

## Chapter 5

### “Feuille d’Album”: Katherine Mansfield’s Prufrockian Encounter with T. S. Eliot

*Janet Wilson*

Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot first met through their mutual friend, Lady Ottoline Morrell, at Garsington Manor on December 3, 1916, at a time when they were becoming acquainted with the Bloomsbury circle, developing friendships with Bertrand Russell and meeting guests like Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey.<sup>1</sup> Significant parallels between them have been pointed out, such as that they were almost exactly the same age—twenty-eight years old. They were also “colonial” emigres from New Zealand and the United States, respectively, and as outsiders to the English literary elite they approached its literature and culture through continental intermediaries who wrote in another language: Mansfield through Chekhov and Eliot through Jules Laforgue,<sup>2</sup> although both were also influenced by Arthur Symons’s book on symbolism.<sup>3</sup> They also had in common the fact that being foreigners they had a capacity for self-invention, including the act of being English, and could quickly articulate a sense of displacement. Not surprisingly, they both recognized in the other this talent for the theatrical, and both commented adversely on the other’s use of mask and disguise as a source of irritation, creating a kind of negative symbiosis.<sup>4</sup> Their acquaintance was intermittent—they met rarely and probably not at all after about 1920—but references to each other appear in correspondence with John Middleton Murry and Vivien Eliot, as well as with friends and Bloomsberries such as Ezra Pound, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Virginia Woolf, Violet Schiff, and Dorothy Brett. The ripples of antagonism and open hostility on both sides that appeared around 1920—due seemingly to a sense of betrayal on her side and mistrust on his (and no doubt to professional rivalry)—raise questions that have never been answered

satisfactorily, including the question of their literary relations.<sup>5</sup> Can any artistic influence be defined, or was the relationship one of criticism and scrutiny, or a case of parallel development as their similarities suggest?<sup>6</sup> Until recently, such issues have come second to examining the complex web of emotions that underlay their fraught acquaintance, and the likelihood of a more intense literary engagement, especially on Mansfield's part, has only just begun to receive attention.<sup>7</sup>

This essay argues that Katherine Mansfield was in fact inspired by Eliot's early poetry and that in particular his landmark modernist poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915), provided her with a source of creative energy, one that goes deeper than the verbal echoes and scattered references to poems like "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (published in a special war issue of *Blast* in July 1915) and "Conversation Galante" (1916), references that have already been identified in certain stories and poems as well as in letters and her journals. The most extended artistic encounter with Eliot as poet and man appears in Mansfield's story, "An Album Leaf," first published in *New Age* in September 1917 and later revised and renamed "Feuille d'Album"; it can be traced to her fascination with Eliot's "Prufrock" which was published in *Prufrock and Other Observations* soon after they met.<sup>8</sup> Initially they seem to have been on friendly terms. Mansfield wrote to Ottoline Morrell on 24 June 1917: "I liked him very much and did not feel he was an enemy," and the story's preoccupation with transformation suggest that her encounter with both the poem and its author had a stirring effect on her.<sup>9</sup>

That Mansfield saw herself early on as in dialogue with Eliot's imagination, stimulated by his way of looking at the world and his thoughts about art and aesthetics, is apparent from the details of her urban settings and landscapes that show traces of his thought patterns and turns of phrase. Fleeting glimpses of his style detectable in her writing smack of imitation.<sup>10</sup> Most famous

is her description of the night scene near Hammersmith bridge in London where she and Eliot walked along the riverside, having left together from a dinner party hosted by Eliot's friends, Mary and Jack Hutchinson. In the same letter to Ottoline Morrell she writes: "we walked past rows of little ugly houses hiding behind bitter smelling privet hedges: a great number of amorous black cats looped across the road, and high up in the sky there was a battered old moon."<sup>11</sup> C. K. Stead, who fictionalizes their encounter on that night in his novels *The Secret History of Modernism* (2001) and *Mansfield: A Novel* (2004)—which opens with an imaginative reconstruction of their conversation<sup>12</sup>—comments that this arresting visual account of the cityscape seems to owe more to Eliot's poetry than to real life,<sup>13</sup> notably to "Conversation Galante," for Mansfield's "battered old moon" recalls Eliot's description of "an old battered lantern hung aloft" (ln. 4).<sup>14</sup> Further verbal echoes of Eliot's early poems have been identified in other texts dating from this period: both her poem, "Night-Scented Stock," which Mansfield sent to Lady Ottoline Morrell in 1917,<sup>15</sup> and the dialogue, "The Common Round," written and published in the *New Age* in May 1917 and later revised as "Pictures," carry verbal traces of "Preludes" (1915) and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night."<sup>16</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan notes Prufrockian echoes in representations of the city life that dominates the character of Ada Moss in "Pictures" and that the "grey crabs all the way down the street" (referring to washerwoman on the steps) recalls the "ragged claws" in Eliot's poem; amorous cats also make an appearance in her satirical story, "Bliss" (1918).<sup>17</sup> Similar allusions appear in "Feuille d'Album," which notes "Among the flowers the old women scuttled side to side like crabs," crabs being Mansfield's metonym for the movements of working class women.<sup>18</sup> But I suggest that her encounter with "Prufrock" in "Feuille d'Album" goes much further than superficial allusions to and mimicry of Eliot's work, especially in its involvement with proletarian, urban life, its response to the poem's

