, Bandol, France. After the first keen bliss of composition had worn off, it, too, met the same fate as most of her other work; she read pages of it during the printing and "scarcely knew it again, it all seems so once upon a time."¹ This was about two years after its completion. She was very much afraid it would be a failure and was pleased when a few copies were sold by subscription in advance of publication. She later spoke somewhat disparagingly of it, calling it a child's story and defying the "Intellectuals" to look down upon it.

Its continuation, "At the Bay," begun during the summer of 1921, excited her greatly. She wrote Dorothy Brett that it was "full of sand and seaweed, bathing dresses hanging over verandas, and sandshoes on window sills, and little pink 'sea' convolvulus, and rather gritty sandwiches and the tide coming in."² Elsewhere she felt inclined to suggest that the publishers give away a spade and bucket with every copy. All her heart and soul were poured into it, and she hoped desperately that it would give pleasure to someone.

It is so strange to bring the dead to life again.
There's my Grandmother, back in her chair with her pink

¹Letters, p. 146.

²Ibid., p. 394.

knitting, there stalks my uncle over the grass; I feel as I write, 'You are not dead, my darlings. All is remembered. I bow down to you. I efface myself so that you may live again through me in your richness and beauty.' And one feels possessed. And then the place where it all happens. I have tried to make it as familiar to 'you' as it is to me. You know the marigolds? You know those pools in the rocks, you know the mouse trap on the washhouse window-sill? And too, one tries to go deep--to speak to the secret self we all have--to acknowledge that.¹

John Galsworthy liked the story very much. She wrote him a pleasant letter touching several subjects and acknowledging his approval: "But it is not your praise that I value most, although I am honoured and proud to have that. It is the fact you are watching my work, which is the most precious encouragement."² A few months earlier she had read the proof and felt ashamed of the story. It seemed flat, dull, unsuccessful.³

One of the early New Zealand stories, "The Woman at the Store," is mentioned, as are most of the early works, notably the German Pension (1911), only in refusing to have it reprinted. On the other hand, she allowed "The Wind Blows" to be included in Bliss, and Other Stories (1920) because a rather strange assortment of her friends had spoken strongly about it. A great many others had also admired it.

The New Zealand stories seemed very real indeed to her; perhaps it was the setting. For some reason she felt

¹Ibid., pp. 400-401.

²Ibid., pp. 439-440.

³Journal, p. 200.

to an extraordinary degree the identification with both character and situation that was, to her, a requisite for writing anything. Of a less well-known story she wrote to William Gerhardt:

I've been wanting to say--how strange, how delightful it is you should feel as you do about The Voyage. No one has mentioned it to me but Middleton Murry. But when I wrote that little story I felt that I was on that very boat, going down those stairs, smelling the smell of the saloon. And when the stewardess came in and said, 'We're rather empty, we may pitch a little,' I can't believe that my sofa did not pitch. And one moment I had a little bun of silk-white hair and a bonnet and the next I was Fenella hugging the swan neck umbrella. It was so vivid--terribly vivid--especially as they drove away and heard the sea as slowly it turned on the beach. Why--I don't know. It wasn't a memory of a real experience. It was a kind of possession. I might have remained the grandma for ever after if the wind had changed that moment. . . . I think one always feels it, only sometimes it is a great deal more definite.¹

To Murry she explained her feeling thus: "Until this story is finished I am engulfed. . . . It seizes me--swallows me completely."² Evidently this experience is "the moment when you are no longer writing the book, it is writing, it possesses you."³

She believed it necessary to try to become the thing she was attempting to recreate;⁴ then followed a moment when she was "more duck, more apple, or more Natasha than any of these objects could ever possibly be, and so you create them

¹Letters, pp. 453-454.

²Letters to Murry, p. 583.

³Letters, p. 338.

⁴Ibid., p. 74.

anew."¹ Her creation of characters was achieved by observation from within rather than from outside them: "Delicate perception is not enough; one must find the exact way in which to convey the delicate perception. 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."² She was quick to note, however, that complete knowledge of a character from within was not in itself sufficient to guarantee effective presentation of that character:

It is a very great gift for an author to be able to project himself into the hearts and minds of his characters--but more is needed to make a great creative artist; he must be able, with equal power, to withdraw, to survey what is happening--and from an eminence.³

The lack of this ability, however, she considered fatal to the would-be author. In a review for the Athenaeum (February, 1920) she sharply criticized a writer for failing to allow his characters to speak their minds. He insisted on speaking for them and reinforcing their statements with tiring commentary and explanatory notes. She censured another novelist for the same fault: uncovering instead of discovering characters.

She felt that the troublesome question of how much to imply, how much to trust to the reader's imagination, was easily answered by the author's strength of creative vision,

¹Ibid., p. 74.

