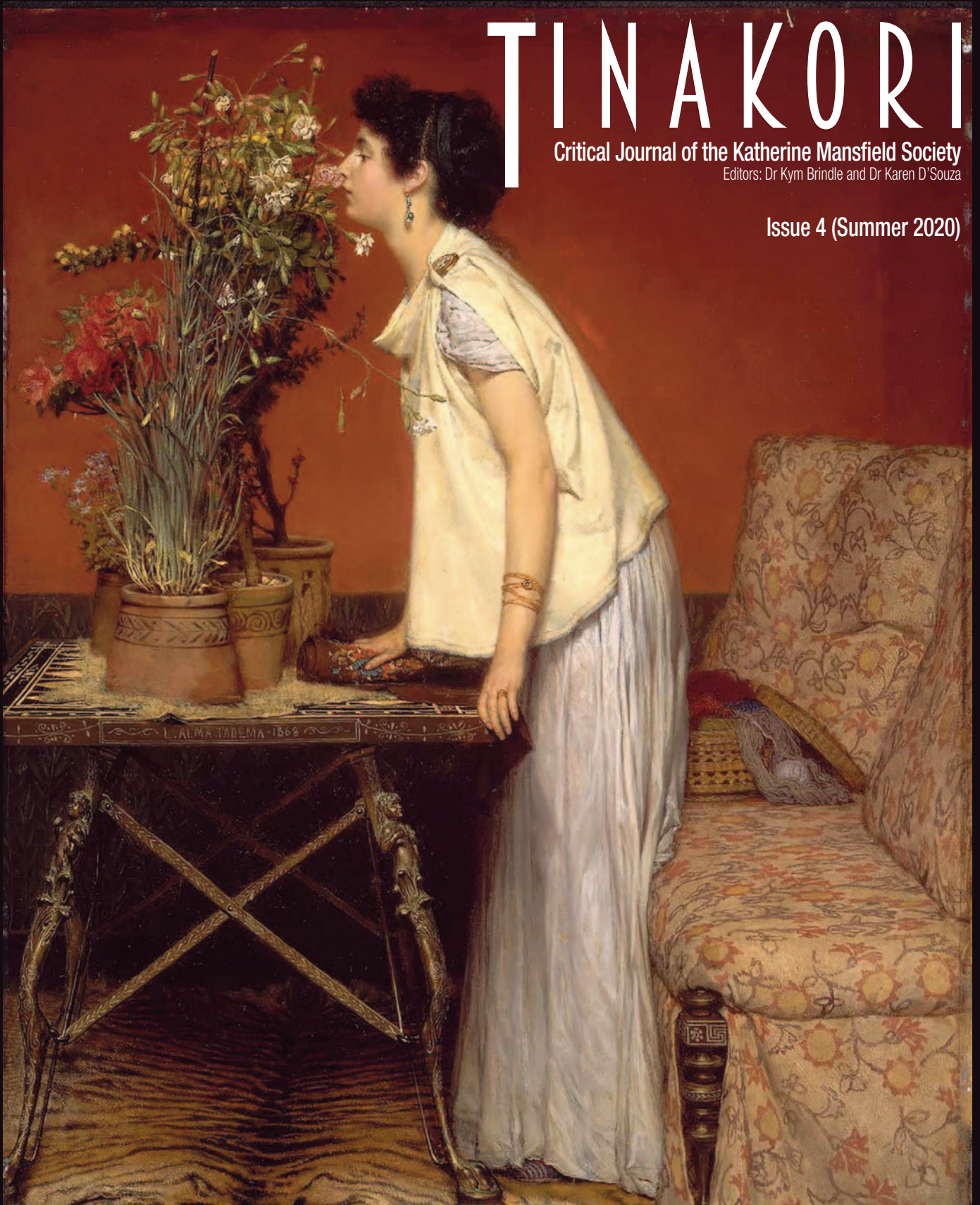


TINAKORI

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Editors: Dr Kym Brindle and Dr Karen D'Souza

Issue 4 (Summer 2020)



HOME, SPACE, AND BELONGING

'But this is all a dream you see. I want to come home – to come home'
Letter from Mansfield to Murry [18 March 1918]



TINAKORI ISSUE 4 SUMMER 2020

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KYM BRINDLE & KAREN D'SOUZA

Home, Space, and Belonging: An Introduction

'But this is all a dream you see. I want to come home – to come home'

Letter from Mansfield to Murry [18 March 1918]¹

WE would firstly like to express our great pleasure in taking on the role of new editors of *Tinakori* and extend our gratitude to Illya Nokhrin for the work done on the journal to date. As incoming editors, we plan a series of themed editions and this, our first, explores ideas of 'Home, Space and Belonging'. Our next issue will explore Mansfield's creative treatment of the complexities of the topic of love and is now in process. We are pleased to offer six essays in this first themed edition, and we are also delighted to feature an interview with Kirsty Gunn, Professor of Writing Practice and Study at the University of Dundee, and Patron of the Katherine Mansfield Society. Professor Gunn is author of *My Katherine Mansfield Project*, a creative exploration of a very personal connection to place and Mansfield's writing. Collectively the six essays in this special edition examine diverse critical aspects of home and develop current scholarship with comparative readings of Mansfield's fiction alongside other Modernist writers like Janet Frame and Jean Rhys.

Representations of home are ambivalent in the writing of Katherine Mansfield. It is familiar critical territory to suggest that a secure sense of home was an elusive concept for the Modernist writer, and a compelling case has been made for the dual impact of a divided colonial identity and her restless exile in search of a cure for the illness that eventually killed her. Mansfield's preoccupation with her lack of a stable home is reflected in her short stories and, as Patricia Moran suggests, Mansfield's fiction represents 'home' in terms of her 'literal homelessness'.² Throughout her unhappy journeying Mansfield found solace in vivid fantasies of an ideal home of her own. She took delight in material pleasures of home and her letters are full of descriptions of domestic surroundings both real and imagined; she shared particular aspirations for a settled home of her own with husband John Middleton Murry conjuring a typical stylised fantasy in a letter of 10 February 1918: 'Our home is a cottage with a gold roof and silver windows'.³

Echoes of such yearnings are very evident in Mansfield's fiction, and yet perhaps more evident is the recurrent thematic conflict that depicts a clash between domestic life and contradictory needs for personal freedom. Mansfield's short fiction repeatedly presents liberation from domestic obligations as a captivating prospect making a

compelling case for home as a place of estrangement and conflict, yet any quest for female identity beyond socially conscribed roles of wife and mother often leads to fragmentation of self and consequent converse fantasies of return home. Such contradictions reflect what Janet Wilson calls ‘Mansfield’s problematics of location, her ambivalence about home and her ontological state of “(un)belonging”’, and this edition of *Tinakori* seeks to further explore the significance of home in conjunction with ideas of homelessness or ‘(un)belonging’ for Mansfield’s creative imagination.⁴ Roberta Rubenstein reminds that ‘belonging is a relational, reciprocal condition that encompasses connection and community’.⁵ Connection and community in tension with individuality create a maelstrom of problems for female identity in evolving modern times and the essays in this collection investigate creative responses to these challenges.

This issue focusses on intersections between desire for home and the social reality of circumscribed domestic space that proves so challenging for so many female characters in Modernist texts. Liberation from home and domestic responsibilities creates transitional states: characters are depicted paused on thresholds to either escape from home or retreat back there. Our first essay by Polly Hoskins entitled ‘A Home of One’s Own: House, Home and the Woman Alone’ contrasts a selection of stories by Mansfield and Frame to consider women’s engagement with domestic life and transformative experiences of solitude and seclusion. Exploring a New Zealand context negotiated individually in gendered terms, Hoskins develops her argument to suggest that stepping beyond the confines of home to spaces between places – including the natural world – can provide a threshold for transition thereby enabling imaginative journeys that re-evaluate home.

Home is often vividly represented as a psychic space in imagination and memory. Rosemary Marangoly George indeed suggests that ‘fictionality is an intrinsic attribute of home’, arguing that ‘home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography’.⁶ Sharon Gordon’s essay is firmly in this territory and her analysis of an underexplored short story of Mansfield’s, ‘The House’ (1912) offers a nuanced reading of this ghostly narrative, finding autobiographical resonance with Mansfield’s relationship with Garnett Trowell. Gordon’s article entitled, ‘The Domestic, the Gothic and the Uncanny in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The House’’, draws upon a critical framework of Gothic themes of the uncanny to investigate fears and anxieties centred on female sexuality and a lost home and child. Ideas of an abject body and liminal space combine to cast new light on symbolism in this little discussed story of a haunted house.

Space and transition are also explored by Imogen Wallersteiner in her essay, ‘The City as Threshold in Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys: “Wavering Between Two Worlds”’. Wallersteiner considers intersections between class and commodity culture in the city making an argument that urban space can be a precarious and hostile environment for women when potential for urban freedoms confronts gendered and class-based restrictions. This article examines the ways in which metropolitan consumerism and aspirational fashion fuel desires for disguise that mask a precarious sense of identity. Class differences for cultural and colonial outsiders are debated to compare the Modernist fiction of Mansfield and Rhys with a focus on tensions between self-individuality and belonging within the city space.

The postcolonial turn in Katherine Mansfield studies draws on a critical discourse that registers home as a place that is far from neutral; its materiality is grounded on contested space and is circumscribed by hierarchies of inclusions and exclusions. A sense of home, thus, becomes more critically dependent on notions of identity and

community. As George notes, the select inclusions that distinguish home are premised on ‘a learned (or taught) sense of kinship that is extended to those who are perceived as sharing the same blood, race, class, gender, or religion.’⁷ Yet, as the following two articles in this edition of *Tinakori* suggest, it is the barriers and exclusions that are frequently more potent, creating tensions between what Minnie Bruce Pratt aptly identifies as two specific modalities: ‘Being home’ and ‘not being home’. Being home, then, refers to ‘the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries’; not being home, ‘is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety’.⁸ A critical lens attuned to the exclusions permeated through specific colonial histories, coupled with contemporary modernist studies that seek to move literary analyses beyond that of stylistic phenomenon, may discover representations of home that draw on the conventional tropes of English fiction only to disrupt or question their validity.

The location of modernist writers whose own states of liminality register the relationships between colonial structures and the metropolitan centre is explored by Uttara Rangarajan in her article ‘Redrawing boundaries: Challenges to Colonial Spatiality in the Works of Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys’. This article provides a complementary comparative reading of Mansfield and Rhys to that of Wallersteiner’s, and sheds further light on how the dialectic between centre and periphery is challenged by writers who occupy ambivalent geographical and political subject positions. Although the settler and plantation colonialisms of New Zealand and Dominica, respectively, have quite different histories of oppression and resistance, the psychobiographies of Mansfield and Rhys reveal distinct continuities that become manifest in expressions of belonging. As writers, they are at once colonial and postcolonial, and their shifting positionality complicates notions of home and belonging across material, emotive, and spatial spheres. Rangarajan’s focus is on how the colonial system enacts the desire to impose rigid boundaries and, in turn, fosters the states of homelessness and the conditions of unbelonging that are similarly rooted in the fiction of both Mansfield and Rhys.

Yet Mansfield’s liminality, as one neither truly at home nor homeless, is perhaps honed by her sensitivity to the particularities of settler colonialism and the attendant impulse to carve a sense of permanency and belonging onto the landscape. As John Thieme notes, issues around ‘the ownership and management of space have [...] particular importance in societies where colonizing powers have seen it their prerogative to impose artificial boundaries’.⁹ Such gestures, as Thieme observes, are underscored by the misappropriation of ‘pre-existing identities of places through onomastic practices that erased earlier iterations of place’.¹⁰ Our next article illuminates how these concerns are written into Mansfield’s depictions of settler spaces and the routines of domesticity. A problematic sense of home, and the attachment to place, is explored in Megan Kuster’s article, ‘Domesticity and Settler Colonialism in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘Old Tar’ and ‘The Garden Party’’. Kuster’s critique registers how the geographical possession of land, essential to empire, is played out in New Zealand’s settler society. Drawing on the tropes of the colonial Gothic, in which landscape replaces architecture, Kuster notes how gardens, gates, roads, and paths construct the boundaries that seek to exclude otherness while preserving the lineage of colonial values. The acquisition of Indigenous land as a site on which to construct familiar models of home and domesticity is shown to be a means of encoding the lives of women and children while also containing a complex threat of otherness.

The final article in this collection provides a fascinating report on the intricate web of cultural connections between New Zealand and Australia and the changing dynamics of empire. In his article, ‘Mansfield in Australia’, Martin Griffiths discusses the significance of Australian arts and media to the early development of Mansfield’s career and provides compelling evidence of her reputation and influence on the continent. In tracing the pattern of influences, Griffiths provides further insight into the transitional nature of home and belonging that is so distinctive in Mansfield’s work – revealing the spatial (dis)connections that were continually present in her autobiographical fiction.

The notion of connections and (dis)connections is expanded as we conclude this issue with an interview with our Patron of the Katherine Mansfield Society. In a meditation on the nuances of her relationship with Mansfield, Professor Kirsty Gunn positions her experience of home and space as liminal to explain what home means to her as a place of return – both personally and creatively. This thought-provoking interview proves a fitting conclusion to this issue’s exploration of the significance of home for Mansfield’s life and work to emphasise that the power of language lies at the heart of representations of home. Collectively, six exciting essays supported by Gunn’s inspiring reflections interrogate multi-faceted ideas of home as an ambivalent concept that generates creative energy reflected in Mansfield’s seductive and dynamic prose.

Notes

¹ Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008), Vol 2, p. 130.

² Patricia Moran, ‘The “dream of roots and the mirage of the journey”: Writing as Homeland’, in *Katherine Mansfield & Continental Europe: Connections and Influences*, ed. by Janka Kascakova and Gerri Kimber (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 202-17 (p. 202).

³ *Letters 2*, p. 167.

⁴ Janet Wilson, “‘Where is Katherine?’: Longing and (Un)belonging in the Works of Katherine Mansfield’, in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 175-88 (p. 176).

⁵ Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 4.

⁶ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 11.

⁷ George, p. 9.

⁸ Minnie Bruce Pratt, ‘Identity: Skin Blood Heart’, in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, ed. by Minnie Bruce Pratt, Elly Bulkin and Barbara Smith (New York: Long Haul Press, 1984), pp. 11-63 (p. 47).

⁹ John Thieme, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 3.

¹⁰ Thieme, p. 3.



POLLY HOSKINS

A Home of One's Own: House, Home and the Woman Alone in the Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield and Janet Frame

Abstract: The great accomplishment of Lydia Wevers' survey of the New Zealand short story in The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English (1989) was to identify a matrix of modern feminine narrative, thus providing the potential for a new approach to contextualising Mansfield with other New Zealand short story writers, as I do here with Janet Frame. In this essay I begin by suggesting that the absence of men in the stories of Mansfield and Frame enables women to engage with the innermost identity of their female characters. I then focus on structures of domestic confinement and ways in which the women in these stories can transcend beyond them. I finally suggest that on a national scale, place remains the means by which female characters negotiate their New Zealand context.

Keywords: Mansfield; Frame; New Zealand; Home; Women; Solitude; Place; Identity

Between them, the work of Katherine Mansfield and Janet Frame spans twentieth-century New Zealand literature. Mansfield was born in 1888 and died in 1923 and Frame was born in 1924 and died in 2004. Mansfield spent her creative life in Europe and Frame gravitated towards home, but both writers shared authentic impressions of New Zealand domestic life and a rendering of childhood, memory and understanding in their fiction. Mansfield's and Frame's short stories share a narrative of feminine selfhood that Lydia Wevers, in her survey of the New Zealand short story, describes as 'particularly concerned with the meticulous investigation of the female condition and its emotional landscape'.¹ Each writer has been studied independently, but generally there has been little in-depth comparison of their short fiction. Heather Roberts asserts that 'we cannot fully know the lives of women in New Zealand unless we have access to the fictional interpretation of those lives', suggesting that narrative is a nexus of communication for every woman.² The feminine matrix that develops in the stories of Mansfield and Frame, as seen in the interactions between Mansfield's Burnell women or between a mother and her daughters in Frame's 'Swans', explores inter-generational connections while also expressing a sense of alienation and introspection. A thematic comparative reading of a selection of both writers' stories is also supported by their shared representation of women's engagement with domestic life.

Both Mansfield and Frame focus on female identity; male characters in their stories can be removed from the scene leaving a space that can be inscribed by female characters. When Stanley leaves for work in 'Prelude' there is a palpable sense of

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relief, enabling the release of a transcendental dream world: Linda, lying in bed listens to the ‘silence spinning its soft endless web’, and feels that ‘everything had come alive down to the minutest, tiniest particle’.³ In ‘At the Bay’ she reappears in the garden on a sunny afternoon: ‘Linda felt so light; she felt like a leaf. Along came Life like a wind and she was seized and shaken’ (Bay, p. 295). On the other hand, Beryl in the same story is enervated in her solitude: ‘It is lonely living by oneself. Of course, there are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that's not what she means’ (Bay, p. 312); yet this statement helps her understand what she means: that, ultimately, she wants a soulmate. A more extreme case is the woman of ‘The Woman at the Store’, who is on the edge of madness because her husband ‘left me too much alone’ (Woman, p. 16). The mother in Frame’s ‘Swans’ is perpetually fretting that she has mistaken her husband’s instructions and lost her way, and yet she leads her children to the lagoon, where there is ‘nothing but peace and warmth and calm, everything found’.⁴ In all these stories, solitude, whether welcomed or dreaded, becomes a key part of female consciousness – an inner space created in contradistinction to the outside world.

In their short fiction, Mansfield and Frame turn their critical gaze from the epic ‘Man Alone’ narrative to reflect on women’s experience of solitude and home.⁵ They seek to interpret female experience as venturing over thresholds from the insulation of daily life to which they are routinely assigned. The consequence for many characters is to encounter a sequence of moments of solitude embedded in the ordinary, continuous and confined everyday domestic life. In Mansfield’s and Frame’s stories, women consistently tussle with the expectations placed on them within the home, ultimately detaching themselves from the people around them to become more self-aware. Mansfield’s Linda Burnell, for example, lives alongside her husband and children yet, at the same time, the moments of visionary intensity she experiences might be described as a record of her seclusion from them; Beryl Fairfield, while longing for a lover, refuses Harry Kember’s advances because she is more needful of ownership of herself, whilst Olive in Frame’s ‘The Bull Calf’ experiences her solitary vision in a paddock distant from the family farmhouse. The trope of feminine solitude in the short stories of Mansfield and Frame could be described as one connected to the domain of the home rather than the wilderness – the traditional locale of male solitude. Nevertheless, Wevers rightly suggests that ‘Home’ is the place ‘in which female selfhood is most clearly recognized’, and where it is ‘most at risk’ because, in its ‘accommodation of the shifting identities’, it is, as she points out, ‘a continuous re-invention of place and condition.’⁶ On the other hand, her claim that ‘there is no equivalent of Man Alone in the fiction written by women’ might be questioned.⁷

In order to navigate the shifting tensions of domestic and social settings, Mansfield’s New Zealand stories probe below the veneer of household contentment, laying bare the insistent desire to escape, as is evident in Linda’s daydream in ‘At the Bay’: ‘she wished that she was going away from this house, too. And she saw herself driving away from them all in a little buggy, driving away from everybody and not even waving’ (Bay, p. 91). Frame’s stories, on the other hand, mostly revolve around journeys taken from home, but which express a desire to return. Sitting up in a tree alone, grieving the death of her sister, Winnie, in Frame’s ‘Keel and Kool’ anxiously wonders ‘Perhaps there was no place. Perhaps she would never find anywhere to go’ (Keel, p. 5), and she looks up at a seagull in the sky crying ‘come home’ (Keel, p. 4). For Winnie, the loss of her sister means a loss of security in the idea of self and home. Return to a stable home might not be possible if, as Michele Leggott maintains, ‘filial security is not the same thing as a home in this world’, yet the longing for this security remains.⁸ Moreover, Mansfield and Frame evoke the idea of extraterritoriality: of

belonging on the outside or edge to regain a true sense of focus or to recover a proper sense of identity. The domestic realm, and the wish to escape from or return to it, is therefore negotiated by women in the stories of Mansfield and Frame that tease out the subtle insights of family and self, and the crosscurrents between them. Ultimately, the most authentic sense of home develops in an interior way, often as a numinous experience.

***'She had the garden to herself; she was alone'* (Bay, p. 294)**

Setting in Mansfield and Frame is based upon structures of domestic confinement, the limits of these structures, and the ways in which women can transcend beyond them. The Mansfield and Frame stories I am discussing share a New Zealand setting and, while Frame's stories are set later in the twentieth century, her female characters experience similar social circumstances to Mansfield's women in terms of anchorage to their domestic environment and family life. Women in New Zealand short stories are, as Wevers notes, 'preoccupied with territorial space. Settings are often quite literally interior, walled, defined, the narrative taking place in domestic environments which function metonymically to signify women'.⁹ In Mansfield's and Frame's stories, topophilic relationships within spaces of containment allow women to either perceive, or at least to intuitively realise, the limitations imposed on them and to make their escape. Domestic settings reveal tensions that are rooted in gendered expectations and they are also important in generating the atmosphere by which meaning is developed. Situating women at one remove from the realities of domestic life reveals the fragmentation of traditional structures of home, both physically and emotionally. Therefore, stepping out into a setting away from home, such as the garden or a day trip to the beach, allows women in Mansfield's and Frame's stories to undertake an imaginative journey in order to recognize the limitations and the freedoms of home.

It can also be argued that the spaces between places is significant in the psychology of stepping away from home, as place theorist Yi-Fu Tuan explains: 'if we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.'¹⁰ If home is not always a location that 'expresses a bounded and secure identity', as Iris Young points out, then it dually becomes both a place that women become attached to and a space of movement in the way women attempt to leave and return home.¹¹ This drift is grasped by Mansfield and Frame in moments where characters in the home perceive that nature is where they truly belong. Kezia, for instance, in 'At the Bay' brings her grandmother a 'special shell' (Bay, p. 298) from the beach as a pledge of her love, and in Frame's 'The Lagoon', when an aunt and her niece look at family photographs in the living room, the interior space is somehow imbued with the constant presence of the lagoon outside. When the aunt draws 'aside the curtain', the niece is 'reminded [...] of the women in films who turn to the window in an emotional moment' – a critical moment that pre-empts the telling of a family secret passed from one generation of women to another.¹² It is therefore not so much home that these women seek, but a place where they find themselves.

There is a paradox in the stories of Mansfield and Frame where women seek a platform for domestic security even while no longer comfortably at home. Linda McDowell observes that:

places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.¹³

Women constantly critique and cross these boundaries as well as the power relations places and spaces entail in order to create their own setting of individuation. One way they do this is to move from the house – in ‘Prelude’, for example, when the women step outside to the verandah to gaze at the aloe tree in the moonlight, or in ‘The Bull Calf’, when Olive climbs the hill beyond the house to look ‘out over the town and the sea and the spilled dregs of light draining beyond the horizon’ (Bull Calf, p. 149). Cresswell claims that the structure of the ‘house or home is a particularly privileged kind of place that frames the way people go on to think about the wider universe’, but this privilege may not faithfully represent the thoughts of women.¹⁴ Feminist geographer, Gillian Rose, for example, writes that women may not see home as rosy, suggesting ‘there is little reason to celebrate a sense of belonging to the home’, and even less to support the ‘claim that home provides the ultimate sense of place’.¹⁵ The difference between the home as an expected and normalized feminine domain and the home as a domain desired by women suggests, as Wevers explains, that ‘the modern is characterized by the difficulty or loss of filiation which might also represent itself as alienated subjectivity’.¹⁶ In the fragmentation of physical and emotional connection to the home and the awareness of constricting feminine expectations, women are thus poised to emerge from traditional normative gender roles to the modern construction of an individual self.

House and Home

House and home are not only the locus of domestic spaces, but a site where women negotiate gendered expectations to express a sense of internal struggle and introspection. For Mansfield’s and Frame’s women, selfhood seems disconnected from home, and is only realized outside its parameters. The tensions between house and home are revealed, for example, in Mansfield’s ‘Prelude’, a narrative that revolves around the act of moving to a new house. In this story the words ‘house’ and ‘home’ are sensitively nuanced. Stanley is the only person who calls the new place ‘home’. He plans his day around ‘cut[ting] away from the office as soon as possible and get them to give him a couple of slices of cold meat and half lettuce when he got home’ (Prelude, p. 100), making ‘straight for home’ (Prelude, p. 99) and asking at dinner ‘Is this the first of the home products?’ (Prelude, p. 112). The adult women, on the other hand, refer to it as a house. Linda asks Beryl ‘do you like the house now that we are here?’ (Prelude, p. 95), and once they admire the aloe ‘bathed in dazzling light’ while speaking to each other ‘with the special voice that women use at night to each other’ (Prelude, p. 114); Mrs Fairfield declares: “We had better go back to the house” (Prelude, p. 116). It is not that the women necessarily despise the house: Kezia’s first impression is ‘from the window downstairs the light of a fire flickered. A strange beautiful excitement seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples’ (Prelude, p. 85). The image is a reversal of Kezia’s final moments in the old house where she presses her hand against the ‘cold shining glass’ (Prelude, p. 82) of the window. The play between warmth and cold, light and dark, movement and stillness situate Kezia in a motif of threshold crossing that develops throughout the story.

The semantic shift between house and home generally connotes an emotional detachment. Iris Young writes that 'if house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, the feminists have good reason to reject home as value. But it is difficult even for feminists to exorcise a positive valence to the idea of home'.¹⁷ She itemises these positive features as 'safety, privacy, preservation and individuation' and, arguably, Mansfield's and Frame's women experience these – but not sufficiently.¹⁸ If Stanley in 'Prelude' sees the new home as a country estate befitting a successful businessman, Beryl feels that she is 'buried' (Prelude, p. 117) in the country, while Linda listlessly sinks into her private dream world, tracing poppies on the wallpaper with her finger where they 'seemed to come alive' (Prelude, p. 92). Old Mrs Fairfield manages the house, putting everything in order; Beryl hangs the pictures and tacks down the carpets; Linda rests, but prepares to receive Stanley's amorous attentions at night. For all the installation of furniture and goods, it is only Stanley who experiences pleasure in the new house, but his pleasure is material – founded on it being 'dirt cheap' on 'land [...] bound to become more and more valuable' (Prelude, p. 89). His ideal of home is what Young calls 'a site of consumer freedom', where 'the size, style, and especially the location of the house, along with its landscaping and furnishing, establish the individual's location in the social hierarchy'.¹⁹ However, while Stanley has financial ownership, women fill the house with themselves and their order of belongings to the point where he does not know where his slippers are.

Occupying space in the household setting is the expected role for women, yet the way they take up space in 'Prelude' and in 'At the Bay' becomes subversive. When Stanley leaves for work in 'At the Bay' they 'celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now' (Bay, p. 287); the children ran 'into the paddock like chickens let out of a coop' (Bay, p. 287), and 'even Alice, the servant-girl, washing up the dishes in the kitchen, caught the infection and used the precious tank water in a perfectly reckless fashion' (Bay, p. 288). Freedom in the house in both 'Prelude' and in 'At the Bay' is truly experienced by women only when Stanley is absent. In 'Prelude', Linda 'did not rest until the final slam of the front door told her that Stanley was really gone' (Prelude, p. 92), and in 'At the Bay', once he leaves: 'Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the man out of the house. Their very voices were changed as they called to one another; they sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret' (Bay, p. 287). In his absence, the house transforms into a place belonging exclusively to the women and children.