²Ibid., p. 312.

³Novels and Novelists, p. 317.

that is, the completeness of his knowledge of the situation and the characters. She believed in letting her characters evolve their own plots, and some critics have thought her stories entirely plotless because she believed in a different type of plot construction from that to which they were accustomed. She related everything in each of her stories to a central idea rather than a carefully designed train of events. If, she said, "what Blake beautifully calls the bounding outline, be removed and if, further, no one thing is to be related to another thing, we do not see what is to prevent the whole of mankind from turning author."¹ Mere accurate recording of detail was to her not enough to ensure realism. The detail must be significant and must convey the author's emotion: "Emotion is essential to a work of art; it is that which makes a work of art a unity."² In order to communicate the complicated interlacings of emotional reactions which constituted her stories she found it necessary to choose her words with extreme care. It is for this reason that she objected strenuously to any alteration whatever of her finished work. Murry's note on the composition of "The Doll's House" bears out this conclusion:

'N.Z. At Karori: The little lamp. I seen it. And then they were silent.' Three days later the entry is completed with: 'Finito, 30.x.21.'
This suggests that in fact Katherine's inspirations

¹Ibid., p. 44.

²Ibid., p. 245.

were much more sudden and unexpected than she herself realized Anyhow, the fact is remarkable that of nearly all her completed stories nothing but the stories themselves remain. Of these stories there are, generally, no notes, no alternative drafts, no "false starts," but only an original manuscript written at ever increasing speed so that the writing towards the end is hardly more than a hieroglyph. In some cases there is a fair copy, with singularly little alteration.¹

The actual writing of "Taking the Veil" took about three hours, but the story had been in her mind for some time.²

Every word and phrase in "The Man Without a Temperament" was exactly the way she wanted it to be and must under no circumstances be changed. Mailing her only copy to her husband, she worried, as she always did, that it might be lost:

The MS I send is positively my only copy. I cannot possibly repeat it. I have not so much as a shaving or a paring of it wherewith I could reconstruct its like. And I think there is not a word I would change or that can be changed....³

She added a postscript to the same letter: "Take care of it for me: PLEASE, PLEASE." After the story was accepted by the publisher she insisted on seeing the proofs herself because there were sure to be mistakes.

Every word matters. This is not conceit--but it must be so. If you did not live at such racing speed I would beg you to go through the typed copy with the MS and see that the spaces were correct--that where I intend a space, there is a space. It's sure to be

¹Scrapbook, p. 224.

²Journal, p. 225.

³Letters to Murry, p. 454.

wrong. But I CAN'T sic afford mistakes. Another word won't do. I chose every single word.¹

As with "The Man Without a Temperament," she took great pains to perfect "Miss Brill:"

It's a queer thing how craft comes into writing. I mean down to details. Par example. In Miss Brill I choose sic not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I choose sic 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.²

She was delighted that Murry praised the story. "I am very glad you liked Miss Brill. I liked her, too. One writes (one reason why is) because one does care so passionately that one must show it--one must declare one's love."³ This story also pleased a great many other people, who sent letters to her; she was surprised at her suddenly blossoming reputation as an author and considered herself fortunate that people liked her work. For once she had had complete peace of mind while writing. Two months after the completion of the story she soliloquized in her journal: "Peace of mind. Yes, I had it when I was first here. Yes, I had it fully when I wrote Miss Brill."⁴ Upon the occasion of its creation she wrote Murry from the Villa Isola Bella:

¹Ibid., p. 466.

²Letters, pp. 360-361.

³Letters to Murry, p. 598.

⁴Ibid., p. 594.

Last night I walked about and saw the new moon with the old moon in her arms and the lights in the water and the hollow pools full of stars--and lamented there was no God. But I came in and wrote Miss Brill instead; which is my insect Magnificat now and always.¹

Surprisingly enough, she welcomed Murry's criticism of "Bliss" and seems to have changed Bertha's conversation slightly at his suggestion:

What I meant was Bertha, not being an artist, was yet artist manquee enough to realize that those words and expressions were not and couldn't be hers. They were, as it were, quoted by her, borrowed with...an eyebrow..yet she'd none of her own. But this, I agree, is not permissible. I can't grant all that in my dear reader. It's very exquisite of you to understand so nearly.²

The writing of "Bliss" was apparently very difficult, since it took "no end of an effort to finish." When she first told him about the story she hoped he would like it and explained that it was "different again." Two days later she informed him that she had just completed it, and that although she had enjoyed writing it, she would be "an absolute rag for the rest of the day."³

Her usual state of mind prevailed when she sent her only copy of "Poison" to Murry: either he would not like it, or it would be lost in the mail. Somewhat later she wrote a detailed explanation of the story, the two paragraphs quoted below being printed in the same letter in the

¹Letters to Murry, p. 594.