The special atmosphere established between women is preserved with shared privacies. In Frame's 'The Secret', Myrtle has a summer romance with Vincent and returns 'from down south full of secret smiles and giggles' (Secret, pp. 9-10). She reads Nini the content of Vincent's love letters and Nini proudly claims she is her sister's 'confidante' (Secret, p. 10). The two girls enjoy late-night shopping in town to 'see the boys' (Secret, p. 11). Myrtle is Nini's model big sister: they have 'fun together' (Secret, p. 15) but her life is blighted. At home, mother tells Nini the 'secret' that Myrtle's heart is weak and that she will die 'at any time' (Secret, p. 15), and Nini is reminded of the death of her grandmother 'old with no legs and a shrivelled up face like an old brown walnut' (Secret, pp. 15-16), and also Aunt Maggie 'who was thin and she coughed all the time and said, excuse me my throat' (Secret, p. 16). At night, lying in bed with her sister, Nini anxiously presses her ear to hear the beat of Myrtle's heart. Home is where mother is baking gingerbread men with raisins for eyes, but it is also where Myrtle will die in the nightmarish bedroom shadowed by the plum tree and the coats hanging behind the door to 'make fantastic shapes of troll and dwarf' (Secret,

p.16). The female secrets in the story are safeguarded by Nini who bears the weight of accumulated knowledge, namely, the transience of life and the ease with which it is snuffed out. At the same time, Frame, like Mansfield, reminds us what the innocence and burden of childhood feels like.

In 'The Reservoir', another articulation of imagined and embodied experience, the children panic as they flee home after reaching the reservoir, wondering if the mysterious domain they have visited would 'ever let us go home' (Reservoir, p. 139). At home, once again secure, the aftermath of their experience is charged with a new feeling of independence. In 'The Bull Calf', adolescent Olive identifies with the cattle steers that have 'no home, they were forever lost in strange surroundings' (Bull Calf, p. 148), but after her epiphanic vision of the moonlit sea, she returns from milking to receive the gift of a narcissus with 'white transparent petals' (Bull Calf, p. 152) that 'seemed visible and in motion as if brushed by secret currents and tides' (Bull Calf, p. 153). As in 'The Reservoir', the aftermath of a transforming episode takes place at home. Yet another example occurs in 'Swans'. At the beginning of the story, the children promise their sick cat Gypsy they will return home at the end of the day. Home, for the children, is the domestic refuge where 'there were Mother and Father always, forever' (Swans, p. 15). The sight of the swans on their way back infuses the narrative with a visionary release, which is (paradoxically) rooted in the discovery on their return home that 'Gypsy was dead' (Swans, p. 16). Young asks: 'Is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others?'²⁰ In Mansfield and Frame, therefore, there is a sense that children can only retain the notion of home as a viable place in conjunction to their growing awareness of their fluidity and individual subjectivity.

Beyond the home: neighbourhood and nationhood

Equally, the concepts of neighbourhood and nationhood can be perceived as places of containment, presenting an ongoing need to look outwards and beyond for the women in these stories. For Mansfield and Frame, Wevers suggests the New Zealand setting serves as a 'metonymic function in writing the nation' to release 'a sequence of exposures whose gaps in time hint at boundaries and complex structures momentarily lit up'.²¹ If Mansfield, in challenging the conventions of representation to which women were traditionally assigned in a realist, localized New Zealand, became, as Alex Calder remarks, 'one of the first writers in the world to put a very new kind of place on the map',²² then, according to Eggleton, Frame is a 'laureate of suburbia'.²³ Frame's description of Myrtle and Nini in town on Friday night in 'The Secret' is an evocation of small town New Zealand in the 1950s:

There were lots of people in town on a Friday night. The Salvation Army Band played 'God the All Terrible' and 'There was a Green Hill Far Away'. Sometimes there were bagpipes down town, and people out of my class at school, all dressed up in their smart clothes, with their mothers in smart clothes too, their mothers with a handbag and gloves and a nice little hat. They would smile at me and Myrtle would say, who was that, and I would tell her, that was Molly's mother. Molly sits next to me at school, she learns the piano. (Secret, p. 11)

Through this cameo, run complex and often contradictory possibilities for Nini's family life, the town they inhabit, and the nation itself. The township marks the place where civilization, with its comforts and proprieties are sealed off from the wilderness surrounding it. Here are shops, bands, religion, education, cultural aspiration and prosperity: a microcosm of middle-class New Zealand. At the same time, there is a certain kind of nostalgia that appears ironic. Moreover, the allusion of continuity is undercut by the hymns that the band plays, that signal Myrtle's death.

Moving from town into the country in 'Prelude' similarly serves to underline the experience of nation in its colonial drive for expansion, but where tensions and perplexities assert themselves. For Stanley, the shift is one that ranks with owning an English-style country manor while, at the same time, it has something of the allure of the frontier, but for Beryl 'any decent person would rather die than ride [out of town] for six miles' (Prelude, p. 117). Both are class-conscious in colonial terms – Stanley imagines himself as squire and Beryl a belle-unseen in society. Calder writes that for some readers, the Burnell and Sheridan families of Mansfield's New Zealand stories 'represent a phase in our national literature when people regarded Britain as "Home" [and] their superficiality is often regarded as a symptom of a lack of connection between custom and place'.²⁴ Beryl's fear that 'decent' people of their class may not visit them is symptomatic: she sees her removal from town as crushing her passion-filled dreams as a society wife, while Linda, who yearns for solitude, is 'mysterious as ever' (Prelude, p. 117). But then Linda has acquired the status that society demands of her, and Mrs Fairfield can maintain the matronly role befitting her age, leaving Beryl as the only one who feels unconnected. Calder writes that 'Mansfield gives her characters sentiments like these [because] she is very much interested in the gender and intergenerational patterns with which these settings will become associated'.²⁵ Physical and psychological remoteness are characteristic in Mansfield's women due to their settings. Beryl is cut off to the extent that she can only live on her romantic fantasies, while Linda fends off the invading terrain of family life in dreams of escape. Yet it is within these crosscurrents that immanent experiences occur – Linda's strange vision of the aloe in 'Prelude' and Beryl's victorious rejection of Harry Kember in 'At the Bay'. With these experiences, feminine consciousness becomes an inner space, a kind of revelation that is nevertheless in touch with the outer world.

The outer world in Mansfield's 'Prelude', is often interpreted as emblematic of New Zealand settlement. The arrival at 'an island of green, and behind the island', and the house, 'out of sight until you came upon it' (Prelude, p. 84), mirrors the pioneer narrative of colonisation. Similarly, in Frame's 'Keel and Kool', one might see the landscape, with its grassy banks, river and forest, as the representation of an island, and the picnickers as pioneers 'in a story' (Keel, p. 2); the domesticity of the picnic itself may suggest settlement. In their colonial location, Mansfield's stories 'are both more expansive and structurally more extended' suggests Wevers, who claims that the Burnell stories represent 'the discovery of a more expansive and complex awareness metaphorically associated with a larger space'.²⁶ The expansion from Calder's modern suburbia and the concept of a modern island both become places of settlement through migration. The isolation that comes with settlement reveals a national narrative of displacement that women in Mansfield and Frame feel particularly attuned with. Thus, suburbs and islands are also spaces of containment in which stories set in New Zealand exist. McMahon argues that it is the image of the island that is significant topologically and tropologically in regard to New Zealand writers, suggesting that 'the colony is not a first beginning but a new beginning, an offshoot

whose origins are elsewhere'.²⁷ An equally striking comment comes from Frame's autobiography *The Envoy from Mirror City* (1985): 'living in New Zealand would be for me like living in an age of mythmakers because it is possible to begin at the beginning and to know the unformed places and to help to form them'.²⁸ On a national scale, place remains the means by which characters can negotiate their New Zealand context to individual effect, discovering a newly inflected view of the way they see themselves.

Perhaps the most evocative yet mystifying representation of place is the opening of Mansfield's 'At the Bay', which begins with a scene that is drowned in a paradoxical vision of blindness: 'Very early morning. The sun had not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist' (Bay, p. 281). Already the landscape is displaced from the reader through the inability to see it: everything is suffused in water (the grass is blue and everything is under a sea mist), yet we have been told by the narrator, familiar with the bay, what should be there – we know what is meant to make up place. Similarly, Frame's 'The Lagoon' begins: 'At low tide the water is sucked back into the harbour, and there is no lagoon, only a stretch of grey sand' (Lagoon, p. 1). 'The Reservoir' is 'said to be four or five miles along the gully', distancing it physically ('miles') and through mediation ('it was said').²⁹ Tellingly, these landscapes exist in both the realm of land and water and the realm of the mind or imagination. Cresswell defines landscape as a scene where 'the viewer is outside it', adding 'we do not live in landscapes-we look at them'.³⁰ Like blank pages, these landscapes wait to be inscribed. 'See the lagoon' (Lagoon, p. 2), the grandmother intones, as if it were a half-imaginary space of remembrance which demands an abrupt awakening.

The opening chapter of 'At the Bay' also evokes a pastoral dream world inhabited by a lone shepherd. But the archetypal New Zealander does not so much serve as a figure of cultural memory and remembrance, but as a figure marking the mutability of landscape and its capacity for cyclic change and transformation. This mutability marks the world of a story where the actions of women are allowed to speak for themselves. Solitude is also a state of space as well as a state of mind: 'we do not dwell in our environments', writes Joanna Walsh, 'our thoughts dwell also elsewhere'.³¹ On a societal level, the way women balance solitude and relationships reveal the complexity of women's roles throughout the twentieth century. Certainly, the women in Mansfield's and Frame's stories become aware of the paradoxical multiplicity in feminine societal expectations and of containment within the domestic world. For women, the house is not always a home. A lack of home means women may not have found stability in fiction or in the New Zealand canon.

Notes

¹ Lydia Wevers, 'The Short Story', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. by Terry Sturm (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 203-68 (p. 264).

² Anne Else and Heather Roberts, *A Woman's Life: Writing by Women about Female Experience in New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 1989), p. 1.

- ³ Katherine Mansfield, 'At the Bay', in *Katherine Mansfield Selected Stories*, ed. by Angela Smith (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2002), pp. 281-314, p. 93. Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.
- ⁴ Janet Frame, 'Swans', in *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), pp. 53-64 (p. 64). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.
- ⁵ The 'Man Alone' trope, a dominating theme in New Zealand literature, stretching from male pioneer literature to Barry Crump's *A Good Keen Man* (1960), is epitomized in John Mulgan's novel *Man Alone* (1939) and the stories by Frank Sargeson, who was Janet Frame's mentor. Johnson's trek through mountains and bush in *Man Alone* is a classic exemplar of the intransigent individualism of the New Zealander heading out alone into the wilderness.
- ⁶ Wevers, 'The Short Story', p. 264.
- ⁷ Wevers, 'The Short Story', p. 264.
- ⁸ Michele Leggott, 'Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the Persistence of Record', in *Opening The Book: New Essays on New Zealand Writing*, ed. by Mark Williams and Michele Leggott (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), pp. 266-93 (p. 270).
- ⁹ Wevers, 'The Short Story', p. 264.
- ¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.
- ¹¹ I. M. Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', in *Motherhood and Space: Configurations of the Maternal Through Politics, Home, and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Hardy and Caroline Wiedmer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 252-80 (p. 278).
- ¹² Janet Frame, 'The Lagoon', in *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), pp. 1-7 (p. 6). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.
- ¹³ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p. 4.
- ¹⁴ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: J. Wiley & Sons, 2015), p. 40.
- ¹⁵ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), p. 53.
- ¹⁶ Lydia Wevers, 'The Sod Under My Feet: Katherine Mansfield', in *Opening The Book*, ed. by Williams and Leggott, pp. 31-48 (p. 37).
- ¹⁷ Young, p. 252.
- ¹⁸ Young, p. 284.
- ¹⁹ Young, p. 262.
- ²⁰ Young, p. 260.
- ²¹ Wevers, 'The Sod Under my Feet', p. 39.
- ²² Alex Calder, *The Settler's Plot: How Stories Take Place in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2011), p. 157.
- ²³ David Eggleton and Craig Potton, 'Introduction' to *Here on Earth: The Landscape in New Zealand Literature* (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 1999), pp. 2-23 (p. 21).
- ²⁴ Calder, p. 159.
- ²⁵ Calder, p. 161.
- ²⁶ Wevers, 'The Short Story', p. 221.
- ²⁷ Elizabeth McMahon, 'Archipelagic Space and the Uncertain Future of National Literatures', in *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature: JASAL* 13 (2013), 1-20 (p. 4).
- ²⁸ Janet Frame, *The Envoy from Mirror City* (Auckland: Random House, 1989), p. 415.
- ²⁹ Janet Frame, 'The Reservoir', in *You Are Now Entering The Human Heart* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1983), pp. 127-39 (p. 127).
- ³⁰ Cresswell, pp. 17-18.
- ³¹ Joanna Walsh, *Hotel* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 78.



SHARON GORDON

The Domestic, the Gothic and the Uncanny in Katherine Mansfield's 'The House'

'Oh, it is the sense of "home" which is so precious to me – it is the wonderful sense of peace – of the rooms sanctified – of the quiet permanence'.¹

Abstract: In this little-discussed story, the house of the title is a Gothicised domestic space with all the hallmarks of a haunted house. This essay considers 'The House' to be a characteristically modernist representation of the domestic, the Gothic and the uncanny. Thresholds, as unstable and ambiguous boundaries occupy a liminal space in the domestic interior and liminal disruptions foreground the presence of things unspecified. Mansfield's exploration of the uncanny in the domestic space embodies Freud's definition of 'The Uncanny', thus connoting what is alien, hidden and repressed. Her modernist literary innovations enable an engagement with the fears and anxieties centering around issues of gender and sexuality. A longing for the security of house and home, which were ultimately unfulfilled in Mansfield's life, underpin the autobiographical aspects inherent in the story.

Keywords: Gothic, uncanny, domesticity, gender and sexuality, literary modernism

Published on 28 November 1912 in the aptly named journal *Hearth and Home*, the notion of house and home inherent in the story 'The House' is characterised by conflict and ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty.² Mansfield scholarship to date has not provided any in-depth discussion of this Gothic tale, and this essay aims to extend the debate regarding the house/home trope in Mansfield's writing. In this complex and deeply ambiguous story, Mansfield deploys the Gothic trope of the uncanny in order to articulate a subversive questioning of women's experiences and desires in the context of house and home, marriage and motherhood. A site of domestic dysfunctionality rather than a place of domestic bliss, the story depicts a domestic interior as a space full of borders and thresholds-haunted by the voices of its ghostly inhabitants.

In life, and in much of her writing, Mansfield was preoccupied by notions of home and belonging. In a letter dated 28-30 April 1909, written to her musician friend Garnet Trowell, she states: 'sick at heart [...] with no home – no place in which I can hang up my hat – & say here I belong – for there is no such place in the wide world for me'.³ Writing in a similar vein to John Middleton Murry on 7 May 1915, Mansfield pleads: 'Why haven't I got a real "home", a real life?'.⁴ It is these sentiments which

are expressed in 'The House', as this essay's epigraph highlights. These feelings were initiated by her own sense of displacement and colonial otherness. A nomadic lifestyle meant that Mansfield never put down roots and therefore had a disrupted sense of place and belonging. Janet Wilson explains this as 'Mansfield's problematics of location, her ambivalence about home and her ontological states of "(un)belonging"'.⁵

As a place of permanence and stability, home is inextricably linked to the construction of self. Writing about her own plural subjectivities, Mansfield writes, 'True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many [...] hundreds of selves'.⁶ The notion of self, as Wilson suggests, was 'moulded by the disjunctures between imperial and colonial worlds, and the permanent dislocation caused by being between both but not fully belonging to either.'⁷ Wilson further suggests that it was Mansfield's 'obsession with "home", [...] which inspired her great New Zealand stories like "The Garden Party", "At the Bay" and "Prelude"', as stories of home, childhood, family life and domestic strife.⁸ In her story, 'How Pearl Button was kidnapped', Mansfield's protagonist perceives home as a 'House of Boxes', a metaphor for a life that is confined and orderly, and a reflection perhaps of Mansfield's colonial life. In 'The Doll's House', for example, the doll's house is described as 'the perfect little house', and, as Pamela Dunbar states, the story is 'a miniature symbol' of 'the idealised home'.⁹ Arguably, Mansfield is 'at home' when writing about home and family life, and her own wished-for desires are transmuted into her stories.

In 1912, the year 'The House' was published, British society was on the cusp of change. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century technological advancements and scientific developments, the discursive *fin de siècle* debate regarding the New Woman, and the questioning of the rigid structures of masculinity and femininity created new fears and anxieties. Marriage and motherhood were no longer considered (mostly by women) to be their only fulfilment. The emerging, aspiring and impassioned New Woman was accused by the media of demonising marriage and motherhood, and emancipated women who did have children were either considered to be inadequate mothers or infanticidal ones. Sally Ledger suggests that

one of the defining features of the dominant discourse on the New Woman at the fin de siècle was the supposition that the New Woman posed a threat to the institution of marriage [...] The repeated assertion that the New Woman rejected motherhood had a profound political significance.¹⁰

In this way, the New Woman was perceived a problem as she challenged the status quo.

Mansfield had conflicting views on feminism and the role of women. She was a feminist in the sense that she advocated sexual autonomy and new freedoms for women in the workplace (her protagonist in the 'The House' works in an office). However, she was not someone who openly advocated women's suffrage. In a letter written to Trowell on 17 September 1908, she tells him of the first, and only occasion she attended a 'Suffrage Meeting'.¹¹ Describing the women as looking 'very much like upholstered chairs' who 'pounced' on her; they were, according to Mansfield, 'all strange looking [...] especially the older ones particularly "run to seed"'.¹² These descriptions foreground a typically conventional point of view in terms of gendered perceptions and, as such, are hardly an endorsement of feminist ideology. Sensing an air of 'revolt' at the meeting, Mansfield declared that she 'could not be a suffragette' because she felt that she 'could remedy the evils of this world so much more easily'

with '[s]tarlight and a glad heart'.¹³ Mansfield's comment is a reflection of her passive response to the suffrage movement, one which opposes the views of those women whose proactive response was to take militant action.

Although 'The House' was written in 1912 at the close of the *fin-de-siècle* period, the evolving position of women together with the autobiographical aspects of Mansfield's writing and her commitment to modernist literary innovations, provide a framework for discussion. The story's complexities and ambiguities hint at a deeply subversive notion of domestic ideology and this essay demonstrates how Mansfield's deployment of the Gothic tropes of subversion, defamiliarisation and obfuscation explore and expose the fears and terrors inherent in the story's narrative.

The Uncanny

A Gothicised space, 'The House' possesses all the characteristics of a haunted house seemingly haunted by the dark secrets and wished-for desires of its inhabitants. Gina Wisker suggests that 'Gothic readings of Mansfield's fiction present us with a covert, darker world, alongside seemingly familiar events and behaviours, a world conveyed in undercurrents and hidden threats'.¹⁴ Elements of the Gothic destabilise the sense of familiar in the story, thus transforming it into something unfamiliar. These binaries embody Freud's definition of the uncanny (*das Unheimlich*) in the context of the homely/familiar (*das Heimlich*) connoting domesticity; the strange/unfamiliar (*das Unheimlich*) thus implying what is alien, hidden and repressed.¹⁵ Rishona Zimring suggests that 'the merging of the "heimlich" with "unheimlich": that haunting by ghosts, secrecy [...] and the blurring of the boundary between fantasy and reality, all begin at home. Domestic space is a source of anxiety [...] not reassurance'.¹⁶ It is these tensions which find expression in Mansfield's Gothic tale.

The story centres on a young woman's longing for the security of house and home. Whilst seeking refuge from the rain in the porch of a derelict old house, the young protagonist, Marion, falls into a reverie in which she envisions a future of domestic bliss full of 'a wonderful sense of peace' and 'quiet permanence' (p. 305). Nevertheless, this is a fantasy and she lives out her experiences in the house as a ghost. Together with her husband John's ghostly presence, they occupy the house's strange and uncanny world. Marion's dreams are unfulfilled, however, when at the end of the story, she is revealed to be dead outside the house.

Although Mansfield's story predates Freud's essay, 'The Uncanny', published in 1921, her exploration of the concept in terms of the architectural significance of the house and the domestic space, lends itself to a Freudian interpretation. As a concept, Anthony Vidler explains that 'the uncanny has found its metaphorical home in architecture, first in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror'.¹⁷ The inhospitable exterior space of the house and the gloomy and foreboding atmosphere in terms of 'rain' falling 'violently' and 'the cold whipping wind [...] full of the shuddering breath of winter' (p. 304), align with the protagonist's disturbed inner consciousness. The Gothic tropes of darkness and lurking unease reveal and conceal the sinister and disturbing elements in the story, which are reinforced by the 'strange effect in the [...] hollow darkness' (p. 305) 'pouring into the world like grey fluid in a greyer cup' (p. 304). The architectural significance of the decaying stone house and its setting in a dark, murky-grey twilight zone identifies something unknown as portentous, thus foreshadowing the fears and anxieties of the ghostly occupants.

The house's setting has resonance with a letter to Trowell dated 16 October 1908, in which Mansfield writes: 'I wandered by myself [and] discovered a *fascinating* castle', which was 'old and ivy grown [...] and I could see [...] fragments of the wall – an old Gothic gate. Garnet I spoke to you, beloved all the time'.¹⁸ Arguably, this Gothicised building was the inspiration for a poem Mansfield wrote in 1908 (a copy of which she enclosed in her letter to Trowell) entitled 'In the Church', which expresses a young woman's sense of desolation, isolation and grief:

In the church, with folded hands she sits
Watching ivy beat upon the pane
Of a stained glass window, until she is fain
To shut her eyes - - - yet ever hears it tapping.

'Come out' says the ivy
'I spring from the mound
Where your husband lies buried
You, too, in the ground
[...].'

In the church, with folded hands she sits
Seeing a bride and bridegroom, hand in hand
Stand at the altar, but no wedding band
Crowns the young bride – save a chaplet of ivy leaves.¹⁹

Recounting the poem to Trowell, Mansfield describes 'the ivy' as 'rough, cruel, horrible, and then the first verse in a dream'.²⁰ The transition between the realms of waking/dreaming/dying occupy the space between the Gothicised descriptions of the ivy and the dream-like sequence of first stanza: 'until she is fain/ To shut her eyes', thus foreshadowing the woman's death in the second stanza. In the final stanza, the woman returns as a ghost, as her hoped-for marriage is nothing more than a fantasy. The poem's powerful images find expression in the narrative of 'The House' when, for example, Marion 'saw an iron gate swinging idly on its hinges leading to a stone house [...] with a wide, empty porch covered in by a creeping plant and a little glass partition' (pp. 304-5). Arguably, Mansfield's letter to Trowell, and her poem, suggest some striking resonance between autobiography and the story.

Marion's looming inner crisis is hinted at as she approaches the house. The veil of the hat she is wearing is sticking to her face, a sensation which she finds 'abominable' (p. 305). Mansfield's use of the veil as a Gothic trope, in terms of its 'abominable' and abhorrent interpretation, is weighted with layers of meaning. Melissa Edmundston suggests that the veil 'foreshadows [Marion's] ghostly vision from beyond the veil' and, in this way, the veil serves as the metaphor for her death shroud.²¹ As an enigmatic and semi-transparent boundary, the veil functions as a semi-protective cover, shielding its wearer from the outside world. The veil's 'metaphoric function', as Wilson explains, is 'to screen human consciousness from reality. Mansfield's interpretation of the veil as an instrument of revelation [...] enables access to a deeper sense of things'.²² This 'deeper sense of things' is perceptible when Marion's consciousness shifts into a fantasy world of her own creation, thus marking a transitional moment in the story between the real and the unreal.

Seeking refuge in the porch of the house, Marion finds herself

looking up at the green blistered door and a little octagonal lamp hanging over the doorway. Found herself staring at the lamp ... now where had she seen it before? What trick of memory ... *had* she seen it.? She remembered so well a girl saying '[a]n octagonal lamp above the doorway – that settles the question! ...' (p. 305; original emphasis)

The above quotation serves as an anticipatory and revelatory indicator of the uncanny and strangely familiar elements inherent in the story, indicated by Mansfield's use of ellipses and broken syntax.

In keeping with modernism's preoccupation with liminal spaces, borders, thresholds and boundaries, the story begins and ends with moments of transition. These moments are realised through the liminal trope and its representation of the space between the borders of the conscious and unconscious mind. The modernist uncanny story, as Claire Drewery explains, 'uses the liminal trope to convey an insight into borderline states and emotional conditions.'²³ A marker of the mind/body threshold, Marion's musings signal the moment when the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the dream-fantasy begins. According to Vidler, the uncanny [...] is, in the aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming.²⁴

This 'slippage' also signals Marion's demise when she finds herself 'suddenly and unaccountably tired' (p. 305). This moment is, as Edmundston suggests, the point at which Marion dies, still wearing her veil. Its metaphorical significance is, according to Edmundston, 'the "veil" between the two spheres of life and death'.²⁵ Edmundston's argument supports the notion of borderline states. The veil, both real and metaphoric, thus occupies a liminal space between Marion's life and her demise at the end of the story.

Mansfield's use of ellipses marks the moment of transition as time and location become suspended when 'leaning her head against the wall ...' Marion hears the 'quick, light steps [of] a tall thin man' striding towards her (p. 305). It is at this moment, the reader is informed, that 'they crossed the threshold' (p. 305) and entered into the house of their dreams. This transitional moment in the story has resonance with the dream of domestic bliss Mansfield craved with Trowell. In a letter to him, dated 7 October 1908, she writes: 'Last night I dreamed we were together in the country – happy [...] half-dreaming – you are really beside me'.²⁶ In many of her letters to Trowell, Mansfield fantasises about their future together as man and wife. On 2 October 1908, she writes that 'Ours will be the Perfect Union' and expresses her desire that 'we were in our own home'.²⁷ As Edmundston suggests, Mansfield idea of 'house' and 'home' is remarkably similar to Marion's own fantasy creation of the home that she, like the author, will never realise'.²⁸ This 'fantasy creation' of house and home, husband and child, is transformed in the narrative into the strangely familiar, yet unfamiliar. There is a young child in the story, and the fears and anxieties expressed by Marion concerning the child, though ambiguously expressed, suggest that she is the mother of the child. This raises the issues of pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion, which are transformed in the narrative into something sinister and subversive, but which have autobiographical resonance.

In 1908 Mansfield became pregnant by Trowell and subsequently in July 1909 suffered a miscarriage in Bavaria. Claire Tomalin comments that Garnet's baby, dreamed of and lamented for the rest of her life was lost [...] Clearly, Katherine had conflicting feelings about the loss [...] she shared a distaste for the process of

childbirth, expressed by many educated British women at the time.²⁹ During her lifetime, Mansfield possibly had two miscarriages and one abortion. As Mary Burgan explains: ‘about four or five months into her pregnancy, Katherine Mansfield suffered a miscarriage [...]. She had at least one more pregnancy’ and ‘probably through the radical feminist Beatrice Hastings – she had an abortion’.³⁰ Hastings was an influential and noteworthy figure in the literary world, and through her connections she might well have opened doors for Mansfield, both personally and professionally. Mansfield had also been infected with gonorrhoea and, as Anne Fernihough explains, had undergone surgery for the removal of a fallopian tube.³¹ Marriage, childbirth and motherhood, and the subsequent impact they had on women’s lives, depicted for example, in Mansfield’s *In a German Pension* stories, are not portrayed in sentimental terms, but described in terms of fear, horror and disgust. For example, pregnant Frau in ‘The Child-Who-Was-Tired’ appeared ‘as big as a giant’; her ‘heaviness’[was] ‘terrifying’. When looking at the baby, the child of the title saw that ‘it suddenly had two heads, and then no head.’ (p. 161; p. 163). For Frau Lehmann, whose ‘bad time was approaching’ in ‘At Lehmann’s’, ‘a frightful, tearing shriek’ is heard as she gives birth (p.179; p. 183). Such traumas, and their association with the female body, find expression in ‘The House’ in the context of oozing, sticky substances relating to images of miscarried fetuses and abortion. The image of a parcel containing ‘madeira cake sodging through the brown paper’ (p. 305), which Marion carries before entering the house, is grotesque in its imagery, suggestive of oozing substances or, more subversively, bodily fluids. Sticky, seeping substances, according to Deborah Lupton ‘particularly threaten bodily integrity because of their ambiguity, their half-life between solids and fluids [...] they are too redolent of bodily fluids deemed polluting’.³² Arguably, the madeira cake imagery, when likened to female flesh, is represented as something corrupting and dangerous and, in this way is expressed as an image of revulsion. The notion of bodily integrity is reinforced in the narrative when Marion, having entered the house, ‘suddenly remembered with thankfulness that she had left the “madeira” cake on the verandah’ (p. 306). Enclosed in quotation marks by Mansfield, the supposedly innocuous madeira cake alerts the reader to something more sinister – that of the unspeakable horror of a foetus, a miscarried child, dead, yet undead and, hence, in vampiric terms, the child’s life-force lives on. In this way, the potentially corrupting substance remains outside the house for fear of violating the sanctity of home.

As the repeated madeira cake imagery reveals when Marion is found dead outside the house, there are cries of:

Look out, wot’s in that bag, Take care, you leave that bag alone ...
there’ll be a clue there ... bags and things, they always let the cat out
[...] it’s a madeiry cake and all sodgin’ through the paper. (p. 310)

In opposition to the more disturbing elements of ‘sodging’ liquids, the madeira cake ‘parcel’, we are informed, was ‘pretty [...] very pretty indeed’ (p. 305; original emphasis). Mansfield’s emphasis of ‘pretty’ alerts the reader to other possibilities – that of a longed for and lost baby. Though hinted at throughout the narrative, it is never explicitly stated whether Marion had suffered a miscarriage, is the mother of a seemingly living child in the story or has committed an act of infanticide. Yet all these possibilities are plausible and underline the psychological trauma and uncanny unease present in this deeply ambiguous tale.

Spaces of Fear and Seduction

Emblematic of the uncanny, the nursery in the story functions as a forbidden space, a territory fraught with fear and anxiety. The gate, a seemingly innocuous barrier at the foot of the stairs leading up to the nursery, is a threshold that Marion repeatedly resists crossing, thus reinforcing her uncanny self-alienation from the nursery. The elusive language and the frequent reference to what is an apparently living, unnamed, but uncannily absent child, is marked by Marion's fear: 'Each time he mentioned the ... each time she felt he was going to speak of their ... she had a terrible, suffocating sense of fear [...] and at the thought something within her cried out and trembled' (p. 308). The fragmented sentences, the frequent use of dashes and ellipses which interrupt the narrative flow throughout the narrative, raise the notion of what Fernihough describes as '[t]he idea of unspeakability [...] where conversations are truncated by the narrator – these awkward breaks and evasive responses indicate a host of unspeakable issues [...] which threaten to shatter a complacent ideology of hearth and home'.³³ Mansfield's use of the Gothic enables a discussion of the repressed and unspecified 'unspeakable issues' inherent in the narrative, which remain obscure and ambiguous. Finally overcoming her fears, Marion, on entering the nursery, 'saw the child banging the wooden head of a Dutch doll on the floor' (p. 309).³⁴ The doll is an uncanny trope in Gothic literature and the disturbing image of the child's violent behaviour foregrounds the notion of the unspeakable and hints at the suggestion that Marion has committed an act of terrifying brutality and killed her child.³⁵ This argument is in keeping with contemporary rhetoric that the New Woman was guilty of acts of infanticide.³⁶

As previously stated, the early twentieth-century New Woman was an advocate of sexual autonomy and this finds expression in the bedroom scene in Mansfield's story when Marion's husband John, 'putting his arms around her neck' cries "'Look at yourself, you beautiful woman' [...] every time it seems to me, more beautiful – more adorable [...] why this is *my* portion – this life with you. *Baby*," he cried' (p. 306; original emphases). These lines, and the emphasis of the words 'Look/my/Baby', imply a male-dominated relationship in which Marion is objectified, but also one in which she is compliant. Her pleasure, and apparent submissiveness, are expressed in terms of unrestrained sensuousness when she exclaims:

Oh, John, when I am away from you, my body aches for this, it's resting place – for the pillow of your heart, I never feel safe further from you than this; you hold the anchor to this drifting being. In the security of your arms [...] I am such a willing prisoner. (p. 307)

Similar pleadings and desires are expressed by Mansfield in a letter to Trowell written on 12 October 1908, in which she declares that: 'I feel I want [...] to pillow my head on your shoulder'; and on 23 September 1908, she wrote: 'I could lock you in a prison of my arms and hold you there – until you killed me'.³⁷ Arguably, this impassioned plea hints at consensual sadomasochism.³⁸ In a similar vein, in a letter dated 16 September 1908, Mansfield implores Trowell to 'take me – hold me – kiss me. Let me lose myself in you – for I am yours'.³⁹ It is feasible that the sentiments expressed in Mansfield's letters to Trowell are driven by her sexual appetite and willing submissiveness, which find expression in the story's narrative.⁴⁰

Issues concerning female desire and female sexuality fluctuate between the desiring woman and the desired woman. For example, when Marion is 'pulling the

pins from her hair' (an erotic gesture in itself), John exclaims, 'you don't look more than sixteen! You ought to be ashamed of yourself – and you – the ...' (p. 307). The stilted, unfinished, fragmented sentence, hints at a larger reality. Arguably, her 'shame' was that, in his eyes, she was a temptress and thus guilty of seducing him, a view that would be in keeping with conventional notions of female sexuality. The bedroom, however, was a sexually liberating space for Marion. Her face veil, an abomination to her at the beginning of the story is, in the bedroom setting, eroticised and suffused with images of sexuality. As Wilson explains, 'the veil's mechanics of shutting and opening signal entry and exit, or in social terms invitation and withdrawal'.⁴¹ The seductive and alluring images suggested by Wilson, find expression in Marion's provocative behaviour when she 'went over to the oval mirror, unpinned her hat and veil, and threw them down on a chair and looked round smiling' (p. 306). Her abandonment of the veil therefore signals her readiness for a sexual encounter. The bedroom scene in the story thus offers a subversive questioning of female sexuality in the context of how women are perceived and expected to behave, and yet, on the other hand, are desirous of having control over their sexual lives.

As a radical movement, modernism interrogated notions of objectified femininity. In accordance with this, Marion's sensuality, described by her husband in terms of her 'shame',—is in keeping with what Marianne Dekoven describes as a 'reactive misogyny'.⁴² This 'reactive' approach is in line with the early twentieth-century debate regarding a shift in gender relations; as Dekoven explains, modernism's preoccupation with gender 'expressed a male Modernist fear of women's new power'.⁴³ On the other hand, it also expressed 'a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine'.⁴⁴ As a consequence, issues of gender and sexuality 'forged many of Modernism's most characteristic formal innovations'.⁴⁵ In this way, Marion's self-empowerment in terms of her sexual autonomy in the story, effectively reflects the evolving social and cultural position of women at the time, thus foregrounding Mansfield's commitment to literary modernism. Radical experimentation in keeping with modernism's preoccupation with consciousness and alienation, time and space, thus serves as an indicator in the story of the out-of-body experience her protagonists undergo in order to escape their emotional and psychological traumas.

Spectrality and Trauma

Modernist conceptions of temporality and spatiality find expression in 'The House' at the point in the narrative when the protagonists' spectral presence becomes apparent: 'peering through the gloom' (literally through the mists of time), John exclaims: 'You ridiculous child, [...] we are too old to play "hide and seek" – no, not too old, darling, but too cold' (p. 305). Uncanny memories of childhood and child-like play occupy the space between childhood and adulthood as, for example, the game of 'hide and seek' and John's suggestion that 'I'll race you to the top of the house'(308).⁴⁶ The concept of coldness raises the notion of spectrality, in the Derridean sense that a 'specter is always a *revenant*' since 'it begins by coming back'.⁴⁷ This reinforces the return from a past experience in which the protagonists see 'again that fascinating hall' (p. 305). Indicative of the protagonists' long absence John declares: 'I feel as though I haven't seen you for a thousand years' and 'to know that this is no dream that through the years, I have but to look to find you' (p. 306). Rebecca Munford argues that 'spectres are the lifeblood of the Gothic. Ghosts, phantoms [...] and revenants return to the Gothic scene again and again, giving expression to its preoccupation with fragile

thresholds of mind and body'.⁴⁸ The spectre is associated with trauma and Marion's spectral presence as a dead, but undead woman-wife-mother haunts the narrative.

The locus of the uncanny drifts from the nursery into Marion's inner consciousness, when she suddenly heard her name being called from the lower part of the house:

Whose voice was that? What, what was he doing there – yes, it was he. Something within her seemed to crash and – give way – she went white to the lips. Marion! ... Marion! ... Marion! Please God that she could stop that voice [...] Where was it coming from [...] Yes, it came from the porch. (p. 310; original emphases)

Marion's quasi-ghostly appearance and the auditory uncanniness of the voice is an ominous sign of her impending estrangement and mortality. A disembodied consciousness, as Anya Heise-von der Lippe explains, 'returns as the ghostly embodiment of suppressed guilt and dark secrets [...] the repressed past returns [to expose] past transgressions'.⁴⁹ In this way, Marion's 'guilt' and 'past transgressions' return to haunt her. Her experience is thus symptomatic of her uncanny fears and, as such, is incapable of rational explanation. The favourite motif of the uncanny was, according to Vidler, 'the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the feared invasion of an alien presence, on a psychological level, its play was one of doubling, where the other is [...] experienced as a replica of the self'.⁵⁰ Marion's uncanny doubling of her alienated self foregrounds her shifting and conflicting inner/outer consciousness.

Marion's other self is foreshadowed when stepping over the foreboding threshold of the porch, 'the door banged behind her. It was dark and cold ... and ... silent ... cold' (p. 310); the broken syntax indicates the moment of transition between life and death. Though not explicitly stated, the ensuing exchange between an assumed male owner of the house and a former employee, whose speech denotes his social class, declares: 'I seen 'er coming up 'ere last evening – thinkin' she was a friend of your missus. What she come to the front door for then – with the airy steps' (p. 310), her 'airy' steps thus serving to reinforce her haunting and ghostly presence: '[I]t's 'er alright – That's 'er face (p. 310) [...] ain't she young too' (p. 311). In keeping with Mansfield's modernist strategies the story is open to multiple interpretations as, for example, when an unnamed, assumed male owner of the house, is ordered to 'leave' Marion 'alone', because, as he is warned, 'you'll ketch it when they know [...] You'd better look out what yer say. It'll go *down*' (p. 311; original emphasis). Recalling Marion and her husband's previous incarnation, the working man recalls them

fixing' up nurseries and rose-trees and turkeys carpets, 'er 'anging on 'is arm [...]. It'll be called 'aunted now. [...]. And when e'd gone, she comes back laughin', and says – 'We ain't got enough money to furnish a cottage,' she says, 'we're just dreamin' true, she says, 'and ere's half a crown, Peter dear I never 'eard people laugh the way they did – and she, so set on this 'ere lamp ...'. (p. 311)

These lines add to the sense of uncanniness in the narrative in which the familiar is defamiliarised, boundaries are blurred and meaning obfuscated. The complexities and ambiguities inherent in story remain indeterminate.

To read ‘The House’ as a Gothic tale in which the ghosts of the past return to haunt its inhabitants is to undermine the story’s powerful subtext. As a modernist writer, Mansfield saw the potential of in Gothic narrative strategies as a way to explore the wider themes of domestic ideology and the politically subversive aspects of female sexuality. These issues, as I have argued in this essay, are transmuted into ‘The House’ in order to foreground binaries of house/home, love/life, longing/belonging, alienation and otherness, that have biographical resonance. As indicators of the emotional complexities inherent in Mansfield’s life, these themes are bound up with her feelings of displacement which haunted her for much of her short life. Reflecting on her early days in New Zealand, she writes to her lover, Trowell on 5 October 1908: ‘I cannot help but feel the old days back again [...] I get that frightful sensation of grief [...] It is like suddenly finding myself face to face with this ghost which terrifies me’.⁵¹

Notes

¹ *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O’Sullivan, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), Vol 1, pp. 304-11. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

² Mansfield and Murry were friends of the editor of *Hearth and Home*, Frank Harris, who Mansfield described somewhat fawningly as ‘our hero and our master – always’. Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Vol. 1, p. 113. A previous editor and co-owner of the publication was the leading authority on home décor in the early twentieth century: Mrs Talbot Coke, stated that ‘the house is one’s mind, the home of one’s soul’. ‘The House of my Pilgrimage’, in *Hearth and Home*, ed. by Mrs Talbot Coke, 30 December 1909, p. 424. Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 137.

³ *Letters* 1, p. 91.

⁴ *Letters* 1, p. 177.

⁵ Janet Wilson, ‘Where is Katherine? Longing and (un)belonging in the works of Katherine Mansfield’, in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary of Essays*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 175-88 (p. 176).

⁶ Margaret Scott, *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, 2 vols (Canterbury, New Zealand: Lincoln University Press, Daphne Brasell Associates, 1997), Vol 2, p. 204.

⁷ Wilson, ‘Where is Katherine?’, p. 176.

⁸ Wilson, ‘Where is Katherine?’, p. 175.

⁹ Pamela Dunbar, *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield’s Short Stories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p. 174.

¹⁰ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 11; p. 18.

¹¹ Mansfield wrote the letter to Trowell after her visit to the suffrage meeting in Baker Street, London, earlier the same day.

¹² *Letters* 1, p. 60.

¹³ *Letters* 1, p. 60.

¹⁴ Gina Wisker, ‘Introduction’, in *Katherine Mansfield and the Fantastic*, ed. by Delia da Sousa Correa and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 1.

¹⁵ Freud’s entire argument in his essay, *The Uncanny*, was centred around these issues, and central to these was the notion of repression. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by Hugh Houghton (New York and London: Penguin Books, 2003).

- ¹⁶ Rishona Zimring, 'Mansfield's Charm: The Enchantment of Domestic "Bliss"', in *Katherine Mansfield and the Fantastic*, ed. by da Sousa Correa and others, pp. 33-50 (p. 39).
- ¹⁷ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT, 1992), p. 11.
- ¹⁸ *Letters* 1, p. 72; original emphasis.
- ¹⁹ *Letters* 1, p. 81. The poem is also included in *The Collected Poems of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 63.
- ²⁰ *Letters* 1, p. 80.
- ²¹ Melissa Edmundston, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 224.
- ²² Janet Wilson, 'Veiling and Unveiling: Mansfield's Modernist Aesthetics', in *Journal of New Zealand Literature, Special Issue: Katherine Mansfield: Masked and Unmasked*, 32 (2014), 203-25 (p. 216).
- ²³ Claire Drewery, *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 84.
- ²⁴ Vidler, p. 11.
- ²⁵ Edmundston, p. 224.
- ²⁶ *Letters* 1, p. 67.
- ²⁷ *Letters* 1, p. 62; p. 63.
- ²⁸ Edmundston, p. 226.
- ²⁹ Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p. 70.
- ³⁰ Mary Burgan, 'Childbirth Trauma in Katherine Mansfield's Early Stories', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 24 (1978), 395-412 (p. 396).
- ³¹ *Katherine Mansfield: In a German Pension*, ed. by Anne Fernihough (London: Penguins Books, 1999), p. xv.
- ³² Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 114.
- ³³ Fernihough, p. xix.
- ³⁴ Mansfield might have been familiar with the popular children's book, *The Little Dutch Dolls*, by Walter Copeland and illustrated by Charles Robinson (London: Blackie, 1906). The wooden jointed dolls (both boy and girl dolls) were often drawn without clothes. The dolls violated their bodies by removing their heads, arms and legs. In the Edwardian period they were a common nursery toy.
- ³⁵ It is interesting to note that Mansfield's unravelling relationship with Murry, one that she did not care to 'to relive', is expressed metaphorically, as that of a dead child. She wrote on 17 December 1919, 'I'd say we had a child – a love-child, and it's dead [...] this child can't be made to live again'. Scott, *Notebooks* 2, p. 180.
- ³⁶ Mansfield's allusion to Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula* (1897) is striking. The New Woman in the novel, portrayed as vampiric and infanticidal, is perceptible when one of the women pointed to 'the dreadful bag [...] which had [been] thrown upon the floor, there were some living thing within it'. On opening the bag, 'there was a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child'. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1996), p. 39.
- ³⁷ *Letters* 1, p. 68; p. 61.
- ³⁸ In 1906, on a voyage back to New Zealand, Mansfield had become infatuated with 'R', a cricketer from the England team. In her diary she notes: 'R is my latest [...] When I am with him a preposterous desire seizes me. I want to be badly hurt by him, I should like to be strangled by his firm hands'. *The Diaries of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 24.
- ³⁹ *Letters* 1, p. 58.
- ⁴⁰ In 1907, Mansfield's father had consulted a Wellington journalist, Thomas Lewis Mills, regarding his daughter's ambition to become a writer. Mills was shocked by what he considered the 'sex problem' in her work. *Letters* 1, Footnote 1, p. 47.
- ⁴¹ Wilson, 'Veiling and Unveiling', p. 213.
- ⁴² Marianne Dekoven, 'Modernism and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 212-31, (p. 174).
- ⁴³ Dekoven, p. 212.
- ⁴⁴ Dekoven, p. 212.
- ⁴⁵ Dekoven, p. 212.
- ⁴⁶ There is an uncanny sense of déjà vu in the narrative, when Mansfield, reflecting on her unravelling relationship with Murry in 1919, wrote on 17 December that year: 'We'd been *children* to each other. [...] being "children" together gave us a practically unlimited chance to play at life – not to live'. Scott,

Notebooks 2, pp. 179-80; original emphasis. Although 'The House' was written in 1912, seven years before Mansfield wrote the letter to Murry, the words have an uncanny resonance in the story.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11; original emphasis.

⁴⁸ Rebecca Munford, 'Spectral Femininity', in *Women and the Gothic*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 120-34 (p. 121).

⁴⁹ Anya Heise-von Lippe, 'Others, Monsters, Ghosts: Representations of the Female Gothic Body in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Love*', in *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, ed. by Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 166-179 (p. 167).

⁵⁰ Vidler, p. 3.



IMOGEN WALLERSTEINER

The City as a Threshold in the Writing of Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys: 'Wavering Between Two Worlds'¹

Abstract: This essay seeks to explore the city as a threshold space in the writing of Jean Rhys and Katherine Mansfield. In their writing, the city is presented as a hostile and sometimes haunting space, mirroring the troubled psyches of its female inhabitants and collapsing the boundary between the interior and exterior experience of the city. Their characters share an impulse to overcome their marginal status and assimilate into society, a process often taking the shape of rituals and transformation acts. Attention is paid to the emergence of the modern department store, emerging consumer capitalism and the role of women in the modern city. By approaching the threshold as a precarious space, this essay draws attention to the limitations placed on women living in the periphery in early twentieth-century Europe. Furthermore, Rhys's and Mansfield's depictions of liminal subjectivities reveal their work to be disruptive and exploratory, placing them at the heart of modernist experimentation.

Keywords: Women writers; Katherine Mansfield; Jean Rhys; Cities; Threshold Space; Modernity; Femininity; Class

Jean Rhys (1890–1979) and Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) were both born in former British colonies: in Dominica and New Zealand respectively. Living in Europe as expatriates, both women were liminal subjects who were caught in 'threshold' space. Their modernism is characterised by its transnational qualities, and it is as colonial women that they found themselves doubly marginalised in the metropole. An experience of heightened oppression manifests within the recurring portrayals of dissidence, liminality and alienation in their fiction. Indeed, the psychic effects of colonial exile are configured within Mansfield's and Rhys's literary depictions of metropolitan city space. In these spaces, their protagonists find themselves entering into troubled psychological states. Often, their characters are physically disorientated as they straddle the border between private and public space, unsure of their social position or standing. In Mansfield's short stories 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' (1908), 'A Cup of Tea' (1922), and Rhys's novels *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), protagonists seek to overcome spatial dislocation by attaching themselves to commodities, buying new clothes and constantly searching for the new. Every new purchase is a promise of transformation and assimilation for the marginal woman: the experience of buying gives a temporary

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sense of power, security and stable identity. However, within these stories is a critique of the commodities of consumer capitalism, as the passage to independence is recurrently stunted by the modern city, which often proves itself to be a sterile, repressive and unequal space.

The contemporaneousness of Rhys and Mansfield is interrupted by Rhys writing her major works later in her life, subsequent to Mansfield's short writing career, which was arrested by her premature death. Their biographies, like their writing, converge and diverge in many ways revealing fascinating echoes between them as modernists and colonial subjects. Rhys's protagonists feel their exile at every turn: they are introspective and lack strong relationships with others. Deborah Parsons writes that as an expatriate in Paris, Rhys was 'separated from the coteries surrounding male writers and artists', and lived in the impoverished thirteenth *arrondissement*.² In her autobiography, Rhys writes: 'I would never belong anywhere [...] I am a stranger and I always will be'.³ Mansfield's writing has a different spirit as her stories have a greater tendency to code the effects of exile subtly. Mansfield herself wrote that the modernist writer does not tell her readers' anything 'bang out'.⁴ By examining Rhys and Mansfield alongside each other and, in particular, focusing on the transnational and peripatetic dimensions of their work, this essay seeks to demonstrate that they are reciprocally illuminated as intensely experimental and exploratory modernist writers.

Throughout this essay, 'liminality' will be employed as an approach to the work of Rhys and Mansfield in order to explore the role of the threshold as a city space. The word 'liminal' comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning 'threshold'.⁵ Victor Turner, building on Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1909), has posited that 'liminal identities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention'.⁶ According to Turner, Van Gennep's concept of the 'rites of passage' theorises the liminal as a middle stage in a tripartite structure of 'separation', 'transition' and 'incorporation'.⁷ In order to cross the threshold and transition from one social status to another, individuals must perform specific rites and rituals. For the early twentieth-century woman in Rhys's and Mansfield's fiction, rituals often take the form of transformation through acquiring material wealth and self-fashioning with commodities.

The indeterminate nature of the threshold means it is a space in which identity feels porous, holding the promise that the self can be disguised through purchasing dresses, costumes, makeup and changing appearance. This essay considers the escapism and illusion posed by purchasable femininity in the context of the modern city. The mirages of the city offer a promise of belonging to the marginal woman, inciting fantasies of assimilation and dreams of transformation. Sasha Jenson in *Good Morning, Midnight* is acutely aware of being a woman constantly on display; her sense of entrapment emanates from her own body, her gender and an internal 'otherness'. In both Rhys's and Mansfield's writing, the volatile internal landscapes of their protagonists are reflected in external cityscapes, which are often hostile and grating. As we travel through the city with their protagonists, we often encounter the uncanny and grotesque, thus suggesting another layer to the writers' modernism: a type of dissonance against uniformity. By holding up the shiny masks of femininity that women may apply, Rhys and Mansfield expose how false they can be. Beneath the surface, we find inner turbulence and alienated psyches.

European cities, such as Paris and London, are the sites of modernism where we encounter commodity culture in the writing of Rhys and Mansfield. Walter Benjamin's writings on European culture, written around the same time, help to illuminate the threshold spaces of the city. His encyclopaedic study on nineteenth-

century Paris, *The Arcades Project* (1927–1940), reads the city as ‘phantasmagoria’ in the eyes of the *flâneur*.⁸ For Benjamin, the arcades, interiors, exhibition halls and panoramas of Paris are ‘wish symbols’, displaying the ‘residue of a dream world’.⁹ Whilst often alienating, Rhys’s and Mansfield’s depictions of modern cities also hold the promise of lavish and extravagant visual spectacle. In Mansfield’s short story, ‘The Tiredness of Rosabel’, London provides Rosabel with a tantalising space of possibility, offering different class and gender roles. This escapism is presented in the form of an oneiric narrative during which Rosabel dreams beyond her reality as a working-class shop girl. The dream highlights Mansfield’s frequent employment of liminal tropes, and supports Anthony Alpers’s view that often the ‘trick of [Mansfield’s] mind is evident: she is constantly inhabiting one space while observing another, and has her characters doing the same’.¹⁰ Written during Mansfield’s brief return to New Zealand from London in 1908, the story reveals various fragments of European consumer culture retained in Mansfield’s youthful memory, such as the advertisements: “‘Sapolio Saves Time, Saves Labour’ – ‘Heinz Tomato Sauce’ – and the inane [...] ‘Lamplough’s Pyretic Saline’”.¹¹ In this dream narrative, Mansfield’s own travelling consciousness sits at a threshold, fluctuating between reality and illusion, past and present. Furthermore, the dream is similar to the liminal state in which Victor and Edith Turner locate a ‘symbolic inversion of social roles’, as Rosabel imagines herself assuming the role of her wealthy customer ‘Madam’ and then being swept off her feet by ‘Madam’s companion, Harry’.¹² Rosabel’s impoverished and exhausting life makes clear the connection between her internal state and her environment as the urban space around her feels strange and unwelcoming.