²Ibid., p. 211.

³Ibid., p. 189.

1951 edition and dated "end of November, 1920" and as parts of two different letters in the 1929 edition, both dated December, 1920:

The story is told by (evidently) a worldly, rather cynical (not wholly cynical) man against himself (but not altogether) when he was so absurdly young. You know how young by his idea of what woman is. She has been up to now, only the vision, only she who passes. You realise that? And here he has put all his passion into this Beatrice. It's promiscuous love, not understood as such by him; perfectly understood as such by her. But you realise the vie de luxe they are living--the very table--sweets, liqueurs, lilies, pearls. And you realise? She expects a letter from someone calling her away? Fully expects it? That accounts for her farewell AND her declaration. And when it doesn't come even her commonness peeps out--the newspaper touch of such a woman. She can't disguise her chagrin. She gives herself away.... He, of course, laughs at it now, and laughs at her. Take what he says about her 'sense of order' and the crocodile. But he also regrets the self who dead privately would have been young enough to have actually wanted to marry such a woman. But I wanted it to be light--tossed off--and yet through it--oh, subtly--the lament for youthful belief. These are the rapid confessions one receives sometimes from a glove or a cigarette or a hat.

I suppose I haven't brought it off in Poison. It wanted a light, light hand--and then with that newspaper a sudden...let me see, lowering of it all--just what happens in promiscuous love after passion. A glimpse of staleness. And the story is told by the man who gives himself away and hides his traces at the same moment.¹

In July, 1921 she finished "Mr. and Mrs. Dove," about another kind of young love. Her Journal records that she was not altogether satisfied with it. It seemed a little "made up" and decidedly not inevitable. She did not think the story strong enough, nearer the central emotions. She had meant to imply that Reggie and Anne might not be happy together, that often young girls marry for no better reason

¹Letters to Murry, pp. 604-605.

than hers, but she had a "sneaking notion" that she had used the doves at the end "unwarrantably." A few days later she completed "An Ideal Family." It was better than "Mr. and Mrs. Dove," but she still felt that she had not touched the truth of her idea. "This looks and smells like a story, but I wouldn't buy it. I don't want to possess it--to live with it."¹ She thought superficial knowledge of a situation too easy, a kind of trickery; it was necessary to touch the heart of the matter.

She was gloomily certain that Massingham would not take "Carnation;" he did, however. She was very pleased that Murry understood and liked the story. "I meant it to be 'delicate'--just that."² She confided to him that she was in "a foolish panic" over "The Young Girl" and told him not to print it at all if he did not like it exactly as it was; not a word might be changed.

At the end of the manuscript of "The Garden Party" in her notebook she wrote: "This is a moderately successful story, and that's all. It's somehow, in the episode at the lane, scamped."³ In reply to Gerhardi's mention of a criticism she explained:

And the reason why I used the "florid" image was that I was writing about a garden party. It seemed natural

¹Journal, p. 188.

²Letters to Murry, p. 270.

³Letters, p. 449.

then, that the day should close like a flower. People had been looking at flowers all the afternoon, you see.¹

Again to Gerhardi:

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.²

She closes the letter wondering why the reviewer in Time and Tide was so violent: "One would think . . . that I wrote all my stories with a carving knife. It is a great mystery."

"The Fly" does seem to have been written "with a carving knife," however. The recurrent image of a fly drowning in a milk jug can be found in her writings for several years before the composition of "The Fly" in February, 1922. It was a characteristic figure of speech to designate a helpless being struggling vainly but feebly against certain destruction undeserved. From Bandol she wrote Murry, "I feel like a fly who has been dropped into the milk-jug and fished out again, but is still too milky and drowned to start cleaning up yet."³ The last Journal entry in 1918 reads as follows:

December 31. 4.45 p.m. Oh, the times when she had walked upside down on the ceiling, run up glittering

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 454.

³Letters to Murry, p. 116.

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 their silver harps and shrilled: 'How is the fly fallen, fallen!'¹

Elsewhere in the Journal in connection with inspiration she refers to herself as a little fly dropped by mistake into the huge sweet cup of a magnolia. This seems to be the only instance of a fortunate fly.

If anything of interest took place while she was writing a letter, it was usually included among details of her health, literary opinions, philosophical speculations, and the miscellaneous, often incongruous topics about which she happened to be thinking at the moment. Frequently there are descriptions of the servant bringing in the lunch, the storm last night, an insect crawling along the porch. Once two flies explored her scissors, again a fly "walked bang into the fire--rushed in, committed suicide." At a pension in France where she stayed for awhile there was a very sad widower and his four little sons all in black, "as though they were flies that had dropped into milk. There was a tiny girl, too, but she was not fished out again soon enough, and she died."²

She first mentioned the story while it was being written. On February 13 she wrote to Dorothy Brett: "I

¹Journal, p. 103.