In Mansfield’s fiction, domestic interiors play a significant role in conveying the interior states of their occupants. Rosabel’s bedsit is an isolated room up ‘four flights of stairs’, a height causing her to bemoan: ‘Oh, why four flights! It really was criminal to expect people to live so high up’ (Rosabel, p. 433). Once she enters her building, in the threshold space of the landing, Rosabel encounters the disorientating and shocking sight of a ‘stuffed albatross head on the landing, glimmering ghost-like in the light of the little gas jet’ (Rosabel, p. 434). This ghostly apparition recalls the frightening image of the *commis voyageur* (‘commercial traveller’) in Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*, a man who dwells in the hotel hallway.¹³ The *commis* occupies the room next to Sasha’s; he is as ‘thin as a skeleton’ and always ‘hanging around [...] like the ghost of the landing’ (Morning, p. 13). Both the *commis* and the albatross are symbols of the uncanny, and emblematised the inhospitable environment of the city. As Sasha and Rosabel both transition from the street into their temporary accommodation they find no respite from their feelings of exclusion, and the stable boundary between private and public space is threatened. The image of the ghostly apparition is a symptom of the modern urban condition and it resonates with Mansfield’s own fears of London. In one of her letters she described this sensation of terror when facing the city: ‘It is like as suddenly finding myself face to face with this ghost which terrifies me’.¹⁴

For Mansfield then, the city constitutes a precarious threshold space troubling the boundary between a stable interior and exterior identity. In ‘The Tiredness of Rosabel’ the city represents a boundary between illusion and reality, and the promises of transformation can be read in Mansfield’s preoccupation with commodities, dreams, advertising and clothing. Rosabel’s day is long and tiring as she is at the beck and call of a young couple choosing a hat in the ‘millinery establishment’ (Rosabel, p. 433) where she works. On her bus journey home she recoils from the ‘sickening smell of

warm humanity... oozing out of everybody' (Rosabel, p. 433). Yet the city is a space divided between realist description of everyday drudgery, and illusions of wealth, symbolised by the jewellers' shops that are 'fairy palaces' (Rosabel, p. 433). As Rosabel gets off the bus at Westbourne Grove, her perception shifts to enchantment as she compares it to Venice at night: 'mysterious, dark' with 'gondolas dodging up and down' (Rosabel, p. 514). The blurring of reality and illusion corresponds with Benjamin's description of Parisian arcades that were fluid and dreamlike spaces 'in constant flux, like realities in the dream'.¹⁵ The inherent liminality of an oneiric narrative is apt to explore the possibilities of identity transition and fluid consciousness. Rosabel's dream begins at a window, so that her ordinary domestic space is turned into a threshold site: 'Rosabel [...] knelt down on the floor, pillowing her arms on the window-sill... just one little sheet of glass between her and the great, wet world outside!' (Rosabel, p. 434). Rosabel's kneeling connotes a sense of ritual, with the window a thin veil between reality and dream. Whilst the use of ellipsis delineates her transition into a dream state and creates a liminal environment where the boundaries between reality and fantasy collapse – the everyday merges with the unreal.

Indeed, 'Tiredness' is a narrative characterised by transitions – from cold to hot, innocence to experience, and reality to dream state. Back in her room Rosabel performs a transformation as she sorts through her emotions of the day: such as the 'sudden, ridiculous feeling of anger' (Rosabel, p. 435) that seized her when she was asked to try on the hat by her customer. The significance of costumes in Mansfield's writing has been pointed out by Janet Wilson, focusing on the veil, she writes that it 'introduces an engagement with socially constructed stereotypes of the female, indexing the escapist urge into fantasy'.¹⁶ Indeed for Rosabel, the hat is a symbol of possession and power, acting as a catalyst for her flash of anger and class envy. Yet in Rosabel's fantasy, back in her bedsit, her anger is redistributed into a kind of rapture and taboo eroticism suggested by her 'hot' forehead (Rosabel, p. 436). When she imagines herself in Harry's arms, the paranthetical interpolation combines this energy with a surprising voyeurism: '(The real Rosabel, the girl crouched on the floor in the dark, laughed aloud, and put her hand up to her hot mouth)' (Rosabel, p. 437). Mansfield's free indirect discourse allows her to oscillate between fantasy and reality, and Rosabel's energies take on Freudian dream patterns of 'fore-pleasure' (*Vorlust*) as the day's tension drives her pleasurable fantasy, reaching a crescendo in the image: 'under the folds of the rug [Harry] pressed her hands convulsively', and ending with the suggestive: '[she] went upstairs to bed... quite early...' (Rosabel, p. 437).¹⁷ Erotic feeling pulses through the narrative; however, there is no *Endlust* and we are left with liminal fantasy – as suggested by the ellipses that refuse Rosabel consummation and release.¹⁸

The sexual undertones in 'Tiredness' are underscored by the reference to the notoriously amoral popular novel *Anna Lombard* (1901) by Anne Sophie Cory. Around the time of Mansfield's writing, this book was causing a furore due to its 'vice' and 'sophistry' – and was few years later even considered for inclusion in New Zealand's *Indecent Publications Act* (1910).¹⁹ Set in colonial India, the novel revolves around a 'New Woman' who does not conform to conventional sexuality, scandalously choosing to marry a Pathan dancer over an Englishman. The novel is a daring, taboo-breaking mix of colonialist desires and anxieties. Rosabel reads the cheap paperback over a girl's shoulder on the bus: 'it was something about a hot, voluptuous night... and a girl with lovely, white shoulders...' (Rosabel, p. 437). While initially Rosabel derides the 'cheap' paperback and its reader, she is titillated by its

content, reading a form of consumption that feeds Rosabel's romantic illusions, so that in her dream she imagines 'her lovely white shoulders' (Rosabel, p. 437, original emphasis). As Kate Fullbrook writes, these popular clichés are a commentary on escapist romances, 'an attack on the final cruelty of such images as drugs for the minds of oppressed women'.²⁰ In Mansfield's layered narrative, Rosabel longs for the acquisition of expensive clothes, fine ornaments, money and higher social status. Alongside feeding her litany of wishes, the reading of romantic novels stimulates Rosabel to romanticise Harry's objectification and exoticisation of her. While buying the hat, Harry, attracted to her 'damned pretty little figure' asks Rosabel, 'Ever been painted?' (Rosabel, p. 435). As Harry 'counts the money into her hand', he turns Rosabel into an object of desire. This invokes the plot of *Anna Lombard* as his fantasy crosses class divides. Rosabel's position as a shop girl titillates Harry – his privileged male gaze has the power to not just to look at her, but potentially to purchase and turn her into a commodity. She is exploitable due to her liminal social status – as a shop girl she is a person apart, alienated and vulnerable. Harry's passing fancy for Rosabel also suggests that it is within his power to purchase women across class boundaries, but for Rosabel this is a dangerous situation. Women here are aligned with consumer culture and new department stores, but Rosabel's submissive role in this scene reveals how these were highly uneven spaces – emancipatory for some women more than others.

An interesting parallel can be drawn *Voyage in the Dark* by Rhys and to Anna's reading of Emile Zola's *Nana* (1880).²¹ Maudie advises Anna 'it's about a tart. I think it's disgusting [...] all books are like that – just somebody stuffing you up' (*Voyage*, p. 9). Maudie's comment expresses her disapproval of the fantasies presented by popular novels – she is unlike Rosabel, who 'stuffs' herself up with the orientalist romance *Anna Lombard*. The cover depicting 'a stout, dark woman brandishing a wine-glass' who is 'sitting on the knee of a bald-headed man' suggests sexual consumption through the drinking of wine, and racialised transgression with the reference to 'dark' features (*Voyage*, p. 9). The insertion of *Nana* into the text does more than just link Anna's sexuality to the deviance of Zola's eponymous heroine. Like an earlier reference to the 'Hottentot' in the text, *Nana* provides a frame for Rhys to expose ideologies that have kept women as marginal and degenerative – indirectly questioning prejudices surrounding the category of 'white creole'.²² In *Voyage*, the reference to Saartje Baartman – the 'Hottentot Venus', is connected to a wider pattern in Rhys's novels of colonial women being judged as spectacle in European space.²³ *Nana* does not offer Anna desire or optimism, instead the words of the novel are an 'endless procession' of 'dark, blurred words' – their darkness connoting the inescapable bind between illicit sexuality and racialised 'blackness' that confines Anna (*Voyage*, p. 9). While *Anna Lombard* temporarily fuels Rosabel's fantasy, the narrative ends in a similar deflation. Her waking smile is accompanied by a 'tragic optimism', implying that her fantasies keep her 'half-asleep' from the cruelty of the real world (Rosabel, p. 437). Fuelled by the illusions of literary romance, Rosabel's dream is a coping mechanism. It allows her to visualise herself as something *other* than a marginal within the city, and temporarily permits her to cross over a threshold into the realm of fantasy to imagine a less impoverished life.

Such instances of intertextuality in Rhys's and Mansfield's writing establish an intersection between imaginative illusions and illicit sexuality. They can be interpreted as textual acts of rebellion against controlled, regulated female sexuality, as desire is a need to be satiated as much as buying clothes or food. Benjamin's *Arcades Project* recognises an erotics of capitalism, writing that 'in big-city

prostitution, the woman herself becomes a mass-produced article'.²⁴ In Benjamin's view, women consume goods such as fashion and makeup to enhance their sexual appeal and status. Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* also yokes desire with economic transactions and commodities. In particular, Sasha's relationship with the gigolo René is experienced in terms of cost and transaction, and throughout the text she stages a distinctly commodified femininity and desire.

Sasha has been sent to Paris after the tragic death of her baby and is given money to undergo a 'transformation act' (*Midnight*, p. 53). Her meanderings through the milliners, dress shops and hairdressers of Paris recall Rosabel's journey that begins at Oxford Circus – the heart of commercial London. Sasha's acts are rituals that defer inner turmoil, for example, when she contemplates suicide, she decides instead to dye her hair: 'I try to decide what colour I shall have my hair dyed, and hang on to that thought as you hang on to something when you are drowning [...] another colour must be imposed on it.' (*Midnight*, p. 44). The quip that the entire process will transform into 'Educated hair' (*Midnight*, p. 44) suggests that these acts are a removal of original identity, a masking over with another one that is approved by the system. Sasha's moulding of her appearance is a form of discipline and social control as she adopts the uniform and symbols of respectable femininity.²⁵ In particular, the bleaching of hair into a '*blonde cendre*' (*Midnight*, p. 44) suggests a washing over of Sasha's vaguely racialised past in order to fit into a homogenous European identity. The graphic violence contained in the imagery of this scene positions it as a moment of a counter-critique, and there is a degree of rebellion as Rhys scrutinises mass-culture and the constructions of beauty it imposes on women. Sasha fantasises about her brutal revenge against this society: 'One day, quite suddenly, when you're not expecting it, I'll take a hammer from the folds of my dark cloak and crack your little skull like an egg-shell' (*Midnight*, p. 45). The violence of this narration conveys Sasha's disillusionment with her Paris makeover; her anger stemming from her internal resistance to societal expectations of women and a loss of individuality.

Consumerism has served as a form of compensation for a fragmented selfhood caused by urban alienation and fiscal lack. In Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna Morgan also ties up her self-improvement with fashion: in a shop she states: 'Out of this warm room that smells of fur I'll go to all the lovely places [...] This is the beginning' (*Voyage*, p. 25). As Terri Mullholland states, the threshold is a space of performance where 'the individual can create and recreate notions of self in multiple ways as identity becomes destabilised'.²⁶ By participating in consumer culture, Rhys's and Mansfield's protagonists hope that they can transform their marginal position and achieve status in the marketplace. These European marketplaces are the physical spaces of consumerism, sites of retail, commodity exchange and consumer activities where Rhys's and Mansfield's protagonists often dwell. Rhys and Mansfield were not alone in observing the aspirational role of fashion – Georg Simmel's 1904 essay 'Fashion' describes a basic tension in human nature between two drives: a tendency to distinguish ourselves from others, and a tendency to imitate others.²⁷ This duality is played out in fashion, as Simmel writes, fashion 'satisfies the need of differentiation', but it also allows the 'passive individual to adapt himself to existing elements'.²⁸ Clothes allow the wearer to materialise class and articulate their economic status, and Rhys's female protagonists are aware of such potential. Indeed, Anna's possession of the right clothes in *Voyage in the Dark* is a visible representation of what she perceives to be the correct class, privilege and femininity. The shop window is a site where her fantasies of becoming a 'model' woman play out: the glass itself the threshold between who she is and who she wants to become. Similar to

Sasha's hair colouring in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys uses menacing imagery to expose the false hope that is bound up in artifice. In these moments of consumerist need, there is a self-reflexive gaze: 'And the shop-windows sneering and smiling in your face. And then you look at the skirt of your costume, all crumpled at the back' (Voyage, pp. 21-22). The shop window acts a physical and psychological barrier between Anna and her fantasy of becoming one of the 'Beautifully dressed' women (Voyage, p. 21). Her reflection strips her naked as she remarks on her 'hideous underclothes', a violent reminder of a harsh truth: that clothes and makeup can only be deceit.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha spends for cheap thrills and to achieve a numbness similar to her alcohol consumption that first makes her feel 'fire and wings' (Midnight, p. 88), followed by a tranquilizing and depressive effect. The illusions generated by spending provoke a surge of energy – a moment of pleasure and bliss. At the end of the novel, Sasha goes to the *Galeries Lafayette* in Paris for 'just the sensation of spending' to 'look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue, necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette cases, jewelled tortoisés' (Midnight, p. 121). The department store is a quasi-shrine, as Alissa G. Karl has written, it is a 'modern temple of consumerism' – a space that promises belonging to the marginal subject.²⁹ Perhaps it is in Paris, an imperial centre, where Sasha feels she can reverse the gendered and 'othering' stare inflicted on her by gazing back at the lavish commodities of the metropole. This is a form of ownership that is denied to her by her feminised poverty and sense of physical displacement.

Rhys's commentary on the consumer culture of Europe is related to her understanding of the cultural, social and geographical alienation of women. Perennial dissatisfaction breeds obsession with buying new clothes, and Sasha often fixates on sartorial matters in moments of alienation and acute anxiety. She notices a girl in a café wearing clothes that she envies: 'What a lot of things I've got to get! Would a suit like that be a good thing to get? No, I think I have better get...' (Midnight, p. 102). The parataxis of this statement suggests the need for new clothes is so palpable that Sasha's thoughts are obsessively interrupted. The women Sasha envies are those within the commodity system, and she strives to construct a similar simulacrum of stability. The shopping ritual of buying a new hat is a strange, quasi-religious exchange taking two hours between Sasha and a shop-girl, and when she leaves the shop with her fetish object she is described as being 'saner and happier' (Midnight, p. 59-60). Transformation means paranoia is temporarily alleviated; a calm achieved by Sasha's submission to what Mary-Lou Emery calls 'the priestlike administrations of others who manipulate her body'.³⁰

Consumer culture's potential for the transformation of emotion and identity is a process that Anne Friedberg has termed the promise of 'transubstantiation through purchase'.³¹ For Sasha, hats hold the potential of transubstantiation: 'It isn't my face this tortured and tormented mask [...] shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather [...] and walk about the dark streets so merrily [...] Singing "One more river to cross, that's Jordan, Jordan..."' (Midnight, pp. 37-8). This hat is strikingly similar to the fantastical hat with a 'great, curled feather' that 'charm[s]' in 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' (Rosabel, p. 435). Sasha's illusionary hat also incites a fantasy of identity transformation, however, rather than Rosabel's fantasy of sexual and class transgression, Sasha's illusion is cross-racial. The nonsense song is irruptive and references an African-American spiritual, suggesting a liberating, albeit momentary, identification with 'otherness'.³² However, Sasha is merely replacing one mask with another, a process that does not compensate for the alienated self, as she subsequently

admits: 'I have no price, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere' (Midnight, p. 38). For both Rhys's and Mansfield's characters the city constitutes a threshold space, a liminal zone that holds emancipatory potential, yet they are unable to find their place and become integrated individuals. The threshold is a space outside of the social structures of the city, and the shop-girls and single women who inhabit it are designated to the margins, unable to mask their precarious identities.

The female experience of the city also similarly intersects with class and commodity culture in Mansfield's short story 'A Cup of Tea' (1922).³³ This story presents a different experience of London compared to 'Rosabel', as Rosemary Fell, the protagonist of 'A Cup of Tea', is a rich member of the upper-class. 'A Cup of Tea' explores a cosmopolitan landscape through the satirical portrayal of Rosemary, who fails to overcome her narcissism by helping the poor Miss Smith. Again, in this story, the shop is a site of aspiration and facilitates indulgence in fantasy. Rosemary begins her day browsing in an expensive antiques store on Curzon Street and gushes over a small enamel box, 'An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream' (Tea, p. 333). With similarity to Rosabel's hat and Anna's clothes, the box is symbolically connected with desire. When Rosemary steps out of the shop into the street, she crosses a kind of threshold between fantasy and reality, as she is then confronted by the impoverished Miss Smith begging for 'a cup of tea' (Tea, p. 334). Rosemary invites Miss Smith into her home, who is described as a 'little captive' that Rosemary 'had netted' (Tea, p. 334). Mansfield draws on the fairy-tale of 'Cinderella' to construct the fantasy, as Rosemary wants to prove that 'fairy godmothers were real', and that 'women *were* sisters' (Tea, p. 335; original emphasis). However, this narration is an act of self-deception, as it is not Miss Smith who is undergoing the transformation, but the 'fairy godmother', Rosemary, who craves transformation through acquiring fashionable objects and by borrowing Miss Smith.

Rosemary Fell seeks out an alternative role in the city as a benevolent saviour of a lower-class woman. In a similar vein to Rhys's writing, the city offers a diversion from everyday life with the shop window acting as the site of promised transformation. A preoccupation with looking and looks dominates the story; opening with a comment on surface appearance: 'Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces' (Tea, p. 332). Using free indirect discourse, Mansfield uses this vignette to slip into Rosemary's own voice and mental activity. She objectifies and reduces herself to just her physical appearance. At the end, the text circles back to Rosemary's preoccupation with her own surface, ending with a whispered plea to her husband, "'Philip, am I pretty?'" (Tea, p. 338; original emphasis). It is when Rosemary's husband describes Miss Smith as attractive, that she suddenly regards her new acquisition as a threat and disposes of the woman into the street. Rosemary's brief sense of self-assertion is temporary, however, and as soon as her husband points out the attractiveness of the girl, Rosemary is threatened. She reverts back to her dutiful role of wife and to the safety of her domestic sphere; the limitations of her role are underscored by her need for male approval and her consequent insecurity when this is threatened by an outside influence. While Rosemary may have financial and spatial privilege, her gender and entrenched domestic role denies her true autonomy. Rosemary is set apart by her wealth and class, resorting to fantasy for escapism and a fleeting sense of autonomy.

The ending of *Good Morning, Midnight* also underscores the temporary and ephemeral transformation of spending, as Sasha resumes the 'role of passive object of another's desire' offering her body to the ghostly and repulsive *commis* of the hotel.³⁴ This ending reinforces Sasha's increasing dehumanisation at the hands of modern

mass culture. During the novel, she assimilates into Benjamin's view of the modern female body as an aesthetic ornament, symptomatic of mass-produced fashion and cosmetics that invent 'artificial humanity'.³⁵ Benjamin describes women as seeing themselves 'ten times reflected' in Parisian shop windows due to the mannequins and excess of mirrors.³⁶ Sasha also observes the phenomenon of mannequins; she describes feeling as if drugged, 'watching those damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women' (Midnight, p.16). Manufactured mannequins present a feminine ideal to Sasha, and she wishes to emulate their 'satin skin' and 'silk hair' (Midnight, p. 16), so that her body will become an object and mask. Furthermore, she longs to have the same emotionless surface and 'sawdust' interior: 'you must make your mind vacant' (Midnight, p. 17). The performance of 'femininity' is so deeply rooted that Rhys's protagonists strive to become 'sexual automata'.³⁷ As rootless wanderers they transform into the commodities of the arcades, a result of a gendered economy underpinned by masculinist ideologies. As Christina Britzolakis points out, *Good Morning, Midnight* employs the trope of the street itself as 'an ambiguously gendered, treacherous and possibly even sadistic lover'.³⁸ As the city takes on a hostile character, Rhys's and Mansfield's protagonists seek refuge in idealised selves proffered by fashion and costume.

Rhys's and Mansfield's innovative modernist discourse configures metropolitan consumerism as related to the cultural, social and geographical alienation of women. In Mansfield's writing, sexual fantasy has been linked to consumerist desires, as liminality poses a space of titillating and even erotic possibilities for women. However, for Rhys, any optimism is flattened as Sasha's mind is controlled and colonised by commodities. As shop girls living outside the bounds of middle-class gender conventions in early twentieth-century Europe, they work in jobs that involve the exhibition of their bodies. Thus, illusions of physical transformation preoccupy their psyche, generating mental fantasies about perfect lives and social stability. As Victor and Edith Turner have written about liminal states, they contain 'not only *transition* but also *potentiality*, not only "going to be" but also "what may be"'.³⁹ The metropole is a glimmering arcade of possibility, yet what these stories lack is the culmination of the ritual as the in-between subject remains marginal.

Journeying through the city does not engender freedom or self-improvement, rather these protagonists are disorientated and vulnerable to the economic and class-based limitations of the metropole. The physical move from the private space of the room into the hostile public sphere of the street results in psychological shock and disappointment. Rhys's and Mansfield's protagonists are fixed as strangers and outsiders – their attempts at assimilation are, in Sasha's words, at 'what they call an impasse' (Midnight, p. 9). Both writers collapse the boundary between the interior and exterior experience of city space so that their protagonists feel the strain of modern life at every waking moment. Makeup, clothing, fashion and new purchases promise to smooth over the strains of life and offer a form of protection. However, the forces of modernity are too strong, and they cannot shield themselves from the violent, distinctly masculine, oppression of the city space.

Rhys's and Mansfield's accounts of spending and loss are presented from the viewpoint of the woman who exists on the outside. As writers, their awareness of this position was heightened and shaped by their own gendered experiences of the European modern city. In the words that Rishona Zimring used to describe Jean Rhys, these are 'dissonant female voice[s]'.⁴⁰ They expose the limitations of the city to its female inhabitants and also its threats. Indeed, these texts can be read as palimpsests

of Rhys's and Mansfield's alienation in the metropole as colonial migrants. As has been suggested, their writing registers the global narratives and historical shocks of the early twentieth century such as rising modernity, mass urban migration, war and the dissolution of empire.⁴¹ Their bifurcated modernism is a framework that hovers between centre and periphery, delineated in texts that reject established forms, reify the marginal and voice colonial dissent from within. As Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Matthews argue, the colonial relationship to modernism was not 'belated', as has traditionally been suggested, rather the heterogeneous modernity of colonial writers informed the 'discontinuous, and generically mixed utterance that Modernism increasingly began to favour'.⁴² It is clear that Jean Rhys's and Katherine Mansfield's literary, psychological and geographical 'wavering between two worlds' illuminates a crucial alterity and essential 'otherness' at the heart of modernism.⁴³ It is this perennial sense of in-betweenness which allows them to so deftly explore the space of the threshold, and illuminate the experiences of their protagonists who reside there.

Notes

¹ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 18.

² Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 135.

³ Jean Rhys, *Smile Please* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016), p. 124.

⁴ Vincent Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Vol 1, p. 393.

⁵ Anthropological studies of liminality were first developed by Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1909). This study adopts Victor Turner's conception of liminality as a transitional and intermediate state of being 'in-between', in which individuals are stripped of usual identity.

⁶ Arnold van Gennep, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldrine Publishing, 1969), p. 359.

⁷ Gennep, p. 359.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁹ Benjamin, p. 13.

¹⁰ Anthony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 53.

¹¹ Katherine Mansfield, 'The Tiredness of Rosabel', in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), pp. 433-38 (p. 433). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

¹² Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 3.

¹³ Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000). Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴ Alpers, p. 70.

¹⁵ Benjamin, p. 841.

¹⁶ Janet Wilson, 'Katherine Mansfield as traveller writer: space, identity, home', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Shaping Modernism: Katherine Mansfield and Her Contemporaries' (University of Cambridge, 25-26 March 2011) <<http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/cambridge-2011/>> [accessed 23 July 2020]

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans., by A. A. Brill (Global Grey Online, 2018), pp. 66-437 (p. 66). <<https://www.globalgreybooks.com/three-essays-on-the-theory-of-sexuality-ebook.html>> [accessed 30 May 2020].

¹⁸ Freud, p. 66.

¹⁹ Parliament, New Zealand, 'Indecent Publications Bill', Parliamentary Debates, Google Books (1910), p. 633.

²⁰ Kate Fullbrook, *Katherine Mansfield* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), p. 26.

²¹ Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (Penguin Classics, 2000). Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

²² Helen Carr, *Jean Rhys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 48.

²³ In 1810, Saartje, a South African Khoikhoi woman, was taken from her home in South Africa to be displayed at Piccadilly Circus due to her enlarged labia and buttocks. Her subsequent life in England was one of pain and depraved racist exploitation.

²⁴ Benjamin, p. 346.

²⁵ Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at 'World's End': Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 153.

²⁶ Terri Mullholland, 'Between Illusion and Reality, "Who's to Know": Threshold Spaces in the Interwar Novels of Jean Rhys', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 23 (2012), 445-62, (p. 457).

²⁷ Georg Simmel, 'Fashion', *American Journal of Sociology*, 62 (1957), 541-558.

²⁸ Simmel, p. 543.

²⁹ Alissa G. Karl, *Modernism and the Marketplace: Literary Culture and Consumer Capitalism in Rhys, Woolf and Stein, and Nella Larsen* (Milton: Routledge, 2013), p. 26.

³⁰ Emery, p. 153.

³¹ Karl, p. 26.

³² Cynthia Davis, 'Jamette Carnival and Afro-Caribbean Influences on the Work of Jean Rhys', *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*, 3 (2005), 1-17 (p. 6).

³³ Katherine Mansfield, 'A Cup of Tea', *Collected Stories*, pp. 332-338. Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

³⁴ Cynthia Port, "'Money, for the night is coming", Jean Rhys and the Gendered Economies of Aging', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 12 (2001), 204-17 (p. 207).

³⁵ Benjamin, p. 80.

³⁶ Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London: A & C Black, 2006), p. 55.

³⁷ Andrzej Gasiorek, 'Modernism in the 1930s', in *A History of Modernist Literature* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 432-522, (p. 461).

³⁸ Christina Britzolakis, "'This Way to the Exhibition", Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction', *Textual Practice*, 21 (2007), 457-82 (p. 471).

³⁹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ Rishona Zimring, 'The Make-up of Jean Rhys's Fiction', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 33 (2000), 212-34, (p. 226).

⁴¹ Anna Snaith has suggested that gender, empire and rising modernity are configured within Rhys's and Mansfield's writing in her book *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 1-36.

⁴² Elleke Boehmer & Stephen Matthews, 'Modernism and Colonialism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 284-300 (p. 288).

⁴³ Gennepe, p. 18.



UTTARA RANGARAJAN

Redrawing boundaries: Challenges to Colonial Spatiality in the Works of Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys

Abstract: Focusing on Katherine Mansfield's 'Prelude' and 'At The Bay' and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea and Voyage in Dark this paper examines how these authors confront and re-write colonial ideas of spatiality. As white colonial women living in metropolitan centres Mansfield and Rhys occupied liminal positions in the colonial hierarchy. Their liminality emerges in their writings, which undermine the colonial construction of spaces by exposing the 'otherness' that constantly interrupts colonial boundaries. This 'otherness' often signifies the violence and oppression that underwrite the construction of colonial categories. In Mansfield and Rhys' works liminal female characters constrained by colonial borders re-imagine the spatiality of metropolitan centres and colonies suggesting alternative ways of understanding and relating to space. Through a comparative reading of Mansfield and Rhys this paper will illustrate the parallel yet distinct ways in which both authors critique and overcome hegemonic spatial divisions.

Keywords: colonialism, postcolonial, gender, spatiality, Rhys, Mansfield

Colonialism was marked by its desire to control and order differences. In its imagining of colonized territories and populations it strove to construct clear boundaries and hierarchies. Despite this, colonialism, both as a material and discursive process generated vast differences that could not be wholly ignored or contained within strict binaries. Critiques of colonial boundaries often emerged from those whose identities did not align with these rigid categories. As white colonial women living in metropolitan centres in the early to mid-twentieth century, Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys occupied such liminal positions in the colonial system of ordering. The ambiguity and instability of their positions is reflected in their writings, which undermine and rewrite colonial boundaries. Both Mansfield's and Rhys' writings (albeit in different ways) are concerned with the fear, strangeness and anxiety that disrupt supposedly safe colonial spaces, whether this be the Pakeha settler colony (Mansfield) or the English metropole (Rhys). Their work not only interrupts the boundaries of these 'safe spaces' but also reflects on the violence and oppression that underwrite the imposition of colonial borders. Both authors often depict the perspectives of women characters whose inability to fit within rigid colonial categories leads to feelings of 'homelessness' and 'unbelonging'. Constrained and restricted by colonial boundaries these women re-imagine metropolitan and colonial spaces to express to their own ambivalent positioning. Reading Mansfield's famous

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New Zealand short stories ‘Prelude’ (1918) and ‘At the Bay’ (1922) alongside Rhys’ *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) my analysis examines the ways in which these authors redraw boundaries and question defined categories to suggest alternative models of spatiality that reflect the complex and fluid positioning of people and places.

Mansfield and Rhys spent the early years of their lives in the colonies (New Zealand and Dominica respectively) before moving to England for work. This displacement figures in the work of both writers as they examine the fraught relationship between colonial settlers, colonized lands and metropolitan centres. In his book *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, which focuses on modernist writers from the colonies, Saikat Majumdar points to the ‘ambiguous historical space’ occupied by the white settler community.¹ Colonial settlers aligned themselves with the culture and ideology of Europe as a gesture that marked their distance from the Indigenous populations of the colony. Yet, as Majumdar argues, they were undoubtedly a ‘colonial population’ anxious about ‘living on the margins’, constantly afraid of ‘being excluded from [...] metropolitan power and affluence’.² In the metropolitan cities of Europe they were viewed as inferior to the English. Marked by their associations with the indigenous populations of the colonies they were seen as ‘vulgar colonials’, strangers who did not truly belong.³

The daughter of a Welsh planter and white Creole mother, Jean Rhys was born in Dominica and spent her childhood there, moving to England in 1907, at the age of sixteen. Describing Rhys’ double alienation Helen Carr writes that growing up in Dominica, Rhys ‘repeatedly discovered she was alien, suspect and even hated’ by the black populace.⁴ As a white European Caribbean, Rhys’ presence in the West Indies is tied to the oppression and subjugation of the indigenous Caribs and other non-white inhabitants of this region. This violent history frames her relationship with Dominica and, as Helen Carr comments, her writing indicates her sorrow and envy that it ‘belongs more to the black majority than to the white Creoles’.⁵ On arrival in England, this feeling of homelessness and un-belonging is compounded. In the early twentieth century both white and black West Indians faced prejudice in England. The Caribbean planter class was regarded as degenerate; believed to have interbred with and absorbed the values of the natives. Marked as ‘alien’ by her ‘strong Caribbean accent’ Rhys was regarded as racially tainted: she was neither ‘wholly white’ nor ‘truly English’.⁶ Her occupation as a chorus girl and her status as a ‘kept woman’ caused her to slip further down the social hierarchy, leading to a deep sense of alienation, which Carr argues, gave her ‘profound insights into the workings of the [...] imperialist English social system’.⁷ Many of Rhys’ protagonists mirror her ambiguous racial and social status, occupying shifting positions in complex hierarchies. Through the eyes of these characters Rhys disturbs the spatial relationship between colony and metropolis, rewriting space to reflect the instability of colonial categories.

Scarcely a year after Rhys’s migration to England, Mansfield embarked on a parallel journey from colony to metropolitan centre. In 1908, spurred by a desire to escape the ‘bourgeois provinciality’ of New Zealand Katherine Mansfield moved to Europe.⁸ In a chapter on Mansfield in *Prose of the World* Majumdar outlines her difficult relationship with New Zealand and Europe. In the nineteenth century New Zealand was widely viewed as an outpost of Australia. Far removed from England it was a place located at the periphery of the British Empire. Raised in a tradition of Anglophilia Mansfield yearned to escape this colonial backwater for the ‘metropolitan [...] modernism’ of Europe.⁹ Yet, as Boehmer argues, as a white colonial Mansfield’s ‘sense of place in Britain and the rest of Europe was not comparable with that of the

British and the Americans'.¹⁰ In Europe Mansfield always felt like 'a little colonial', an outsider who could only 'pretend' to be English.¹¹ Despite her flight from New Zealand, Mansfield's colonial origins continued to shape her life and her writing. As Majumdar notes, most of Mansfield's 'best work, especially the late stories, have colonial settings'.¹² In stories such as, 'When Pearl Button was Kidnapped', 'At the Bay' and 'Prelude' Mansfield's critique of colonial hierarchies emerges in her depiction of white settler spaces as unstable and fragmented. Often the limitations of these spaces are explored through female characters restricted by the masculine framework of settler colonialism. Unsatisfied with their position in the gendered imperialist hierarchy these characters re-work colonial geography to express their inner lives.¹³ Mansfield and Rhys' positioning at the interstices between colonial and metropolitan worlds is reflected in their respective writings through a more fluid conception of urban, domestic and natural spaces.

Jean Rhys and the re-writing of the Caribbean

The principal characters of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark* (Antoinette and Anna respectively) are Creole women of (allegedly) white descent. Both texts cast shadows on this whiteness, alluding to the colonial fears about miscegenation in the Caribbean. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's English husband is suspicious of her lineage. He thinks that though she is a 'Creole of pure English descent [...] [she is] not English or European either'.¹⁴ For the husband her 'sad, dark and alien eyes' become a physical indication of Antoinette's 'otherness'; a sign that she is a part of the Caribbean terrain that unsettles and frightens him. In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna's stepmother Hester hints at her coloured ancestry and cultural ties to black Dominicans: '[t]hat awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked- and still do'.¹⁵ In the early twentieth century the English social system accorded great importance to accents; Anna's West Indian accent, unlike Hester's 'English lady's voice', highlights her colonial origins and troubles her whiteness. In England, Anna's fellow chorus girls refer to her as 'the Hottentot', suggesting that she embodies blackness and the hyper sexuality that was associated with it in the racial theory of the time. Anna and Antoinette occupy liminal and shifting positions in colonial hierarchies. In the Caribbean, as members of the white settler population they enjoy racial and social privileges, yet in England this identity marginalizes them and marks them as not quite white and not quite English. As colonial women they are also disempowered members of the settler class, restricted and oppressed by a gendered system. In England their gender and background lead to 'assumptions' about their 'sexual morality'.¹⁶ Antoinette and Anna with their plural and overlapping identities defy easy classification, as colonial discourse privileges as well as others them; across contexts and spaces they are perceived and inscribed in a variety of ways. Their ambivalent position within the colonial system is reflected in the ways in which space is navigated and imagined.

Wide Sargasso Sea and *Voyage in the Dark* disturb the hierarchical relationship between the metropolitan centre (England) and the colonial periphery (Caribbean). *Voyage in the Dark* opens with Anna imagining herself in Dominica, she pretends that she is 'standing outside the house at home, looking down Market Street to The Bay' (*Voyage*, p. 7). This foreshadows a common theme in the text; Anna's memories of Dominica weave through her life in England and as images from the colonial periphery intrude into the metropole, the boundaries between these spaces are blurred.

The warmth of the English fire morphs into the heat of Dominican sunlight; the path to Constance Estate is mapped onto the darkness of Anna's bedroom and England and Dominica merge into a seamless island. This jumbling of spaces not only reflects how Anna's colonial identity frames her life in England but also disrupts the process of colonial mapping. Boehmer writes that colonial '[mappings]' employed '[c]lassifications and codes imported from Europe' to describe 'topographies that were entirely un-European'.¹⁷ This process sought to control the difference and strangeness of colonies by placing them within a familiar framework. Distant territories were shackled to Europe and marked as 'subject and secondary'.¹⁸ In using Dominican spaces to interpret English cities Anna inverts this frame and highlights England as the strange and unsettling space that must be approached by a recourse to the familiar. By mapping Dominica onto England Anna undermines Europe's geographical primacy and breaks down the division between centre and periphery.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette's conception of England emerges from an assortment of pictures and stories. '[S]ome romantic novel, a stray remark never forgotten, a sketch, a picture, a song [...] fixe[s]' (Sargasso, p. 56) her idea of England and try as he might her husband cannot change her mind. Boehmer, presenting empire as a 'textual exercise', notes, 'from the early days of colonization, [...] not only texts in general, but literature [...] underpinned efforts to interpret other lands'.¹⁹ She argues that colonial texts did not merely reflect imperial preoccupations but actively created, 'clarif[ied]' and propagated them.²⁰ Texts then, like military or economic power were a form of control and writing about the colonies was a means of exerting 'imaginative command'.²¹ As such, Antoinette's England, viewed through a prism of text and imagery parodies the imperial gaze in its textual construction of colonies. Paralleling colonial officials who considered texts more 'reliable' than the 'accounts' (Sargasso, p. 56) of native inhabitants, Antoinette draws her ideas about England from secondary sources and is resistant to the information provided by her husband. Here, England is imagined from Dominica, and Antoinette's 'peripheral' perspective dominates over her husband's 'central' one.

Both Antoinette and Anna also tend to view England as dreamlike. For Anna sometimes 'England [is] a dream' while '[a]t other times England [is] the real thing and out there [is] the dream' (Voyage, p. 8). Antoinette's convictions are firmer, she insists that England with its 'millions of people [...] houses and streets' is far more 'unreal' than her 'beautiful island' (Sargasso, p. 48). The use of words denoting 'mystery and inarticulateness' to describe colonial territories indicates the insecurity of colonialism, its inability to control and order everything. By describing England as unreal and dreamlike Rhys both emphasizes this insecurity and upsets the colonial gaze, displacing England from its position as the determiner of reality. Suspended between the 'worlds [...] of the Caribbean and the metropole', Anna and Antoinette problematize the hierarchical demarcation of England and the Caribbean by interpreting the metropole through the gaze of the colony.²²

If *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark* rewrite the relationship between the metropole and colony they also question the relationship between colonizers and colonial spaces. Colonial discourse seeks to represent colonies as chaotic and threatening spaces that demand a 'restoration of order'.²³ Concurrently, they are also seen as regions of 'absence' that require an 'affirming presence'.²⁴ Such constructions blur indigenous populations with the colonial landscape, equating them with nature while the white colonizer stands in for the forces of order, civilization and culture. This opposition between culture (colonizer) and nature (colonised) 'naturalizes the process of domination' and erases the mark of colonial appropriation by depicting it

as a ‘response to a putative appeal on the part of the colonised land and people’.²⁵ In her novels Rhys problematizes such a fixing of the Caribbean, which emerges as a multifaceted space that evades the imposition of singular meaning. Through Anna and Antoinette’s complicated relationship with the Caribbean Rhys uncovers the effaced ‘mark of colonial appropriation’ and explores how colonial violence has impacted upon the Caribbean terrain.

In *Voyage in the Dark* Rhys depicts the way that colonies in the Caribbean were stereotyped and understood in twentieth-century England. An English book that Anna quotes from describes Dominica as a ‘goodly island [...] but all overgrown with woods’ (*Voyage*, p. 17). Her older paramour, Mr. Jeffries, remarks that the island is ‘too lush’ for his taste while Anna’s fellow chorus girl dismisses her as having been born in the ‘West Indies or somewhere’ (*Voyage*, p. 13). Anna’s memories of Dominica provide a contrast to the assumptions of her English companions; the Dominica she remembers is not empty and wild, but filled with people, sights and smells. Trapped in cold and ‘grey’ England Anna conjures a detailed picture of Market Street with its ‘wood-smoke and salt fishcakes’; ‘patients standing outside the surgery’ and smells of ‘cinnamon and cloves’ (*Voyage*, p. 7). *Voyage in the Dark* describes Dominica in intricate and specific detail, presenting it as a fully realized place and not just ‘somewhere’ in the West Indies. Anna remembers the various streets and roads in Dominica, the shapes of the hills and the different smells of the ‘sea breeze and land breeze’ (*Voyage*, p. 8). To Anna, England rather than Dominica is a chaotic and blurry space. She thinks:

This is London – hundreds thousands of white people white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning down one after another all alike all stuck together- the streets like smooth shut in-ravines and the dark houses frowning down. (*Voyage*, p. 17)

Anna’s London, then, is disordered and sinister, teeming with indistinguishable ‘white people’ who melt into the dreary background. As she moves from town to town Anna thinks that ‘all the houses [...] and streets [...] [are] exactly the same’ (*Voyage*, pp. 1-3). In an inversion of colonial categories, Dominica is rendered in painful detail while England comes across as a blur of dark colours and repetitive sights. It is relevant that Anna’s understanding of England is an explicitly gendered one. Snaith notes that in the metropole the bodies of colonial women were ‘invariably figured as [...] sexually promiscuous’.²⁶ Anna’s reading of England as dangerous and claustrophobic pre-empts her experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation by English men. Anna’s perceptions of England can be placed in dialogue with the ways in which Mansfield’s female protagonists imagine the Pakeha settler colony. For both sets of protagonists these safe, ordered, ‘English spaces’ present as oppressive sites brimming with the possibility of sexual violence. I will discuss Mansfield’s gendered representation of the settler colony in the next section.

As much as she yearns to be back in Dominica, Anna’s connection to the island is painful and complicated. Though she refers to the Caribbean as ‘home’, Anna experiences acute feelings of estrangement and unbelonging in Dominica. H. Adlai Murdoch contends that ‘the complex social patterns’ of colonial Dominica ‘drive [Anna] to disown the white world into which she is born’.²⁷ In *Voyage in the Dark* Anna mentions that she ‘hate[s] being white’ and fears that her whiteness will make her ‘old and sad’ (*Voyage*, p. 72) like Hester. Antoinette is similarly estranged from

the white colonial class in Jamaica as the ‘Jamaican ladies’ do not ‘[approve]’ (Sargasso, p. 9) of her mother. Excluded from white creole society Antoinette and her mother live on the isolated Coulibri Estate where ‘few people come to see them’ (Sargasso, p. 9). Unable to see herself as a part of the white colonial population Anna longs to be black. Unable to identify with the white colonial class, Anna and Antoinette long to be accepted into the black Creole world. Both women seem to equate blackness with belonging to the Caribbean and idealize the relationship that black creoles have with the West Indian landscape. Tia, the black servant girl who is Antoinette’s childhood companion, navigates the Jamaican terrain with ease: ‘sharp stones’ fail to ‘hurt her bare feet’ and ‘fires always [light] for her’ (Sargasso, p. 15). Christophine, who works in Antoinette’s house, is an obeah who can bend the natural world to her will. Antoinette does not share this easy bond with nature; wandering through remote parts of the Coulibri Estate ‘razor grass cuts [her] arms and legs’, snakes drift into her path and red and white ants ‘swarm’ (Sargasso, p. 16) around her. For Anna the Dominican landscape brims with threats: boat rides on ‘lovely moonlight nights’ are flooded with the fear of ‘sharp-toothed’ barracoutas and the ‘terrible’ (Voyage, p. 53) Dominican sun induces a sickness that lasts for months. Black characters act as mediators who ward off these threats demonstrating their superior knowledge of nature. Anna’s cook Francine calmly kills the cockroach that petrifies her while Black Pappy, the boatman, keeps Anna safe from barracoutas. Rhys’ depiction of black people as being close to nature doubtless invests in and furthers colonial stereotypes. However, it also doubles as a symbolic expression of the black creoles’ more legitimate claim to the Caribbean. Anna and Antoinette’s alienation from the natural world comes from their inheritance of a past that wrought destruction on the environment as well as black and indigenous peoples in the Caribbean. Carrine Mardorossian notes the extent to which ‘colonialism, slavery [...] and the sugarcane plantation system have irremediably transformed the Caribbean environment.’²⁸ This destructive history haunts Anna and Antoinette, preventing any easy relationship between them and the Caribbean. Anna remembers an old slave list that she saw at Constance Estate and the entry, ‘Maillotte Boyd, aged 18, mulatto, house servant’ (Voyage, p. 56), echoes through her mind highlighting the role played by her ancestors in the slave trade. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (set shortly after the Emancipation of black slaves in British colonies) Antoinette’s Coulibri Estate functions as a physical marker of this discriminatory institution and is burned to the ground by black Jamaicans. The black population labels Antoinette and her family ‘white cockroaches’, while Anna herself repeatedly compares white people to woodlice. Both are invasive species of insects that wreak havoc upon their environments. Vestiges of an oppressive regime, both women are rejected by the black populace they so long to be a part of. Anna’s idol Francine ‘dislike[s]’ her because she is white, and Antoinette’s only friend, Tia, cruelly calls her a ‘white nigger’, remarking, ‘black nigger better than white nigger’ (Sargasso, p. 14). Anna and Antoinette then, are imprinted by the history of invasion, violence and subjugation that also marks the space of the colony. Rhys’ Caribbean repeatedly reveals the signs of colonial appropriation; it is not an ‘idealized natural landscape devoid of human history and labour’, but a space that is profoundly shaped and moulded by colonial endeavours and their repercussions.²⁹

It is clear that Anna and Antoinette’s envisioning of the Caribbean is deeply influenced by their personal and social histories, and through these characters Rhys indicates how imperialism and identity can impact on the construction of spaces. Antoinette’s husband, for instance, views Dominica (the region they move to after their marriage) quite differently. Displaying a masculine, colonial desire to

appropriate and order ‘difference’, he is perturbed by the ‘disturbing, secret loveliness’ of the Caribbean and wants to uncover what the island ‘hides’ (Sargasso, p. 179; original emphasis). His inability to fully understand or subdue the island and its inhabitants morphs into a colonial anxiety that leads him to view the region as a ‘menacing’ (Sargasso, p. 41) space. Though Rhys’ narrative gives no access to black perspectives it suggests the complex inner lives of characters like Christophine and Francine and hints at their divergent understandings of the Caribbean. In Rhys’ novels the Caribbean emerges an unfixed space which is open to several meanings. Inscribed with a complicated history it overflows colonial categories that seek to limit and order colonized spaces.

Katherine Mansfield and the troubling of settler spaces

In a parallel questioning of rigid boundaries Mansfield’s short stories ‘Prelude’ and ‘At the Bay’ indicate the porous boundaries of white settler space in colonial New Zealand. Focusing on the lives of the Burnell family these stories unfold against an ‘orderly and apparently secure pastoral landscape.’³⁰ ‘Prelude’ begins with the two youngest members of the Burnell family, Lottie and Kezia, travelling through the night to their new home in the countryside. The little girls’ journey through ‘unknown country’ with ‘bushy valleys’ and ‘wide shallow rivers’ describes a wild and unsettling terrain that provides a contrast to the domesticity and safety of the Burnell homestead.³¹ Lottie’s and Kezia’s crossing from unfamiliar to familiar spaces opens a recurrent theme in both ‘Prelude’ and ‘At the Bay’, where the mundane settler terrain is frequently interrupted by strange and disturbing occurrences.

Majumdar argues that New Zealand’s location at the very margins of Empire made the settler community all the more zealous about ‘investing’ the “‘alien” local landscape [...] with all they could associate with England’.³² The English garden, with its connotations of order and civilization was one such investiture, which fulfilled settler’s needs for ‘points of [...] cultural familiarity’.³³ Yet, these ‘English’ gardens occupy a settler space built upon the violent displacement and subjugation of the Māori people. In Mansfield’s stories this violent history presents as the Freudian *unheimlich* of “secure” settler spaces, a repressed truth that nevertheless ‘[comes] to light’ and interrupts the idyllic settler garden.³⁴ While exploring the garden in her new home Kezia is delighted by one part of it which is filled with roses and geraniums and enclosed within ‘high box borders’ (Prelude, p. 31). However, the other side of the garden with ‘tall dark trees’, ‘feathery cream flowers’ and ‘strange bushes’ is ‘frightening’ and seems to be ‘no garden at all’ (Prelude, p. 31). The presence of unfamiliar and obviously non-English flora in the Burnell’s English-style garden points to the indigenous peoples and cultures that settler colonialism sought to displace and erase. The ‘fat swelling’ aloe with its ‘cruel leaves and fleshy stem’ (Prelude, p. 34) that Kezia encounters a little later serves a similar metonymic purpose. Standing apart from its tame background the aloe is strikingly resilient. It has a body that that ‘no wind [can] ever shake’, and it clings so tightly to the earth that it ‘might have [...] claws instead of roots’ (Prelude, p. 34). ‘Old’ and ‘stout’ with deep ties to the earth the aloe predates the settler garden and indicates the endurance of the Māori people against colonial violence and domination (Prelude, p. 34). The safety of the settler home space is always shadowed by the otherness and difference that was suppressed during its creation. In Mansfield’s gardens *heimlich* eventually ‘coincides with its opposite *unheimlich*’ undermining the myth of colonial control.³⁵ There is a

connection here between Rhys' depiction of England and Mansfield's depiction of colonial New Zealand. As 'strange' (Prelude, p. 31) flowers and plants intrude into the Burnell's English garden they mirror the Caribbean images that transform Anna's London. The 'Englishness' of both landscapes is disrupted by images and signs of colonial 'others'. Demarcated colonial spaces, the metropole in Rhys' work and the settler colony in Mansfield's, are interrupted by geographies that colonialism has sought to subordinate and control.

In 'Prelude' and 'At the Bay' Mansfield suggests the gendered construction of settler spaces, indicating that they function to constrain and control women. The anxiety that Mansfield's male characters express over losing this control highlights colonialism's incomplete spatial control. As the father of the various Burnell children and the male head of the household, Stanley Burnell is convinced that he must be the centre of all the attentions and efforts of women in the house. As his wife Linda notes: she must spend all her time 'restoring [Stanley] [...] calming him down and listening to his story'.³⁶ In 'At the Bay' as he leaves home for work Stanley is overcome with anxiety about what the women of the house do in his absence. The scene is described in the following way:

Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the man out of the house. Their [the women's] very voices were changed as they called to one another; they sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret. Beryl went over to the table. "Have another cup of tea, mother. It's still hot. She wanted, somehow, to celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now. There was no man to disturb them; the whole perfect day was theirs. (Bay, p. 12)

Mansfield's third person narration, which slips between omniscient description and revelations of a character's inner feelings in free indirect style, is somewhat vague about the source of this passage. The passage could be a description of the women's behaviour in Stanley's absence or a portrayal of his insecure imaginings about what happens when he is away. This ambiguity allows the narrative to perform the dual role of highlighting the masculine insecurity that accompanies any small loss of control as well as the burden that such scrutiny places on women. Stanley, thus, is presented as a character threatened by gestures of female independence: he requires constant affirmations of status from the women of the house and he expects them to respond to his comings and goings with appropriate vigour, joy and sadness. Stanley's fixation on control is reminiscent of Antoinette's husband's desire to uncover the 'secrets' (Sargasso, p. 52) of Dominica. Both men are troubled by what lies beyond their gaze and both men project their anxious fantasies onto places and people who escape their control. While Stanley imagines the treachery of his wife and sister-in-law, the husband envisions Dominica as 'alien' and 'disturbing' (Sargasso, p. 52). Both Stanley and the husband indicate settler colonialism's masculine obsession with complete control: of land, of women – of all signs of difference and otherness.

While Stanley seeks to strengthen colonial boundaries, his wife Linda wants to escape them. For Mansfield's female characters the settler space is often constraining and claustrophobic and they strive to imagine it in more fluid and liberating ways. Sitting in the garden Linda Burnell, the mother of four children, dreams of escaping the burdens of being a wife and mother. To Linda the fertile garden represents the 'dread of having children' (Bay, p. 26). Unimpressed by the beautiful flowers on the manuka tree, Linda notes that as 'soon as they flowered, they fell and were scattered

[...] wasted' (Bay, p. 24). Linda views her life as similarly wasted, 'broken' through 'awful journeys' (Bay, pp. 26-7) of childbearing. Musing on the repetitive weariness of her days, Linda thinks: 'I shall go on having children and Stanley will go on making money and the children and the gardens will grow bigger and bigger' (Prelude, p. 63). Like Linda, her sister Beryl is also unsatisfied with life in the settler colony. Majumdar argues that for colonial women, life in remote settler spaces was often unbearably vacuous and boring. Unable to participate in the 'masculinized ambitions of settler colonialism' young women like Beryl viewed the colony as a tedious space of 'social and sexual isolation'.³⁷ In 'Prelude', shortly after moving into the new house, Beryl writes to her friend that she is 'buried' in the countryside with no hope of anyone '[coming] out from town' (Prelude, p. 64) to visit her. Her letter speaks to the loneliness and boredom that shaped the lives of many settler women.

Though it is portrayed, as a bastion of safety and security, the settler colony is fragmented by masculine violence. Linda and Beryl's quotidian lives are ruptured by threats of sexual violence that indicate the destructive consequences of an ideology of masculine control. When Beryl steps out of her window to join the handsome Harry Kember for a nighttime stroll, he '[snatches] her to him' (Bay, p. 57) and tries to drag her behind the fuschia bush. His threatening presence transforms the beautiful garden into a masculinized and fearful space with 'pit[s] of darkness' and 'shadows like bars of iron' (Bay, p. 57). Kember's attempt to rape Beryl destroys the illusion of safety that envelops the white settler space. For Linda, the threat of violence comes from within the borders of the Burnell home. Stanley who is otherwise presented as a good-natured albeit silly man, at times, 'really frighten[s]' (Prelude, p. 61) Linda. She thinks of the 'times' when 'he [is] too strong for her' and '[rushes] at her' (Prelude, p. 44). Mansfield strongly hints that Stanley is sexually violent and has forced unwanted children upon Linda, indicating that for colonial women masculine control over settler space makes it unsafe and insecure.

Both women in the Burnell household find some respite in re-imagining the settler space to express their hopes and desires. At night, gazing into the garden from her window, Beryl views it as a magical and romantic space, where 'every bush, every leaf, [...] the white palings [and] even the stars' become feminine 'conspirators' (Bay, p. 54) aiding her fantasy of finding a lover. She envisions a lover waiting for her in the garden and imagines asking him to 'take [her] away from all [the] other people' (Bay, p. 54). Here, Beryl invests the settler space with her dreams of romance, briefly transforming it into a space where her frustrated desires can come to fruition. Beryl's fantasies, which involve rich men 'who [have] just arrived from England' (Prelude, p. 17) also strive to reconnect her 'provincial backwater' with the 'metropolitan heart of empire, England'.³⁸ For Linda, it is the aloe tree whose strange appearance frightens Kezia that allows her to re-imagine the settler space. Almost infertile, flowering only 'once every hundred years' the aloe represents an alternative femininity that Linda aspires to. Further, the aloe's connection to the unsettled lands beyond rupture the rigid boundaries of the colonial space, presenting Linda with the hope of escape. Roaming the garden at night, Linda imagines the aloe as a ship and the 'high grassy bank' it grows from as a 'wave' that will carry her 'far away' (Prelude, p. 60). Transforming the garden into the sea, Linda wrests it from its position within the settler colony and re-imagines it as a space without boundaries where she can be free of her family and their constraints. The imaginative fluidity of Linda's garden questions the rigidity of colonial borders and highlights the connections between the settler colony and the land beyond.