²Letters to Murry, p. 210.

must begin work. Seven stories sit on the doorstep. One has its foot inside. It is called The Fly. I must finish it today. This is a hard moment for work--don't you think? It's hard to get life into it."¹ She was restless, waiting for spring. A little less than two weeks later she wrote succinctly: "I have just finished a queer story called The Fly. About a fly that falls into an inkpot and a Bank Manager. I think it will come out in the Nation."² William Gerhardi apparently did not like it and called her attention to a similar story by Chekhov, to which letter she replied with thanks for his criticism and acknowledgement of familiarity with the Chekhov, which she does not seem to think bears resemblance to it.

I am sorry you did not like The Fly and glad you told me. I hated writing it. Yes, I remember the story about the little boy and the buzzing insects. His father comes home from the town and finds him sitting up to the table cutting Kings and Queens out of a pack of playing cards. I can always see him.³

She seemed to regard "The Fly" as her last story, although "The Canary" was written in July, 1922. Either she did not regard it as finished, or else she had momentarily forgotten its date of completion when she wrote to Murry in October, immediately after entering the Institute: "I have only written long or short scraps since The Fly."⁴

¹Letters, pp. 446-447.

²Ibid., p. 449.

³Ibid., p. 473.

⁴Letters to Murry, p. 676.

Her last story, "The Canary," is evidently not like her original plan for it. In March, 1922, she wrote Dorothy Brett that she wanted to write a story called "Canaries" about the birds themselves, "their feelings, their dreams, the life they led before they were caught,"¹ and a comparison between those bred in captivity and their South American ancestors, who roamed the forests and saw the "immense perfumed sea." In its final form, the story is a monologue of a little old woman or, whether old or not, a lonely woman, whose only companion was a canary, recently dead. The emphasis here, of course, is on the life and character of the woman, the canary being considered from her point of view, not its own.

She began "The Doves' Nest" early in 1922 or perhaps even late in 1921 and still was working on it in August. It remained unfinished at the time of her death. It was to have been the longest by far that she had ever written, although the published fragment is only twenty-two pages long. She wrote Dorothy Brett on January 9, 1922: "I'm working at such a big story that I still can only just see the end in my imagination It's called The Doves' Nest. But winter is a bad black time for work, I think. One's brain gets congealed."²

Another unfinished story, "Daphne," is spoken of as finished: "I think it would be a famous idea to have

¹Letters, p. 448.

²Ibid., p. 433.

sketches and stories in the Athenaeum. I wrote one on the spot called Daphne--about a plant."¹ Since the heroine of the published fragment is named Daphne and since there is no mention of any particular plant, it may be conjectured that the fragment was untitled until Murry edited it for publication; he might easily have confused it with the other sketch. This seems the most plausible explanation of the discrepancy.

Mansfield seems not to have spoken of many of her stories and sketches at all; others she mentioned only in passing. A few she referred to only when she mailed them to Murry or when they were accepted by a publisher; such allusions are only bare mentions of the stories and do not include significant comment pertaining to her method of composition or her opinion of the completed product. "Pictures," a popular success during her lifetime, is identified by Murry in a footnote as the story referred to on one occasion when she mentioned receiving a cheque from her publisher, who asked for another story because that one had been so successful. Surprisingly, she did not refer to "Life of Ma Parker" either, although it is usually counted among her best. She spoke of the character only once: "Ma Parker came yesterday and went to my heart. She said suddenly: 'Oh, Miss, you do make the work go easy!'"² A published

¹Ibid., p. 307.

²Letters to Murry, p. 97.

portion of a letter to Murry in May, 1918, caricatures another old woman in somewhat different circumstances who resembles Ma Parker in type but not in character. Another less famous sketch, "The Lady's Maid," is a Christmas story, although not quite in the ordinary sense. She sent it in answer to Murry's request for a Christmas story and explained that although it was not exactly what he had asked for, perhaps people would like to read it at Christmas time. It is not mentioned again.

From such opinions as are quoted in this chapter it is easy to discern her usual attitude toward her work: high enthusiasm, "possession" during composition, sudden apprehension that the piece might not be appreciated or that it might be lost if mailed, distinct distaste upon re-examination before printing or proof-reading, delight if the story was understood, perhaps a slight rise in her estimation of it, a feeling never equal to her first keen joy, however. This pattern was not always followed, but it is a fairly typical course. In many instances she was never satisfied, even at the moment of finishing. Once or twice she continued to hold her original opinion of a story after publication, but for the most part her delight in those stories struck off in ardor dimmed rather quickly.

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