Conclusion

As displaced modernist writers suspended between the metropole and the colony, Mansfield and Rhys question rigid colonial boundaries and illuminate the connections between white settler spaces, unsettled lands and metropolitan centres. Troubling colonial notions of fixed and closed spaces they re-imagine (colonies and metropolises) as open to myriad significations. By approaching the colonies and the metropole from the perspective of characters marginalized by colonial and patriarchal systems Rhys and Mansfield highlight complicated relationship between identities and terrains. Both authors also trouble colonial myths of control and supremacy by showing how colonized ‘others’ are marked by, and in turn leave their mark upon, colonial spaces. It is, however, necessary to note that Rhys’ and Mansfield’s critiques of colonialism are limited by their stereotypical portrayals of people of colour. As argued earlier, Rhys’ depictions of black Caribbeans fails to diverge from problematic colonial constructions of blackness. With the exception of a few stories, such as ‘When Pearl Button was Kidnapped’, there is very little direct representation of Māori characters in Mansfield’s work, Majumdar notes, that in most of Mansfield’s writing all signs of the Māori are limited to ‘allegory or metonymy’.³⁹ Repeating Rhys’ blurring of black people with nature, Mansfield’s Māori are often only visible as features of the natural environment. Despite such problematic stereotyping of colonized people, the work of these two authors include visionary critiques of colonial spatiality and the destructive process of colonization. In their works, colonial boundaries are disrupted and discarded as spatial re-imaginings depict the diverse and complex reality of both spaces and people.

Notes

¹ Saikat Majumdar, *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 73.

² Majumdar, p. 73.

³ Anna Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 19.

⁴ Helen Carr, “‘Intemperate and Unchaste’: Jean Rhys and Caribbean Creole Identity”, *Women: A Cultural Review*, 14 (2003), 38-62 (p. 43).

⁵ Carr, p. 39.

⁶ Carr, p. 46.

⁷ Carr, pp. 49-50; p. 43.

⁸ Boehmer, Elleke, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 62.

⁹ Majumdar, p. 75.

¹⁰ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 61.

¹¹ Katherine, Mansfield, *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by J. Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1954), p. 157.

¹² Majumdar, p. 77.

- ¹³ Elleke Boehmer, 'Mansfield as Colonial Modernist: Difference Within', in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 57-71 (p. 57).
- ¹⁴ Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. by Judith L. Raiskin, Norton Critical Editions (London, New York: Norton), p. 39. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.
- ¹⁵ Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London, New York: Norton, 1982), p. 65. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.
- ¹⁶ Snaith, p.19.
- ¹⁷ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 17.
- ¹⁸ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 18.
- ¹⁹ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, pp. 14-15
- ²⁰ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 5.
- ²¹ Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, p. 5.
- ²² H. Adlai Murdoch, 'The Discourses of Jean Rhys: Resistance, Ambivalence and Creole Indeterminacy', in *Jean Rhys: Twenty-First-Century Approaches*, ed. by Erika Johnson and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 146-67 (p. 152).
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- ³¹ Katherine Mansfield, 'Prelude', in *Bliss and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), pp. 1-70 (p. 9). Further references to this story are given after the quotations in the text.
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- ³³ Anne Brown-Berens, 'Literatures of Expatriation and the Colonial Mansfield', in *Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)Colonial*, ed. by Janet Wilson and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 116-26 (p. 121).
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- ³⁵ Freud, p. 226.
- ³⁶ Katherine Mansfield, 'At the Bay', in *The Garden Party* (New York: The Modern Library, 1922), pp. 1-59 (p. 26). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.
- ³⁷ Majumdar, p. 74; p. 73.
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MEGAN KUSTER

Domestic Settler Colonialism in Katherine Mansfield's 'Old Tar' and 'The Garden Party'

Abstract: Focusing on the domestic ideals of settler colonialism, this essay provides an analysis of Katherine Mansfield's representations of house and home in several of her New Zealand short stories. The first part of the essay considers Mansfield's use of Gothic tropes to represent settler-Indigenous spatial relations in the story 'Old Tar' (1913), suggesting that the dread-tinged colonial house challenges settler colonial ideas about land-tenure and inheritance. The second part of the essay discusses the development of second-generation settler identities, analysing Mansfield's representations of class in the context of settler spatial relations in 'The Garden Party' (1921). The essay's broader claim is that 'Old Tar' and 'The Garden Party' challenge the domestic ideals of settler colonialism by showing the unpleasant realities of settler patriarchy and the racialised, gendered, and class-based underpinnings of second-generation settler sociability and culture.

Keywords: Katherine Mansfield; 'The Garden Party'; 'Old Tar'; settler colonialism; domesticity; colonial Gothic; second-generation settler culture

“ Haven't you got any Houses in Boxes? ”, the settler child protagonist asks her Māori hosts in Katherine Mansfield's 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' (1912), “ Don't you all live in a row? Don't the men go to offices? Aren't there any nasty things? ”.¹ Pearl's questions reveal her mental model of 'home' as predictable repetitions that enclose women and children, porously permitting the arrival and departure of men, and charged by a perceived atmosphere of unpleasant roughness: of 'nasty things'. Pearl's initial decision to leave her home with the two 'dark women' is accompanied by assumed familiarity and curiosity, 'wondering what they had in their House of Boxes' (Pearl, p. 286). Pearl's questions later in the story register her surprise at the existence of alternative, unfamiliar domestic arrangements with different architectural, social and environmental ideals. When Pearl first sees the sea, for example, she cries out, “[w]hat is it, what is it? ”, but this is transformed into delight when she dips her feet in: “ Oo, oo! [. . .] Lovely, lovely! ” (Pearl, pp. 287-8). Pearl's surprise and delight take on meaning not just as a settler's romanticised idealisation of Indigenous environment and culture, but also as a gendered and racialised repudiation of the type of middle-class domesticity suggested by the 'Houses of Boxes' she invokes.

Scholars have addressed the significance of the domestic environments that recur across Mansfield's work, but the particular domestic themes that appear in her New Zealand writing remain understudied.² 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' encapsulates key themes of Indigenous spatial relations, criticism of the ideals of imperial domesticity, and children's relative but limited freedom to move between

homes of different socio-cultural values. Yet it is not Mansfield's only New Zealand story to do so. This essay considers the socio-cultural relations and processes depicted in Mansfield's New Zealand houses, suggesting that they are part of a challenge to the discourses of settlement and the construction of settler community values.³ More specifically, it argues that Mansfield challenges the ideals of the colonial home and family through uneasy representations of questionable land-tenure and inheritance, and through settler children characters, who look to women of other classes and cultures for ideal representations of home that are aligned with security and love. In a detailed reading of 'Old Tar' (1913), I analyse Mansfield's critique of spatial relations between settler men and Indigenous land, arguing that Mansfield's use of colonial Gothic tropes, particularly the motif of the house, challenges settler entitlement and subverts the settlement discourse's ideal of domestic colonial family life by illuminating its unpleasant realities. The last part of the essay offers a reading of 'The Garden Party' (1921), along with some reference to 'The Doll's House' (1921), in the context of the child rescue discourse, focusing on attempts by second-generation settler children to navigate the more fluid social boundaries that were emerging in early twentieth-century New Zealand. I argue that Mansfield's story queries the possibility of reciprocal socio-cultural and racial relations and explores the local limits of second-generation settler affiliation as an imagined national community.⁴

Houses and homes: Domesticity, the Gothic, and child rescue

The frequency with which houses appear in Mansfield's New Zealand short fiction suggests their importance as places that encode familial and cultural relations. A variety of dwelling types feature in her twenty-nine short stories set in New Zealand, including houses, cottages, bungalows, huts, and 'shell-like' homes. Most often, the main setting is a box-type house like the ones referred to by Pearl Button, with other sorts of domiciles mentioned as comparisons.⁵ For example, in 'The Garden Party' scenes move between a two-storey settler house and clusters of 'little cottages'.⁶ Rarely does the main domestic setting deviate from the middle-class settler house. A notable exception is 'The Woman at the Store' (1912) which, the narrator specifies, takes place in a *whare*. Mansfield's untranslated use of a Māori word for 'house' or 'dwelling' is striking given that she infrequently included Māori language words in her fiction. 'The Woman at the Store' does not feature Indigenous characters, but the use of the Māori word suggests a geographical location beyond the established settler village communities with place names like 'Hawk Street, or Charlotte Crescent', which draw the attention of Lottie from 'Prelude' (1917).⁷

Mansfield's colonial New Zealand households extend beyond primary architectural structures to include gardens, paddocks, fences, gates, avenues, roads, paths and boundary markers. In her domestic Antipodean stories, features of the landscape function as property boundaries, making explicit the spatial aspects of troubled settler-Indigenous relations that emerge through Indigenous responses to settler struggles for land. As Edward Said has emphasised, contests for land were as much disputes over power, culture, and knowledge as they were conflicts over geography.⁸ In the context of settler colonialism, where land is the primary field on which the reproduction of imperial culture is played out, domestic social relations extend beyond the house to include the land. Jason Rudy discusses the significance of this in his analysis of the Australian landscape in poetry produced by 'native' or colonial-born writers, underscoring the importance of communal, as opposed to individual, social identities for the success of the project of settler colonialism:

to invoke community was, in colonial poetry of the [nineteenth century], to indicate success: triumph over a hostile environment, the founding of a new homeland. To speak as an individual, as a voice manifest most clearly as an individuated lyric, was most often to fail: to fall victim to the landscape, to remain in a position of existential dread or uncomfortable ambivalence.⁹

While Rudy is mainly concerned with the work accomplished through poetry in colonial Australia, his comparison between communal and individual settler invocations of the landscape is useful for conceptualising the dynamism of Mansfield's fictional domesticity and for thinking through settler-Indigenous spatial relationships that themselves hinge on distinctions between individual and communal forms of home-making.¹⁰ Erin Mercer, analysing Mansfield's colonial Gothic specifically and Australasian Gothic more broadly, has suggested that settler colonial landscapes replace the architectural sites of the European Gothic as the site of complex threat, as these landscapes resist being tamed and remain involved with 'the oppression of Indigenous populations similarly capable of responding in a hostile manner to European settlement'.¹¹

A number of Mansfield's New Zealand stories feature settler houses in ways that foreground settler-Indigenous spatial relations. In 'Kezia and Tui' (1939), a settler child visits familiar Māori households; 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped' imagines a settler child as a guest in unfamiliar Māori communities; and 'Prelude' and 'Old Tar' both feature settler men who boast about how the land on which their houses stand had been Māori-owned, acquired 'dirt cheap' (Prelude, p. 66), 'off Ole Puhui'.¹² These stories challenge the notion that settler ownership of the land is resolved, instead emphasising ongoing and contested negotiations over land and offering a counter narrative to patriarchal settler domesticity.¹³

If a reworking of the Gothic genre allowed Mansfield to engage with the past through the discourse of settlement and inheritance, the child rescue discourse allowed her to engage with the future as concerns about the management of the statutory rights of children overlapped with the conception of metropole-colony relations as akin to parent-child dynamics.¹⁴ Penny Russell has theorised an overlap between notions of domesticity and the discourse of child rescue in the context of settler colonialism in nineteenth-century Australia, arguing that:

[t]he home as a spatial, material entity, its enclosed, protective spaces filled with the domestic paraphernalia of civilisation, seemed designed to mark the security of possession and of moral and social entitlement. But in so many ways, the colonising, civilising agenda disturbed the very illusion of refuge on which it crucially depended.¹⁵

Reflecting fears about the effect of environment on civilisation, the child rescue discourse was haunted by images of 'lost' children who disappear from colonial families and are deemed at-risk in the largely 'unknown, unbounded, unscribed and [. . .] imagined [colonial] land'.¹⁶

In this regard, all settler children at a geographical remove from the centre of imperial civilisation, not just 'lost' ones like Pearl Button, are potentially at risk of having colonial cultural standards dissolved. As Russell argues, while racial anxiety provided imaginative fuel to stoke fears about white children 'lost' among 'Black'

and ‘Indigenous’ society, growing social anxieties in the late nineteenth century also suggested that ‘the child of poverty, neglected and perhaps abused, was lost in a moral rather than a physical wilderness, deprived of opportunities to acquire the social rules and attachments that would lead to both docility and success’.¹⁷ In other words, the child rescue discourse was motivated by the fear that settler children who were exposed to and associated with ‘others’ would become uncivilised. Thus, a child born into poverty, just as much as a child taken in by Indigenous society, could provoke fears of civilizational degeneration.

As part of their role in becoming civilised subjects, Mansfield’s settler children learn values from settler elders. In ‘The Doll’s House’, when Kezia invites the shunned Kelvey children into the garden to play with her popular new toy, Lil Kelvey ‘gasps’: “‘Your ma told our ma you wasn’t to speak to us’”.¹⁸ This informal, often domestically-located, education takes place within the context of a settler community that shifts but does not dismantle hierarchical boundaries that reproduce oppressions. The learning of settler children therefore often appears as incomplete. In ‘How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped’, Pearl expresses fear that she will be chastised for her unpolished manners. Preparing to eat a peach she had been given, Pearl ‘sat on her petticoat as she had been taught to sit in dusty places’ but when the fruit juice spills down her dress she exclaims ‘in a very frightened voice to one of the women, “I’ve spilt all the juice!’” (Pearl, p. 287). Based on her understanding of settler etiquette, Pearl’s fear of being rebuked by an elder for her impropriety is proven unwarranted in this scene: “‘That doesn’t matter at all,” said the woman, patting her cheek’ (Pearl, p. 287).

Mansfield’s female settler characters, in a challenge to imperial cultures of domesticity, look in two directions—across both class and race divides—to test out affinities with other women, not so much out of a politics of anticolonialism but out of a rejection of imperial housekeeping and gendered models of domesticity.¹⁹ Her male figures, on the other hand, often focus on unsettling questions relating to land-tenure and patrilineal inheritance, thus simultaneously reinscribing and disturbing the idea of gendered separate spheres. In each case, settlement and enclosure is aligned with domesticity in ways that both recognise and elide Indigenous culture and sovereignty, marking out the cumulative manner with which effects of imperial domesticity overlap with categories of race and gender.

‘The big white nest’: A dreadful inheritance

‘Old Tar’, an important early story in Mansfield’s oeuvre, deals with settlement history in New Zealand, incorporating elements of the colonial Gothic mode and illuminating settler discomfort with an inheritance gained from ancestral usurpers. Among the story’s colonial Gothic motifs are the eerie bush, untranslatable ‘sounds’, and a ‘strange voice’ (Tar, pp. 343-4), which provoke fears of isolation and racial otherness in Old Tar. The story of a settler dream-turned-nightmare, ‘Old Tar’ is set in the remote interior and begins with a memory from Old Tar’s early boyhood of Sunday mornings with his father:

on the great green shoulders of Makra Hill [. . .] Behind them was the new road leading to Wadesville, and a further drop to the township, Karori; but all that was hidden, and might have been the length of days away. (Tar, pp. 340-1)²⁰

Located at a distance from established settler villages, yet connected by the road, removed from populous areas, not yet part of the isolated but residential frontier backblocks, the setting is initially depicted as empty: ‘There was nothing to be seen to left or right of them but other hill-tops bounded by dark, high masses of bush’ (Tar, p. 341).²¹ Although, at first, there appears to be ‘nothing’ in this place, on closer inspection the masses of foliage in the form of ‘fairy trumpets’ and the ‘laughing’, ‘stealthy, quiet’ sea coalesce into a fleeting Romantic tone while the boundaries ‘through the fence’ and by ‘dark, high masses of bush’ (Tar, p. 340-1) interject a hint of the eeriness to come. The landscape projects an uneasy sense that the wilderness beyond the domestic paddocks enclosed by a ‘barbed-wire fence’ (Tar, p. 340) exceeds settler control: the fence appears to keep the bush, understood to be the domain of Indigenous people, demarcated.²²

In ‘Old Tar’, Indigenous ownership of the land is recognised at the very moment the property is bequeathed to the settler son, which has the effect of querying the legitimacy and endurance of settler ownership:

‘[M]y Pap bought this from the Maoris [sic] – he did. Ye-es! Got it off Ole Puhui for a ‘suit of clothes an’ a lookin’-glass of yer Granmaw’s.’ My stars! He had an eye! Larst thing the ole man says to me was – ‘James,’ ’e says, ‘don’t you be muckin’ about with that bit of land top of Makra Hill. Don’t you sell it. ’And it on,’ ’e says, ‘to you an’ yours’.
(Tar, p. 341)

The father’s explanation of the title’s origin frightens the boy who questions the place’s value: “‘Wot — all this?’” cried the little boy, frightened, clutching the hill, as though he expected it to jump away with him on its back’ (Tar, p. 341).

The boy’s reservations about his inheritance fade fast in the face of elaborate fantasies of a future grand house on the hill. The reappearance of the weight of inheritance, and its questionable reproductive potential, coincides with the death of the father as Old Tar, now in his fifties, hastens to bring his domestic vision to life. On the night before his family is due to see the finished house, Old Tar has a dreadful existential crisis. As evening arrives, the house seems to absorb and reflect the eerie qualities that were long-ago associated with the land’s isolation, except now there is more menace and the house is endowed with the perception of sight: ‘The big white house, with all its hollow eyes, glared at Old Tar’ (Tar, p. 343). The house’s scowl echoes the lamenting landscape: ‘and then he heard the wind, very slow, snuffling round the house like a lonely dog: “Ooh Hee! Oooh Hee!” it sounded’ (Tar, p. 343). Despite the incomprehensible sounds of the wind, Old Tar interprets them: “‘A rare, sad noise,” thought Old Tar, shaking his head to it. “Sounds as if it’d lost something an’ couldn’t find it again”” (Tar, p. 343). The inarticulate sound, for which only one explanation is posited, is interpreted by Old Tar as “‘Lost for evermore””, stirring ‘strange, uneasy ripples’ in his previously ‘quiet heart’ (Tar, p. 343). Old Tar’s fear unsettles and disorients him: ‘Sitting by himself like that, he felt queer and frightened, somehow. “Ooh Hee! Ooh Hee!” sounded the wind, rattling the window sashes. “Tain’t like it used to sound up here,” he thought. “Taint like it was in the old man’s time”” (Tar, p. 343).

Old Tar’s overwhelming fear in this place is not a new experience, as he was frightened when his father first told him the hill would be his legacy. The intergenerational dimension of inherited settler-Indigenous spatial relations, once forgotten in the frenzy to develop the land, reemerges. Overcome with a sense of

estrangement, Old Tar plunges into icy awareness, horrified at the realities brought about by his housebuilding and, by extension, the settler project:

Old Tar stepped back from the house and looked up at it. He saw in the dusky light the pits the workmen had dug in his hill. He saw the great trampled patches the timber piles had made, and he saw, between him and the sea, the white house perched, the big white nest for his wife and her brood on top of the hill. As though he saw it for the first time. Old Tar muttered in a strange voice, ‘Wot’s it doing there – wot’s it for?’ and ‘Oh, Lord, wot ’ave I done – wot ’ave I done, Lord?’ A long time Old Tar stood there, while the dark shifted over him and the house paled and stretched up to the sky. His feet seemed to freeze into the cold grass of the hill, and dark thoughts flew across his mind, like clouds, never quiet, never breaking. (Tar, pp. 343-4)

In contrast to the experiences described by Rudy of nineteenth-century Canadian settlers, for whom the complex process of land-clearing emboldened settlers to feel in possession of the land, Old Tar struggles to resolve his sense of dispossession even while he seems to understand his dilemma as an existential one: “‘wot’s it for?’” (Tar, p. 343).²³ When Old Tar rhetorically asks, ‘wot’s it for’, it conveys the settler crisis of (un)belonging in which the creation of a collective story that legitimises settler authority to determine the future of the state is entangled with a narrative of nativisation based on connection to land.²⁴ The craters and crushed landscape, direct consequences of the timber piles generated to build the house and enclose the cleared land, evoke a devastation magnified by the house’s projection of monstrous desolation, undermining the home as a safe and secure place to ‘nest’ (Tar, p. 344). A deathly whitening of the landscape, depicted through an accumulating vocabulary of ‘light’, ‘white’, ‘clouds’, ‘pale’, ‘cold’, ‘freeze’, and ‘ashen’, (Tar, pp. 343-4) accompanies Old Tar’s unutterable realisation. The voice of the landscape is translated, but the existential questions it raises in Old Tar are unsatisfactorily answered and remain unresolved.

In transferring European Gothic to the outposts of the colonial periphery, Mansfield represents home-building in the colonies as analogous to the colonial process of settlement, representing the empire as a white nightmare for Old Tar. The fear in the story converges around the settler’s realisation of himself as usurper and suggests that the cost of inheritance is much higher, and less attractive, than the price by which the grandfather gained the property. ‘Old Tar’ registers a feeling, articulated by Rudy in relation to a different, Canadian settler context, of ‘internalized belatedness, a feeling of coming late to the game, of recognising one’s distance from the original’.²⁵ In Mansfield’s description of spatial relations between male settlers and the land in ‘Old Tar’, part of the cost of settler inheritance includes dealing with the ongoing reality that ownership of land remains a contested issue. Mansfield challenges the discourse of settlement and inheritance through the tropes of the colonial Gothic, clearing space for gestures of new affinities.

‘[O]ne must go everywhere’: Second-generation sociability

Several of Mansfield’s stories, including ‘The Woman at the Store’ and ‘Millie’ (1913), challenge the discourse of the child rescued from the ‘wild’ of both Māori hospitality and settler poverty. Expanding Roslyn Jolly’s arguments that ‘How Pearl

Button was Kidnapped' is a class-based social critique of ideas about guardianship, the rest of this section focuses on Mansfield's engagement with class in the context of the child rescue discourse and Mansfield's postulation of a vernacular second-generational settler identity.²⁶ 'The Garden Party' and 'The Doll's House' are two late stories that bluntly declare their intention of examining 'absurd class distinctions' (Garden p. 403) in the context of multigenerational colonial families.

Set in a rural village, where scenes move between a lively, 'warm' (Garden, p. 404) middle-class home and the 'little mean dwellings' (Garden, p. 408) of the workers' cottages, 'The Garden Party' follows sensitive young Laura as she awakens to the materiality of differences. Initially ensconced within the safety and comfort of her domestic bubble, Laura's blissful, partial awareness of life's transience is unsettled when she fails to persuade her family to cancel their party due to the death of a local worker. Her mother suggests Laura delivers leftovers to the bereaved, positioning Laura to venture further than she has ever gone before into the social life of the cottages and to experience a shocking epiphany of impermanence in the context of class awareness and uneven experiences of domesticity.

The theme of intergenerational disagreements over cross-class relations surfaces early in the story. When a more experienced workman in charge of party installations guides the naive Laura in deciding where to set up the marquee, he insists that the canopy should stand in a conspicuous place "where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye, if you follow me" (Garden, p. 402). Laura's interiorised thoughts reveal that she has been socialised to class differences: 'Laura's upbringing made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye. But she did quite follow him' (Garden, p. 402). Her girlish romanticisation of the working class seems an extension of socialised class differences, as she soon after considers her preference for having workmen as friends 'rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper', drawn to '[t]he friendliness of it', and even fancying herself 'just like a work-girl' (Garden, p. 403).²⁷

Laura's sense of the porosity of class affinity is nonetheless contained by the spatial relations of the village, which serve to re-inscribe class differences through segregated dwellings and mobility practices. The road, for example, serves as the boundary between the gardens of the house where Laura lives and the grid of workers' cottages:

for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys. Washerwomen lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler, and a man whose house-front was studded all over with minute bird-cages. (Garden, p. 408)

As spatial boundaries marking off settlers from 'others', the barbed-wire fence and bush of 'Old Tar' are here replaced by, but equivalent to, the broad road and the mean cottages. The poverty of the village compared to the affluence of the house with the garden party is a source of displeasure to Laura and her brother, who are at least

somewhat familiar with the workers' living areas: 'But since they were grown-up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and sordid. They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went' (Garden, p. 408). For the children, 'walking through' is both a pastime and an ideological lesson in reproducing class boundaries, enacted geographically through the embodied experience of walking and traversing the landscape boundaries, leaving readers to question the extent of Mansfield's critique of that high Victorian pastime of 'slumming'.²⁸

As Russell points out in an Australian context, as colonialism progressed, the value system of second-generation settlers was characterised by, on the one hand, a continuation in the belief of civilising frontier life as a primary objective and, on the other hand, a celebration of a suite of new values that increasingly accrued status as national characteristics.

[F]reedom from snobbery, fluidity of social boundaries, an open, frank and natural demeanour and impatience with meaningless rules of etiquette were claimed as peculiarly Australian qualities, robustly contrasted with the effeminacy, particularity and reserve of 'English' manners.²⁹

Viewed from the perspective of changing social values, it is the workmen's candid way of speaking that appeals to Laura and casts the boys who visit to dance and dine in a stuffy light. Mansfield queries the extent to which the second-generation is free from snobbery, contrasting Laura's humility to both her mother's 'cold' and her sister's 'hardened' replies when Laura implores them to call off the party for fear that the noise and merriment of the party-goers will be a sign of disrespect for their grieving neighbours (Garden, pp. 408-9).

Laura's familial relations check her impulses regarding how and whether to properly show her sympathy as she moves between unanimous cues from her family members that the party must go on and her separate, inner compulsion to make an urgent gesture of unity with the widow. Laura's sensibility is divided between following her immediate family's determination to carry on with the party, determining 'then it was bound to be all right', and observing a cross-class affiliation with 'that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house' on the loss of their patriarch: 'But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper' (Garden, p. 409). Determined through an imagined sense of the settler community constructed through the printed newspaper, Laura's experience of being pulled in two directions suggests the messiness of the divides between generations, genders and classes in the movement towards the development of a national consciousness. Social egalitarianism, a characteristic that becomes associated with the development of national consciousness, has a relationship to the constraints of the settler colony's spatial relations.

Explaining why the Burnell children of 'The Doll's House' attend a socially heterogeneous school, for example, the narrator explains:

It was the only school for miles. And the consequence was all the children of the neighbourhood, the Judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the store-keeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together. Not to speak of there being an equal number of rude, rough little boys as well. But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It

was drawn at the Kelveys. (Doll's, p. 416)

In constructing a new national identity, settler colonialism rearranges the spatial meaning of metropolitan boundaries (along colonial New Zealand's frontier, the relatively vast distance between settlements determines the necessity of class mixing in schools), while also reinforcing the notion that boundaries are necessary, if arbitrary. There is no critique of the belief that class lines must be drawn, although the selection of the Kelveys as targets is a matter of group discretion.

Russell argues that, while national characteristics developed in ways that pushed and pulled at settler generational, class and gender identities, 'the chasm of consciousness that divided an Indigenous from a colonising identity was effectively erased from public discourse, and an unresolved anxiety about the failures of the civilising project was papered over with buoyant, celebratory nationalism'.³⁰ Mansfield's fiction seems somewhat to defy this, as several of her short stories set in New Zealand deal with intergenerational settler culture and depict relations between settlers and Indigenous people (for example, 'Prelude' and 'Kezia and Tui'). In 'The Garden Party', however, there is just the slightest register of the settler anxiety that Indigenous forms lurk in the landscape, flickering into view when Laura discomposedly rushes out of the wake, finding 'her way out of the door, down the path, past all those dark people' (Garden, p. 413). The emotional residue of this scene is one of heightened self-consciousness. However, in contrast to an acute class consciousness which occupies her mental energy and motivates her action throughout the story, Laura's racialised awareness is muted. There is perhaps in this scene a subtle interplay between working class and Māori people in Laura's consciousness. Yet, if the crux of the story rests in Laura's consolidation of awareness of class identity, any such alliance remains necessarily opaque as an overt sensibility would threaten Laura's coherence of identity.

Laura, disoriented in a moral wilderness of class-manners and agonised with self-consciousness about the velvet ribbon on her hat in the midst of the worker's wake, is rescued by her brother Laurie who steps 'out of the shadow' to scoop her up and console her, admitting that their mother had been 'getting anxious' (Garden, p. 413). Although Laura gives a general impression of her experience, reporting "It was simply marvellous", she is unable to explain her epiphany: "'Isn't life –'" (Garden, p. 413). 'Marvellous' is one descriptor for Laura's experience of viewing the dead man and being overcome with a sense that he was at peace, 'wonderful, beautiful', referring to him as a wonder, as 'this marvel' (Garden, p. 413). Laurie's sympathetic expression, "'Isn't it, darling?'" (Garden, p. 413; original emphasis), does not provide any explanation to complete Laura's ellipses but flattens Laura's recent knowledge of how class inflects death as an uneven experience.

These stories 'found their inner compulsion in my wish to respond to your work': Mansfield's writing within the tradition of 'Māoritanga'

If the child rescue discourse addressed the difficulty of being both British and civilised in a colonial setting, Mansfield's challenge to it posits the potential for and limitations to the development of an alternative (and 'native' in Rudy's terms) identity. Mansfield's imagined gesture of affiliation from a second-generation settler across imperial hierarchies remains incomplete. Her position as a settler writer gives her a privileged understanding of the settler's dual experience of colonisation constructed by imperial/periphery and settler/Indigenous relations, yet the discourses and genres

manipulated to critique imperial middle-class values often seem to impede a fuller or more involved critique of the structures of settler violence, just as her depiction of land-tenure and inheritance is both uneasy and belated.

At the same time, Mansfield's stories gesture towards the possibility of new forms of social organisation and understanding. In *Dear Miss Mansfield* (1989), a collection of postcolonial stories told from the perspective of Māori communities, Māori Aotearoa/New Zealand writer Witi Ihimaera explains that his stories 'found their inner compulsion in my wish to respond to [Mansfield's] work'.³¹ These stories position Mansfield not only as a New Zealander but as a writer within the tradition of 'Māoritanga' or Māori-ness. In highlighting dual colonialisms, that of the imperial centre/colonial periphery as well as that of the settler/Indigenous, these stories see Mansfield as anticipating decolonial impulses. Thus, Mansfield's nascent but incomplete challenges to the insufficiencies of settler colonialism are developed, expanded and carried forward. Mansfield's stories stop short of depicting an anticolonial commitment to repairing the mutual responsibility to care for one other, but her gestures test out new class and race affiliations and are important links in the tradition of building collaborative movements from the awareness of multi-issue identities.

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Notes

¹ Katherine Mansfield, 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped', in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), Vol 1, *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, 1898-1915*, pp. 285-88 (p. 288). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

² On Mansfield and the domestic see Aimee Gasston, 'Phenomenology Begins at Home: The Presence of Things in the Short Fiction of Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 32 (2014), 31-51; Rishona Zimring, 'Mansfield's Charm: The Enchantment of Domestic Bliss', *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, 4 (2012), 33-50. For an important intervention in understanding Mansfield's New Zealand domestic aesthetic see Saikat Majumdar, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Fragility of Pākehā Boredom', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 55 (2009), 119-41.

³ Further insight into Mansfield as a New Zealand writer can be found in Ian Gordon, 'Introduction: Katherine Mansfield: The Wellington Years, a Reassessment', in *The Urewera Notebook*, ed. by Ian A. Gordon (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), pp. 11-30; Lydia Wevers, 'How Kathleen Beauchamp Was Kidnapped', *Women's Studies Journal*, 4 (1988), 5-17; Bridget Orr, 'The Māori House of Fiction', in *Cultural Insititutions of the Novel*, ed. by Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 73-95; Mark William, 'Mansfield in Māoriland: Biculturalism, Agency and Mis-reading', in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. by Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 249-74. For key criticism of Mansfield as a colonial modernist writer see Janet Wilson, "'Where is Katherine?": Longing and (Un)belonging in the Words of Katherine Mansfield', in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 175-88; Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Delia da Sousa Correa, eds, *Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)Colonial* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Elleke Boehmer, 'Katherine Mansfield as Colonial Modernist', in *Celebrating*

Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 57-71. Readings of Mansfield's fiction in the context of colonial ethnography include Saikat Majumdar, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Fragility of Pākehā Boredom', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 55 (2009), 119-41; Rebecca Ruth Gould, 'The Aesthetic Terrain of Settler Colonialism: Katherine Mansfield and Anton Chekhov's Natives', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55 (2019), 48-65.

⁴ Edward Said describes filiation as the relations held together by ties at the personal and worldly level, and affiliation as the relations that change filial bonds into forms that nurture professional and political intelligence that can create imagined communities on local, national and transnational scales. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁵ Katherine Mansfield, 'The Voyage', in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield* ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), Vol 2, pp. 372-79 (p. 378).

⁶ Katherine Mansfield, 'The Garden Party', in *Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Kimber and O'Sullivan, Vol 2, pp. 401-14 (p. 408). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

⁷ Katherine Mansfield, 'Prelude', in *Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Kimber and O'Sullivan, Vol 2, pp. 56-93 (p. 60). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 93.

⁹ Jason R. Rudy, *Imagined Homelands: British Poetry in the Colonies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), pp. 132-3.

¹⁰ Settler colonialism in Australia and New Zealand are distinct and unique structures that nevertheless share some commonalities in terms of literary traditions, as other scholars have pointed out. In relation to Mansfield studies, Erin Mercer has argued that Mansfield's Gothic writing can be viewed as both part of the European tradition and as part of a regional Australasian tradition developed by writers publishing in local Australian and New Zealand publishing forums. I draw on Rudy's distinction between the communal and individual identities invoked in nineteenth-century Australian poetry not in order to make the claim that colonial New Zealand writing replicated a pattern, but rather by way of conceptualising Mansfield's challenging representations of domesticity.

¹¹ Erin Mercer, 'Manuka Bushes Covered with Thick Spider Webs': Katherine Mansfield and the Colonial Gothic Tradition', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 32 (2014), 85-105 (pp. 91-2). Mercer argues that Mansfield's engagement with the Gothic mode is 'most evident' in three stories 'Ole Underwood' (1913), 'Millie' (1913), and 'The Woman at the Store' (1912), which Lydia Wevers (1988) analyses in terms of their colonial mode of writing.

¹² 'Kezia and Tui' was first published posthumously in Katherine Mansfield, *The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1939); Mansfield, 'Prelude', p. 66. Katherine Mansfield; 'Old Tar', in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University), Vol 1, pp. 340-4 (p. 341). Further references to this edition of 'Old Tar' are given after quotations in the text.

¹³ Anna Plumridge points out that 'Mansfield was accustomed to a Māori presence in her own privileged social world [. . .] [her] experience was with an atypically wealthy set of Māori who were successful participants in Pakeha society, but the camping trip drew her through communities whose attitudes to a Pakeha presence, and modes of living and working, were markedly dissimilar'. Katherine Mansfield, *The Urewera Notebook*, ed. by Anna Plumridge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 5.

¹⁴ Swain and Hillel trace the child rescue discourse from its origins in Britain to its dissemination in Australia and Canada from 1850 to 1915 as a discourse that constructed children in negative and racialised ways in bids to raise money. Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire. Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2010). In her article on the counter-imperial Indigenous networks that connected early nineteenth-century Sydney with Pacific history, Tracey Banivanua Mar touches on how both The Native Institution, an early attempt by Australian settlers to relocate Indigenous children away from their parents, and Marsden's Māori Seminary in Port Jackson, intended for, among others, Nga Puhi children from the Bay of Islands, quickly 'merged into a more general and racialised civilising experiment'. Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Shadowing Imperial Networks: Indigenous Mobility and Australia's Pacific Past', *Australian Historical Studies*, 46 (2015), 340-55 (p. 352).

¹⁵ Penny Russell, “‘Unhomely Moments’: Civilising Domestic Worlds in Colonial Australia’, *The History of the Family*, 14 (2009), 327-39 (pp. 328-9).

¹⁶ Russell, p. 335.

¹⁷ Russell, pp. 336-7.

¹⁸ Katherine Mansfield, ‘The Doll’s House’, in *Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*. ed. by Kimber and O’Sullivan, Vol 2, pp. 414-21 (p. 419). Further references to this story are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁹ For an early analysis of the concept of the culture of domesticity and the construction of the ideal nineteenth-century woman according to values of purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity in nineteenth-century American periodical culture see Barbara Welter, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860’, *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), pp. 151-74. For a historical study of how New Zealand settlers reconstructed domesticity see Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Possibly, the setting for the story is Markara Hill. When she was four years of age, Mansfield moved with her family six miles west from Tinakori Road, Wellington to the outskirts of the capital and a new home, ‘Chesney Wold’, in the village of Karori. Bordering the western perimeter of Karori is the hilly locality of Makara, which does have road access to Karori, which extends to Cook Strait/Tasman Sea. Although most of Mansfield’s landscape references in ‘Old Tar’ are to the sea and timber, it suggests a possible Māori place name although the suspension of an exact translation is perhaps more evocative than a definitive one. Kimber and O’Sullivan point out that this place is often pronounced as Mansfield spells it in ‘Old Tar’ (Tar, p. 344). *Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, Vol 1, p. 3

²¹ ‘Backblocks’ is a regional term used to refer to a backcountry thinly inhabited by settlers in New Zealand. Angela Smith uses the term in her introduction to Katherine Mansfield, *Selected Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xvii; p. xviii. On popular literature of the backblocks in the first half of the twentieth century, see Jane Stafford, ‘Romance in the Backblocks in New Zealand Popular Fiction, 1930-1950: Mary Scott’s *Barbara Stories*’, in *Popular Fiction and Spatiality: Reading Genre Settings*, ed. by Lisa Fletcher (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 61-78.

²² Referring to the construction of settler ‘wilderness’, Mar argues that ‘[t]he production of wilderness [. . .] participated in the erasure of Indigenous social spaces, manufacturing untouched nature, in order to preserve it’. Tracey Banivanua Mar, ‘Carving Wilderness: Queensland’s National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890-1910’, in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. by Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2010), pp. 73-94 (p. 76).

²³ Rudy, p. 121.

²⁴ On settler unbelonging in an Australasian context see Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Bridget Grogan, ‘The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature’, *English in Africa*, 35 (2008), 195-8. In a different context, and in order to develop arguments about indigeneity and labour, Shona Jackson discusses the development of Creole belonging in Guyana in Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota p, 2012).

²⁵ Rudy, p. 117.

²⁶ Roslyn Jolly, ‘Children of Empire: Rereading Katherine Mansfield’s “How Pearl Button was Kidnapped” (1912)’, *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 16: 2 (2017), 86-107.

²⁷ On Mansfield and the working class see Charles Ferrall, ‘Katherine Mansfield and the Working Classes’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 32 (2014), 106-20.

²⁸ As a popular phenomenon, ‘slumming’ emerged in the 1880s and 1890s in London’s East End motivated by a mix of curiosity, touristic amusement, philanthropic, moral and religious impulses. Scholarly studies on this late Victorian practice include: Keith Gandal, *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); as well as Emily Cuming, “‘Home is home be it never so homely’: Reading Mid-Victorian Slum Interiors’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), 368–86.

²⁹ Russell, p. 338.

³⁰ Russell, p. 338.

³¹ Witi Ihimaera, *Dear Miss Mansfield: A Tribute to Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp* (Auckland, New Zealand: Viking, 1989), p. 10.



MARTIN GRIFFITHS

Katherine Mansfield's Australia

Abstract: Though Katherine Mansfield wrote little about Australia or their people, there is evidence that the New Zealand-born writer had a strong interest in the southern continent. After all, there were familial connections: Mansfield's grandmother was Australian and Elizabeth von Arnim (Mansfield's cousin) was born in Sydney and a famous writer herself. Perhaps an imagined homeland based on a greater Australasia provided inspiration for Mansfield: a place that mediated the islands of New Zealand and a harsh European reality. From 1907 to 1909 Melbourne's Native Companion presented several stories and poems by Mansfield to the public for the first time. Print media interest grew: Adelaide's Daily Herald gave regular updates from London's New Age and reprinted Mansfield's 'Frau Fischer' in January 1911. Frequently, Mansfield's stories proved worthy exemplars, much prized and often imitated by Australian writers.

Keywords: Short Story, Mansfield, Australia, Modernism, Prichard, Colonialism, Pre-war, Media.

It is possible that the young Katherine Mansfield felt the presence and significance of Australia more than she acknowledged it. Specifically, Mansfield was influenced by Australian-born authors George Egerton, Katharine Prichard and Elizabeth von Arnim.¹ In the case of the latter, a mutual respect and pattern of exchange would last a lifetime.² Australia had an influence on the early life of Katherine Mansfield insofar as it provided her with literary opportunities and the sense of identity that New Zealand, at first, could not. Specifically she was influenced by trends in Sydney, a place where her great-grandmother Margaret Isabella Mansfield married in 1855 and where her relations lived until as late as 1939.³ Australian publishing, music theatre and short story writing influenced early and middle period Mansfield stories and I want to suggest that authors in Australia, including Vance Palmer and Katharine Prichard, were influenced from an early stage by Mansfield's fiction. Mansfield's later fiction, such as *The Garden Party and Other Stories* published in the early 1920s, had a strong presence in Australian media, particularly in newspapers and radio which were burgeoning during the 1920s and 1930s and beyond. Furthermore, the same media sources helped to popularize a cult of Mansfield the person, in Australia, as elsewhere in the world.

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Mansfield's identification with a greater Australasia was personal, but also a symptom of the pre-First World War period's preoccupation with sovereignty and unification, themes that were discussed at a local and international level between Australian and New Zealand citizens and governments. Mansfield's concept of the southern continent was shaped by this social and political environment. For a colonial, the identification of nationality signified inclusion: characters in Mansfield's stories, at least before 1912, are proudly Australian, English, American and German. More broadly speaking, Australia had prestige and significance alongside Europe and North America, as well as Africa, China and India, while New Zealand struggled to live beyond its colonial past.

There are numerous references to Australia in Mansfield's fiction. In 'Young Country' (1913) the adolescents Tui and Ray prefer Sydney to Wellington and the prospect of living in the New Zealand capital for the rest of their lives in is abhorrent to them; in 'Prelude' (1917) Aunt Beryl was once bitten by a huge red ant in Tasmania';⁴ in 'That Woman' (1916) the same Aunt Beryl—who refers condescendingly to Old Mrs Grady as 'that Melbourne girl'—is satirized unforgivingly.⁵ Although set in New Zealand, Mansfield's 1905 story 'About Pat' refers to the Blue Mountains, an iconic location about fifty kilometres west of Sydney. Further, Mansfield read and quoted poems from Melbourne's *Coles' Picture Book* in her journal and in another unpublished and untitled story from 1907 refers to the 'Australian Student'.⁶

What of Mansfield's public reception in Australia? Certainly, it outshone the equivalent reception in her native New Zealand. For instance, between 1910 and 1939 *PapersPast* lists ten references in magazines and journals to Katherine Mansfield while during the same period *Trove* lists over one hundred. In the same way that Annie Beauchamp removed her daughter from her will, there is a sense that New Zealand abandoned their prodigious literary child. After all, she had a tendency to defame prominent Wellington figures by fictionalizing their lives and characters. This paper attempts to document the reception of Mansfield's work, primarily the short stories, among Australian writers, public and media commentators (notwithstanding that writers and academics are also part of the public and, at times, the media). Necessarily, my analysis will focus on the reputation of the New Zealand-born writer in a relatively narrow sphere. I will, however, look at the influence of Australian writing, culture, nationhood and geography, on Mansfield, with special reference to Katharine Prichard.

Mansfield and the Media

Katherine Mansfield began as a performer and magazine writer, and media formed an important part of her early career. I am particularly drawn to newspapers in my quest to (re)view her literary presence in Australia. The temporary, if not temporal, nature of the media offers unexpected benefits and archival libraries of newspapers – such as the superb *Trove* (the online archive of the National Library of Australia) website, which have old reviews of concerts, performances and books, as well as published short stories.⁷ Sometimes the immediacy and authenticity of a non-specialist review provides a unique perspective:

Miss Katherine Mansfield's latest book is bound to be a joy to the literary craftsman; there is a brilliant play of technique on every page. She rides triumphantly over the most difficult of all writer's courses –

which is the short-story course; more, she goes out of her way, it seems, to hunt out all the challenging jumps.⁸

This sporting analogy in a 1922 review of *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, written by Neville Cardus, corroborates the worldwide praise for Mansfield's third collection of short stories that spread as far as Australia.⁹ The status of Katherine Mansfield's work, which was influential in literary and academic circles, was also appreciated by the general public on the southern continent. Mansfield's fame was widespread in Australia before the Second World War. A first edition of her short story collection *In a German Pension* was, according to one source, worth about twenty pounds, the equivalent to two thousand Australian dollars today.¹⁰ The originals of these stories, published in London's *New Age* were also sought after in Australia: according to Jean E. Stone collectors paid high prices for these publications.¹¹

By 1911, when *In a German Pension* was published, the Australian literary world had become aware of Katherine Mansfield, and journalists and editors of Brisbane's *The Telegraph*, Perth's *Sunday Times*, Melbourne's *Herald* and Adelaide's *Daily Herald* all published articles from *The New Age*. Adelaide's *Daily Herald* was not the only daily to publish Mansfield: her poem 'Loneliness,' appeared in Sydney's *The Sun* newspaper – a mere two months after it appeared in *The New Age* in London. In 1912, Sydney's *Bulletin* cited the 'delicate, malicious humour' and 'quiet candor' of *In a German Pension*.¹²

Comment on Mansfield's writing was not restricted to editorial staff. In Sydney's *Bulletin*, L.T. Luxton, a guest contributor, wrote an extended article on Mansfield in the July 1928 edition:

It is said that had there been no Tchekov [sic] there would be no Katherine Mansfield. But towards the end of her life she began to perceive that, powerfully and pitilessly as Tchekov had diagnosed the soul-sickness of pre-revolutionary Russia, his form was as little suited to portray modern English society as his life-vision was likely to impinge on English mentality. 'The Doll's House' is a definite point of departure from her old 'disinterested' philosophy [...] gently [setting out] to lay bare the souls of simple human beings. Age was bringing her, along with perfection of technique, a juster conception of the purpose of the short story which involved a drastic 'humanisation' of her work.¹³

There was a fertile and mutually beneficial relationship between writers on both sides of the Tasman Sea. Magazines were created with the specific intention of fostering this relationship.¹⁴ Further, talk of a greater Australasia – following the federation of the states of Australia in 1901 – whereby the former colonies, including New Zealand, became self-governing dominions, with shared resources, was discussed at a local and international level.¹⁵ A letter to A. G. Stephens from Christchurch poet Jessie MacKay reveals the mood of exchange between New Zealand and Australia of the time:

Everything seems to have taken a great swirling leap forward this last year or two; how is it? It seems as if Australasia has all of a sudden waked (*sic*) up to find a literature of our own, shaped and ready at the door.¹⁶

Dunedin's *Red Funnel* symbolized the new mood of confidence, but predominantly published Australian stories and articles for the New Zealand market. Katharine Prichard's 'Kit, the Wildcat', which appeared in the magazine in 1907, would have appealed to her younger New Zealand counterpart, Katherine Mansfield. In the story, Kit, whose name is a diminutive of Katharine, is a rebellious motherless child whose only friend is her brother – a bookish truant whose Romeo-like death is the sacrifice to Kit's own ultimate demise. Australian Frank Morton, who also published in *Red Funnel*, was the associate editor of Dunedin's *Triad* and a friend of A. G. Stephens. Although Morton encouraged Mansfield by including her poem 'Death of a Rose' in *Triad* in 1908, he seems to have regarded New Zealand literature as inferior to that of Australia (Mansfield may have been considered part of the latter tradition). On this basis both Stephens and Morton, in 1910 and 1914 respectively, decided to return to Sydney.

Newspapers in New South Wales competed with one another to acclaim Mansfield's short stories: Lismore's *Northern Star* berated contemporary American writers for their poor short-story writing and held up Mansfield's 'The Fly' as an example of how they should write. Mansfield's complete story 'Poison' was reprinted in its entirety in *Western Districts Recorder* and *Northern Champion* in 1924. In 1926 New-Zealand-born commentator Gerald Dillon wrote that:

Katherine Mansfield was concerned with the substance of life not with its pattern. Her immortal genius lay in a perfectly uncanny sureness for piercing to just the right depth below the obvious. She knew that when people marry, or make money, or die, there may be very little happening to them, and in her stories these events seldom occur. She pierced into the depths and revealed things which ordinary writers have never reached.¹⁷

Subsequent media coverage inevitably focuses on Middleton Murry's 1927 *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, and *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* published the following year.¹⁸ Much of the Australian reception of these books, as well as *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, was filtered through, and informed by, London-based literary criticism. Mansfield's burgeoning reputation in England and Europe was closely watched by the Australian literary public. Australian novelist Hilary Lofting, writing for *The New Triad*, referred to Edward Shanks' 1927 article about Mansfield from *The London Mercury*:

He [Shanks] seems to put his finger on every vivid delicacy and significance in every story she wrote; he sees her early faults and her conquering of them, and he chooses with confident and convincing certainty the best and potentially most permanent examples of her work.¹⁹

In the next issue of the same journal, Lofting took it upon himself to make his own assessment of Mansfield's legacy:

It is not to be doubted that she was a genius. 'A Married Man's Story', an unfinished fragment which appeared in *The London Mercury*, is lit by the true selfless creative vision of genius. So, too, is 'At the Bay' and 'Daughters of the Late Colonel'. They are not more in content than

glimpses of life and character [...]. All the intense love of life and the portrayal of life, all the wide vivid view of the great novelists of genius was alive in her work.²⁰

Mansfield's 'Vignettes' and 'Silhouettes' were published in Melbourne by Edwin J. Brady in his *Native Companion* in 1907. While immature works, they were part of an influential movement in Australia that 'helped a local modernist aesthetic to develop.'²¹ Indeed a taste for 'Vignettes' spread to other publications including *The Australasian* and Sydney's *Bulletin*. Modest in scale such works gave way to more substantial compositions. As such, Mansfield's 'Frau Fischer' – reprinted from the *New Age* original – was published in Adelaide's newly-established *Daily Herald* in January 1911. Such an early appearance, less than six months after initial publication in England, hints at the influence of the short story on an Australian literary tradition in the pre-First World War period. For instance, Sydney's *Star* newspaper had a progressive approach to the literary form: they published a story every day and an entire story was contained within a single page – the more common practice being to spread a single column over several pages.

Australian A. G. Stephens was active as a journalist in several cities including Sydney and Wellington. During his tenure as a journalist at Wellington's *Evening Post* from 1907 to 1909 he worked alongside Tom Mills. Mills advised Mansfield to seek a publisher in Australia and Stephens may well have read, if not met Mansfield at this time. Mills described Stephens as aloof and remote, concerned more with high-minded literature than the public. The publication of Mansfield's 'Education of Audrey' in the *Evening Post* in 1909 was probably motivated by Stephens or his protégé Arthur Adams: Mills would have considered it unsuitable for New Zealand readers.²² Adams, who had joined the *Evening Post* in 1895, left to take up work in Sydney, including Stephens' former position as editor of the 'Red Page' in *The Bulletin*. Soon afterwards his own short stories began to appear in *The Bulletin* and *Lone Hand*. In 1909 under Adams' editorship the latter magazine published Mansfield's poem 'A Day in Bed'.

Upon Katherine Mansfield's death there were many tributes in the Australian media. The noted Melbourne scholar and poet Archibald Strong wrote of Mansfield's death as a 'grievous loss to literature'; a writer in the *Adelaide Advertiser* viewed the event as 'a loss to the world of one of the finest creative spirits of this generation'²³ and C. E. Lewers, writing in the Melbourne's *Australasian*, explained: 'She [Mansfield] looked upon life from a new point of view. She possessed an acutely impressionable nature, the vision of an eagle for detail, and a relentless artistic conscience.'²⁴

Mansfield and Prichard

Tangible influence of Katherine Mansfield can be found in a handful of Australia's major novelists including Patrick White, Barbara Hanrahan, Christina Stead (Morrison 2013), Eve Langley, and Eleanor Dark, as discussed by Sarah Ailwood. Dark's novel *Prelude to Christopher* (1934) is not only considered 'one of the earliest works of Australian literary modernism', but is demonstrably influenced by Mansfield's short story 'Prelude'.²⁵ Eve Langley's novel *The Pea-Pickers* (1942) is described by Suzanne Falkiner as 'one of the most extraordinary novels of the first half of the twentieth century'.²⁶ Bonny Cassidy notes how the novel 'echoes the young Mansfield's embellished style'.²⁷ Mansfield's writing had an influence upon

Australian short stories by Marjorie Barnard;²⁸ Barbara Hanrahan, who stated, ‘I started to hear Katherine Mansfield talking to me’; and Katherine Prichard.²⁹ The latter, who changed her name from Kathleen to Katharine at the same time as Mansfield occupies a special position in this regard.

Katharine Prichard, who came from a different background to Mansfield – she was the virtually self-educated daughter of a poor journalist – traced the New-Zealander’s steps as a woman and as a writer. Her travel to London in 1908, the subsequent struggle to establish a career there, and the loss of a brother to war in Europe, all echo the experiences of Mansfield. Prichard maintained a virtual silence concerning the New Zealand-born writer: the only public comment that she seems to have made about Mansfield concerns the editor E. J. Brady, who reneged on a promise to publish one of Prichard’s stories in Melbourne’s *Native Companion* – the same journal that had already published Mansfield’s ‘Vignettes’ and ‘Silhouettes’. Prichard’s ‘Vignettes: The Grandchild’ seems to owe a debt to Mansfield and the seaside setting – as well as the brutal realism of a dead child – could easily be mistaken for the work of the New Zealand-writer:

The liner had tramped across the world to her harbour on the other side. So slowly she threw off the veils of the fog and came up channel the crowd on the wharf, who had waited her coming all night, thought the sea birds were bringing her in. A cloud, they hung about her, the light of early morning silver on their beating wings.

In the crowd on the wharf an old couple were the centre of interest. They were simple, old-fashioned folk, and seemed to have come a long way to meet the boat. Their clothes were dusty and travel-worn.

The old woman clung to a faded plush bag, tremulous with joyful expectancy. The old man was not less moved. A splendid old fellow, he bluffed out his emotion heartily, and stood winking the tears from his eyes as he counselled his wife to patience and calm. ‘Expecting somebody by the boat?’ inquired a kindly bystander.

‘Daughter and son-in-law and their wee laddie’, the old man replied. ‘They’re coming from Australya. A long way off, that Australya, but a fine country, they tell me! Jeenie’s bringing the boy to see us. He’s our only gran’child, and a real bonny one, by his pictures!’³⁰

Inevitably news of the death of the grandchild is passed from the ship and, as with Mansfield’s ‘On the Sea Shore’ we are left with the image of the dead child’s soul carried skyward in the form of a bird. While a dead bird is a lasting image in Mansfield’s ‘The Voyage’, in ‘The Stranger’, a death at sea becomes a symbol for the reunited couples’ frayed relationship. In this case the chronology does not allow the New-Zealand writer to influence her Australian counterpart. However, it does in the case of Prichard’s acclaimed first novel *The Pioneers* (1915) which displays a similar plot to Mansfield’s short story ‘Millie’ (which was first published in *Blue Review* in June 1913) and concerns a fugitive who is assisted by a benevolent married woman. In essence, the plot of *The Pioneers* is much the same.

Further parallels between the two contemporary writers’ styles are apparent. Prichard’s ‘The Prayer Meeting’ is told from the perspective of six-year-old Bin who reveals traits of Kezia: she is compelled, against her will, to pray for the dissolution of an engagement between a divorced mother and a member of their church.³¹ The betrayed innocence of childhood is the subject of Prichard’s most famous story ‘The

Cooboo', in which a desperate mother fatally throws her child to the ground.³² Though the inspiration came from the newspaper reportage of a real event, there is every possibility that Mansfield's writing inspired the story. The latter's 'The Child-Who-Was-Tired', in which the Frau throws her baby onto the bed and seemingly stands complicit as she is smothered with a blanket, has echoes in Prichard's story.³³ Similarly 'loss of innocence' is the subject of Prichard's 'Flight', in which Aboriginal children are captured and taken from their families to be raised in white society.³⁴ Mansfield's 'How Pearl Button was Kidnapped' invites comparison here. Whereas Pearl's abduction is a kind of rescue from an overly ordered and restrictive society – the 'little blue men' or police constables intervene as conspirators rather than as heroes or saviours – there is no sense of lost innocence in 'Flight'. The scenario is reversed as a frustrated policeman, bound by orders from his superiors, acts against his will. An unconvincing conclusion, in which the children, although able to escape and return to their community, choose to go with the policeman, undermines the story's authenticity.

Prichard's 'A City Girl in Central Australia' was published serially in Sydney's *New Idea* magazine from May 1906 alongside Millie Parker's story 'Bunny'.³⁵ There is a strong likelihood that Parker, who was a friend of Mansfield's, showed the latter this publication. Prichard's autobiographical story concerns a slightly less-wild 'Kit' than the character in her *Red Funnel* story and the text contains acute observations of human behaviour and the natural world – features that Mansfield was to soon develop – as well as passages of an adolescent intensity:

An outpouring of crimson, glittering like brass, fretted gold in splash and streak, thread lacery in argent, in sparks and facets of living light – an outburst of glory. Steps of red fire to the mid-heaven, cut in a foam of clouds; a sea of little waves rose-red, and paling. I can see, now, a long line of sapphire hills, a wave of desert trees, and long, low levels of sands in the gilding haze. There is a moan of winds, like Mohammedan prayer at evening, a rapt star, and a floating bird.³⁶

Prichard's early mentor, the Australian academic Walter Murdoch, who lectured at the University of Melbourne where she was a student, was an advocate of Mansfield. Under the pseudonym Elzevir, he wrote in 1921 that, 'the novels of Clemence Dane, and the short stories of Katherine Mansfield are enough to show that in the younger generation there is no sign of failing [literary] power.'³⁷ One of Murdoch's other students was the esteemed critic, writer, broadcaster and mentor to many Australian writers, Nettie Palmer.

Palmer – who 'played a seminal role in establishing the canons of Australian literary criticism' – had an interest in Mansfield which ran deeply from early in her career.³⁸ Ailwood closely documents Nettie Palmer's fascination with the writer, citing examples from her articles as early as 1926 as well as diaries, letters and 'commonplace book' of 1929.³⁹ In addition to Ailwood's findings, we may consider Palmer's 3LO radio broadcast titled 'Rambles in Bookland' (1934). A transcript in the National Library of Australia shows that an entire episode from the series, comprising twelve programmes in total, was dedicated to the New Zealander:

She [Katherine Mansfield] is probably the best-known writer in the Southern Hemisphere to-day. This is all the more remarkable when we

see how quiet her stories are; how devoid of all that is showy and best-selling in the ordinary way. That is the secret of her importance?

The boundaries between a writer's life and art are always hard to settle. Some writers are too shy to express themselves in action. In Katherine Mansfield's life there were more meditations and endurance than action, yet many of her actions became famous and have appeared, slightly veiled, in other peoples' books. Examine them, and they will all be found to resemble the act of Kezia in letting the little Kelveys see the doll's house. Nobody else would have guessed, though, how much it would have meant to them to see the little lamp.⁴⁰

Evidence that Vance Palmer (Nettie's husband) was, as one biographer claims, known for 'associating with Mansfield' is hard to substantiate.⁴¹ However, reference to *Katharine* [with two a's] Mansfield in his many discourses in the media – a form of her name which was used almost exclusively for her stories published in London's *New Age* in 1910, the year Palmer wrote for the same magazine – suggests that he had at least become aware of her as a writer from or about 1910. Palmer's 'The Grandfather' – published in Melbourne's *Weekly Times* in 1927 – echoes the style of Mansfield. The story concerns the painful discovery that the man in the bush (the Grandfather) is not a stranger but a blood relation: 'How could she ever tell them that this old man who stood for everything that was sinister and terrible was their grandfather?'⁴² The psychological implications of estrangement within a tripartite relationship – in this case the mother, child and grandparent – echo similar relationships in the stories of Mansfield's 'Bliss' and 'The Stranger'.⁴³ Palmer, who writes from a mother's perspective in 'The Grandfather', managed to improve on previous attempts: in 'The Mother' (1911) he failed to convince with the tale of a grieving parent, as the mother's reaction to the death of her child is, appallingly, cheerful stoicism.⁴⁴

Although I can find no record that Vance Palmer acknowledged any debt to Mansfield, there is, however, evidence that he was aware of her work at the dawn of her career in England: when he arrived in London, in the summer of 1910, he began writing letters that were published in *The New Age*, a magazine for which Mansfield was a regular contributor. If he read Mansfield at this time, his post-war criticism gives the impression that he found her writing less than satisfying:

By concentrating all her [Mansfield's] vision on some small corner of life she achieves a certain intensity, but it is the intensity of light refracted from a small bit of broken looking-glass. Her talent is feminine, nervous, thin. After reading a dozen of her stories you feel you have been at a moving-picture show where there is no music.⁴⁵

The 'feminine', 'nervous' and 'thin' qualities – including altering of perspective, cinematic 'cutting and splicing' and ambiguity of content – are modernists traits. We do not really know what Palmer thought of these qualities. Palmer's later view of Mansfield's short stories is similarly ambiguous: in 1929 he mentions Mansfield favourably in Sydney's *Bulletin*: 'any question of her importance [was] settled long ago'.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Given the familial connection with Australia – her sister Vera resided in Sydney for several months in 1908, and her parents visited Australia on more than one occasion – it is surprising that Mansfield never travelled there. Nevertheless, tracing the network of possible connections, and disconnections, reveals a striking triangulation of relationships that are at once, personal, artistic, cultural, nationalist, and colonial, in varying hues.

There was, it seems, an intricate web of connections to the southern Pacific continent, which also included career musicians such as Alfred Hill, Frank Johnstone, Winnie Parsons and Mrs Barrington Waters, all of whom were personally known to Mansfield – and who were born and worked there.⁴⁷ Furthermore, much of New Zealand's cultural connection with Europe was maintained by a steady stream of musicians travelling via Australia. Artists and promoters such as Amy Sherwin, Arnold Toy, Nellie Melba, J. C. Williamson, Albert Zelman, George Musgrove, who visited Wellington during Mansfield's impressionable youth. All had careers at home in Australia as well as in Europe. Likewise, the Australian actor Julius Knight, upon whom the character Norman Knight (from Mansfield's 'Bliss') is almost certainly based. Yet, Mansfield never followed her friend and collaborator Edie Bendall to Sydney although the latter lived and studied there from 1904. A spatial connection with Australia, however, was continually present in Mansfield's autobiographical fiction; in 'The Aloe' (1915) there are two references to the continent. More tellingly Kezia, who features in 'At the Bay' (1922), is named after Mansfield's legendary Australian relative Kezia Bedford Iredale,⁴⁸ and there are at least two other references to Australia—including one in 'Bank Holiday' – from the same collection of stories.⁴⁹

The patterns of influence to emerge in this charting of Katherine Mansfield's career also demonstrates how a sense of home, space and belonging was transitional owing to the developments of modernity and the changing political dynamics of empire. Emergent nationalisms were expressed in different ways on either side of the Tasman. For New Zealand it was not simply a matter of disassociating itself from 'mother' England, rather it was reconciling the influence of Pacific cultures—principally Māori – alongside immigrant (bi)cultural practices. The crass tendency toward a 'White Australia' policy – as exemplified by E. J. Brady in *The Land of the Sun* – undermined Australian leadership in this area.⁵⁰ For both Mansfield and Prichard, however, the struggle of the outsider, underage or dispossessed, was central to their aesthetic.

Broadly speaking then, it might be claimed it was the evolution of telegraphy that enabled a wider exchange of political and social ideas during the early development of Mansfield's writing, and that her reputation, and her career, benefited from the ensuing cross-cultural exchange. Her own view of newspaper media was unambiguous: 'no [one] has the right to run a paper without preaching a gospel.'⁵¹ Such a gospel would, presumably, struggle to transcend the privileged position of the colonial elite, but then a struggle was something that the fearless Mansfield would not shy away from.

Notes

¹ George Egerton's real name was Mary Chavelita Dunn. See Elke D'Hover's 'The Development of Katherine Mansfield's First-Person Narratives', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 42 (2012), 149-65. See also W. H. New's *Reading Mansfield and Metaphors of Form* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 42.

² There are many aspects that Mansfield borrowed or developed from the books of her cousin, christened Mary Beauchamp. A vast and recent tome of analysis of this latter relationship – *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim, Katherine Mansfield Studies*, Vol 11, ed. by Gerri Kimber, Isobel Maddison and Todd Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019) – precludes a discussion here.

³ Many members of the family went 'home' to England, but Harry Beauchamp Lassetter returned permanently to Sydney in 1923 and Pamela Beauchamp was back in Sydney from 1939. See 'From Overseas', *Daily News* (Sydney) 29 June 1939, p. 3.

⁴ Katherine Mansfield, *Bliss and Other Stories* (London: Constable, 1920), p. 26.

⁵ Katherine Mansfield, 'That Woman', in *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber, Vincent O'Sullivan 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) Vol 2, p. 3.

⁶ *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber, Vincent O'Sullivan 4 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) Vol 1, p. 99.

⁷ A previously unknown story by Katherine R. Mansfield was published in Sydney's *Star* in June 1910. 'The Thawing of Anthony Wynscombe', which was recently discovered by me on *Trove* contained references – including those to the bible, hymn singing, god and the devil – that support an attribution to Mansfield. Furthermore, the story, which is to be published in *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, Vol 12 (September 2020), has the poetic tone of early Mansfield.

⁸ Neville Cardus, 'New Books: Katherine Mansfield's Stories', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 March 1922, p. 7.

⁹ While living in Australia during the Second World War the self-educated Cardus concerned himself with cricket and reviewing classical music, rather than show-jumping – or indeed book reviewing.

¹⁰ See article, 'Book Collecting: High Prices for First Editions', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1938, p. 2.

¹¹ Jean E. Stone, *Katherine Mansfield: Publications on Australia: 1907-09* (Sydney: Wentworth, 1977), p. 9.

¹² Anonymous, 'The Red Page', *The Bulletin*, 7 November 1912, p. 2.

¹³ 'The Fourth Woman: Red Page', *The Bulletin*, 4 July 1928, p. 5.

¹⁴ See A. G. Stephens, 'The Bookfellow', *Evening Post*, 27 November 1909, p. 9.

¹⁵ See 'Alfred Deakin', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981), Vol 8 <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/deakin-alfred-5927>>

¹⁶ *Papers of A. G. Stephens*, State Library of NSW, Sydney, MSS 4937, Box 4.

¹⁷ Gerald Dillon, 'Katherine Mansfield', *The Australian Women's Mirror*, 28 December 1926, p. 18.

¹⁸ *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1927); *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by John Middleton Murry (London: Constable, 1928).

¹⁹ Hilary Lofting, 'Review of Reviews', *The New Triad*, 1 April 1928, p. 26.

²⁰ Hilary Lofting, 'Katherine Mansfield', *The New Triad*, 1 May 1928, p. 26.

²¹ Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver, 'Literary Journals and Literary Aesthetics in Early Post-Federation Australia', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 14 (2014), p. 4.

²² K. Mansfield, 'The Education of Audrey', *Evening Post* (Wellington), 30 January 1909, p. 1.

²³ Archibald Strong, 'Art and Life', *Adelaide Advertiser*, 29 March 1924 p. 12.

²⁴ C. E. Lewis, 'Katherine Mansfield's Art', *Australasian*, 2 June 1923, p. 43.

²⁵ Sarah Ailwood, 'Anxious Beginnings: Mental Illness, Reproduction and Nation Building in 'Prelude' and 'Prelude to Christopher', *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, Vol 2 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 20-38 (p. 21).

²⁶ Suzanne Falkner, *The Writer's Landscape: Wilderness and Settlement* (East Roseville, N.S.W: Simon & Schuster 1992), p. 153.

²⁷ Bonny Cassidy, 'The Meeting of Katherine Mansfield and Eve Langley', in *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence*, ed. by Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 180-93 (p. 183).

²⁸ Carole Ferrier, ed, *Point of Departure: The Autobiography of Jean Devanny* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1986), pp. 94-5.

- ²⁹ 'An interview with Barbara Hanrahan', *The Bulletin*, 21 December 1982 (Literary Supplement), p. 204.
- ³⁰ Katharine Prichard, 'Vignettes: The Grandchild', *The Australasian*, 12 August 1916, p. 46.
- ³¹ Katharine Prichard, 'The Prayer Meeting', *N'Goola* (Melbourne: Australasian Book Society, 1959).
- ³² Katharine Prichard, 'The Cooboo', *Kiss on the Lips and Other Stories* (London: Cape, 1932).
- ³³ It should be noted that Mansfield controversially appropriated the plot of Anton Chekhov's 'Sleepy' for 'The Child-who-was-tired'. See Elisabeth Schneider, 'Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov', *Modern Language Notes*, 50 (1935), 394-97.
- ³⁴ Katharine Prichard, 'Flight', in *Potch and Colour* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1944), pp. 58-73.
- ³⁵ Millie Parker was a close friend and musical companion of Mansfield. See *New Idea* (Sydney), 6 August 1906, pp. 125-27.
- ³⁶ 'A City Girl in Central Australia', *New Idea* (Sydney), 6 August 1906, pp. 140-43.
- ³⁷ Walter Murdoch, "'Books and Men" by Elzevir', *The Argus* (Melbourne), 4 June 1921, p. 4.
- ³⁸ D. J. Jordan, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), Vol 11 <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/palmer-janet-gertrude-nettie-7948>>
- ³⁹ Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey, 'Katherine Mansfield, Nettie Palmer and Critical Influence', in *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 168-78; Ailwood, 'Anxious Beginnings', pp. 20-38.
- ⁴⁰ *Papers of Vance and Nettie Palmer*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, MS 1174, Box 36-2.
- ⁴¹ Geoffrey Searle, 'Edward Vivian (Vance) Palmer', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 11 (Melbourne University Press, 1988) <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/palmer-edward-vivian-vance-7946>>
- ⁴² Vance Palmer 'The Grandfather', *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 16 July 1927, p. 51.
- ⁴³ Tripartite relationships in Mansfield's stories are considered by Noreen O'Conner and Angela Smith, 'Writing Toward a New World: Awakenings in "Bliss" and "The Enchanted April"', *Katherine Mansfield and Elizabeth von Arnim, Katherine Mansfield Studies*, Vol. 11, ed. by Gerri Kimber, Isobel Maddison and Todd Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 54-69.
- ⁴⁴ Vance Palmer 'The Mother', *El Paso Herald* (Texas), 29 May 1911, p. 6.
- ⁴⁵ Vance Palmer, 'Red Page', *The Bulletin*, 16 November 1922, p. 24.
- ⁴⁶ Vance Palmer 'New Zealand Writers', *The Bulletin*, 8 May 1929, p. 5.
- ⁴⁷ All had an influence on Mansfield, especially Mrs Barrington Waters (sister-in-law of Frank Dyer, Mansfield's maternal uncle) who performed on the piano at the Beauchamp residence in 1900.
- ⁴⁸ See *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield*, p.519, footnote 1.
- ⁴⁹ For example, the Burnell family refer to their 'Tasmanian Home' in 'At the Bay' (*Collected Works*, Vol 2, p. 354); and Kezia refers to 'my Australian Uncle William' (*Collected Works*, Vol 2, p. 357) in the same story. An 'Australian soldier' features in 'Bank Holiday' (*Collected Works*, Vol 2, p. 223).
- ⁵⁰ E. J. Brady, *The Land of the Sun* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924).
- ⁵¹ Letter to John Middleton Murry, dated 24 October 1920. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds, *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008), Vol 4, p. 82.



Interview with Professor Kirsty Gunn



Professor Kirsty Gunn is Patron of the Katherine Mansfield Society and internationally acclaimed fiction writer. Her collection of short stories, *Infidelities*, was awarded the Edge Hill Short Story Prize in 2015.

INTERVIEWER

You have written in much depth about your creative relationship with Katherine Mansfield, with place playing an important part for this. In your 2015 book My Katherine Mansfield Project, you suggest that ‘home obsessed Mansfield’s writing life’. How far does this observation resonate with your own experience and creativity?

KIRSTY GUNN

That entire book is a meditation upon this very idea, of course. *My Katherine Mansfield Project* – first published in New Zealand, by the way, by Bridget Williams Books, as “‘Thorndon’ My Katherine Mansfield Project’ – came out of a period in my life of thinking intensely about what home meant as a place of return. What it might feel like to ... go back, retrace steps, pick up where one had left off For as long as I have been writing, the notion of home – where one lives and feels familiar and belongs, as well as the larger context of place, how a country looks and affects and moves us – has possessed me. This is to do with growing up in New Zealand, the country that was my mother’s family’s home, but not my father’s, who always called Scotland ‘home’. So, from an early age I was confused and unsettled around issues of nationality and identity ... and from that position of unease, creativity emerges. The

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New Zealand Poet Bill Manhire described me, when introducing me to a literary audience in Wellington, a few years ago, as ‘liminal’. That’s a perfect description I think... it describes me, and it describes an aesthetic position. It also pertains to Mansfield – and perhaps more so, in the sense that she lived also in Europe, so she’s thrice liminal! Her fiction faces three ways.

INTERVIEWER

You talk about place and the layering of identity – I wonder can you say a little about hybridity. How do your roots in Scotland and New Zealand come together for you?

KIRSTY GUNN

I wonder if that entwining of roots might be best described this way: I was delighted to be awarded New Zealand Book of the Year for my ‘elegy’ (I’ve always loved the way Woolf and Tolstoy, too, resisted the word ‘novel’ to describe their work. I’ve never felt it suited my books, and that Woolf’s ‘elegy’ is so much better...), ‘The Big Music’ – a story set in the Highlands of Scotland about piobaireachd music... so, that work of fiction ... it’s very particularly ... Scottish, you might say. That was a real moment for me, and a wonderfully open minded and intellectually serious award, to my mind – that a New Zealand judging panel would award such a prize to a novel that was no obvious ‘New Zealand Novel’. In the same way, my earlier work of fiction ‘The Boy and the Sea’, so clearly dazed with New Zealand sun and water and summer, was awarded the Scottish Book of the Year. So there, the same thing happened in reverse. I tell both those stories to describe a really beautiful entwining. My daughters still get muddled up in their mind, when they remember a holiday or a lovely walk, or beautiful hills and water and emptiness... as to what country that was. “‘Was it New Zealand or the Highlands, mum?’” they say. I guess that describes what I’m after in writing – as Mansfield herself effected in her work... That places might merge.

INTERVIEWER

You have spoken about Mansfield’s sense of home as interior rather than a geographical sense of place. In what ways do you think this can be linked to her technique of writing?

KIRSTY GUNN

To answer this question requires an essay in itself! There is so much I would like to say here. But for now, and for here, let me just note that this happens in two ways: Firstly, that on the whole, the stories have domestic settings... they take place in rooms and gardens and streets that connect houses to other rooms and gardens. It’s this ... focus ... on what is here, and lived in, touched and apprehended ... rather than the big expanses of landscape that hold her. Even in a story like ‘The Woman at the Store’, where there is a sense of all that country, all that dry space ... the interior of the Store is the focus. Mansfield is writing always about detail, what is seen here, right in front of me, and how that feels, to be so up close. And that detail is animate, it moves and changes, it takes on vital characteristics; her writing follows her eye and sense This is no mere account of background or context to a story. The context also *is* the story. And secondly, it’s the *way* Mansfield writes, her very syntax and rhythm forming a prose that is enclosed, speaks back to itself, is self-referential, creates ‘rooms’ as I call

it, spaces of being. I'll be talking a little about this in the Birthday Lecture I've been asked to deliver later this year. My theme for the Lecture is time and syntax – but these self-enclosed domestic and textual spaces of Mansfield's prose is part of that investigation.

INTERVIEWER

You discuss parallels between home and fiction as a creative world that is 'a home of words' where the writer may also live. It's interesting that you also frequently reference the idea of safety in connection with this idea. I wonder if you could say a little about this.

KIRSTY GUNN

Safety and danger are exciting creative forces to work with, endlessly touching and pulling at each other... Threatening each other. It's a question of language, as well as theme. My work has always been preoccupied by the agonistic performance of words on a page, putting certain elements of vocabulary and grammar together to create something that we read that is not *about* an experience but *is* an experience of reality in itself. Language is boring if it is 'safe' – by which I mean merely reiterates known values, scenarios, contexts, as well as familiar syntax patterns and sentence structure and so on ... because then the language becomes invisible. Our eye and mind simply passes over such texts, searching only for content – and even that we have been dulled to by this safe sort of reading. 'Dangerous' language, on the other hand, is threatening, exhilarating. It wakes us up and puts us on the alert. What's going on here? So we have to pay attention, think, feel ... all kinds of things. We become frightened (I must be stupid that I can't understand this) and vulnerable (oh no! How can I know what the story is if it's written like this?) and also implicated (ah! I see! That's what it is, so I am now involved in that experience) and seduced (this is delicious, being carried along like this) and, oh, all sort of other things. It's thrilling, this kind of text ... and again, that energy that is generated from the struggle between the two states to resolve themselves, as we continue to desire in our reading to be taken from the dangerous 'outside' to the safe 'inside' of the narrative ... this is a powerful life force in writing and reading.

INTERVIEWER

I love your detailed exploration of language – your explanation of the word 'unfurling', for instance, is developed in ways that have resonance with the evocative materiality of Mansfield's stories: 'a length of satin cloth from a roll, seeing the spill and run of silk spread out and along'.

KIRSTY GUNN

Language is who we are. 'Words, words, words' as Hamlet said. They're all we have to go on

INTERVIEWER

You seem to argue for a strong sense of place in Mansfield's creative 'return' to home while acknowledging that it can never be the same place that was left. Are our childhood homes always half fantasy, half fact?

KIRSTY GUNN

What is a 'fact' I wonder, but in this case, only another kind of story

INTERVIEWER

You're interested in crossing boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. What role do you think Mansfield's autobiographical writings – the letters and the notebooks play for your response to her stories?

KIRSTY GUNN

I reviewed Gerri Kimber's and Vincent O'Sullivan's magisterial and profoundly important 'Collected Fiction' for the London Review of Books and in that piece talked a great deal about the relationship between the two. Those two volumes give us a kind of Katherine Mansfield 'workbook' and are of inestimable importance to me. That work, and Vincent O' Sullivan's Oxford edition of 'Collected Letters'. The yellow spines of those volumes, and the navy and maroon bands of the Edinburgh edition ... sit in a lovely row above my desk.

INTERVIEWER

You were able to return to Wellington and Mansfield, of course, never did. If she had, in what ways do you imagine this might have altered the course of her creative imagination?

KIRSTY GUNN

I can't write about anyone else in that way, I could only, in my book about her, go back to her notes and writings about the place she left. From that experience, of re-reading her in the place she came from, was generated certain fictions of my own. I can speak for my own imagination in that regard but am never interested in acting on behalf of another writer, whether in fiction, or in making a projection such as the one you suggest.

INTERVIEWER

Can you tell us what you're working on now?

KIRSTY GUNN

I am completing a new collection of short stories. 'Blood Knowledge'.

INTERVIEWER

Finally, you were recipient of the Edge Hill Short Story Prize for your 2015 collection Infidelities. As new editors of Tinakori for the KMS in association with Edge Hill University, we are very grateful to have your input for this first of a planned series of editions of the journal. Thank you very much for taking the time to respond to questions of home and Mansfield's influence on your writing.

KIRSTY GUNN

Being awarded The Edge Hill Short Story Prize was a great thrill and the work done at Edge Hill around short fiction is a gift to us all. I am delighted to be part of your Interviews series. Thank you for the invitation!

INTERVIEWER

Thank you so much again for providing an excellent first interview for *Tinakori*.



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Martin Griffiths is a cello teacher and examiner for the New Zealand Music Education Board and principal cellist of Opus Orchestra (NZ) as well as member of *Vox Baroque*. He performed "Katherine Mansfield, Cellist" at the 2019 Katherine Mansfield Society (KMS) conference in Krakow, Poland. He is editor of the KMS Newsletter and has published in *Katherine Mansfield Studies* (Vol. 12) and in

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TINAKORI

Critical Journal of the Katherine Mansfield Society
Editors: Dr Kym Brindle and Dr Karen D'Souza

Issue 4 (Summer 2020)

HOME, SPACE, AND BELONGING

Home figures as an ambivalent construct in the writing of Katherine Mansfield. This special issue of Tinakori explores ideas of space and belonging in Mansfield's work and is the inaugural issue for new editors of the journal, Dr Kym Brindle and Dr Karen D'Souza of Edge Hill University. The essays consider the ways in which aspects of identity in Mansfield's work are articulated by engagement with both material and emotive notions of home. Questions are asked of the significance of home and conversely of homelessness for Mansfield's creative imagination. Rosemary Marangoly George stresses that 'fictionality is an intrinsic attribute of home', suggesting that 'home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography'. This issue focuses on intersections between desires for home and the social reality and implications and consequences for domestic space for both men and women. Six essays collectively consider how Mansfield's stories contextualize debates about identity and space and place. This special issue also features an interview with Professor Kirsty Gunn, Patron of the Katherine Mansfield Society, and internationally acclaimed fiction writer. Her collection of short stories, *Infidelities*, was awarded the Edge Hill Short Story Prize in 2015.

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