preoccupations with unfulfilled longing and sexual inhibition, and its engagement with Eliot's images and metaphors of extreme emotional diffidence.

Mansfield's acquaintance with Eliot's early masterpiece can be dated to June 3, 1917, a few days before the dinner party that she and Eliot attended at the Hutchinsons, when she read "Prufrock" aloud to the assembled company at Garsington in what was apparently the first public reading by a woman.<sup>19</sup> In the words of Roger Fry, who brought with him copies of *Prufrock and Other Observations* to distribute to the guests, it "caused a stir, much discussion, some perplexity."<sup>20</sup> For Mansfield, it clearly struck a chord, undoubtedly as a key "modern" poetic text, for this term of approbation appears in letters written several years later, suggesting that the poem stayed with her. In March 1921 she wrote to Sydney Waterlow, "I think that's what I want modern poetry to be. I even have a feeling [. . .] that Johnny Keats would have admired it"; then in August 1922 she declared to Violet Schiff that it was by "far and away the most interesting and best modern poem—It stays in one's memory as a work of art."<sup>21</sup> Echoes of the poem appear in a journal entry of August 1919 in which she laments the meagerness of her output: "Is that all, [. . .] that is not what I meant at all."<sup>22</sup> As Stead comments, this image of her own lapsed creativity, "hovering on the brink of stories but unable to press forward and write them" comes directly from Eliot's protagonist's words.<sup>23</sup> That "Feuille d'Album" took shape as a response to Eliot's verse might be inferred from the fact that it was among the few stories she wrote after her Garsington reading of "Prufrock" in June 1917 and may indeed have been the first new one.<sup>24</sup> In the intervening months Mansfield had completed and revised *The Aloe* which she sent in October to Virginia and Leonard Woolf for publication by the Hogarth Press under the new name of *Prelude*.

It is therefore worth asking whether "Prufrock" was to Mansfield's mind exempt from the criticism that she levied in a letter to Virginia Woolf in 1919 about the aridity of Eliot's verse,

saying that “the poems *look* delightful but I confess I think them unspeakably dreary. How one could write so absolutely without emotion—.”<sup>25</sup> Certainly “Prufrock” would have engaged her interest then because of the representation of voice through dramatic monologue at a time—May to June 1917—when she was experimenting with mime and dialogue, as in “The Common Round,” “The Black Cap,” and “Two Tuppenny Ones, Please.”<sup>26</sup> Such negative comments, therefore, might be read in terms of her more general attack on the masculine tenor of much modernist writing, especially its conceits of artifice and sterility, as typified by her image of those “dark young men—so proud of their plumes and their black and silver cloaks.”<sup>27</sup> Mansfield’s views of Eliot by 1919, however, point to the growing ideological and artistic polarization between her and Murry and Eliot and others, as both she and Murry became convinced of the importance of Romantic artists like Keats; this later developed into the debate between Murry and Eliot on the relative merits of Romanticism and Classicism. But by 1918 Mansfield and Murry were already at odds with Bloomsbury, and their relationship with Lady Ottoline’s Garsington circle was also deteriorating.<sup>28</sup>

“Feuille d’Album,” therefore, belongs to this brief period of her first encounter with Eliot and these literary circles and reflects the creative energy that was unleashed when, in a positive frame of mind, she entered into dialogue with his work. In this light, Mansfield’s comment to Virginia Woolf made in 1919, “I don’t think he is a poet—Prufrock is after all a short story,”<sup>29</sup> may be read as a form of artistic license or slippage; that is, as less a criticism of Eliot than an indirect allusion to the narrative potential of “Prufrock” that evidently inspired her story.

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In the reading that follows, “Feuille d’Album” is interpreted as Mansfield’s literary encounter with Eliot’s persona of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” a kind of “writing back” to his

representations of masculinity, gendered relations, and the psychological hesitation in thought, speech, and action for which his poem is known. Mansfield's narrator displays an acute awareness about the complexities of male inhibition and lightly shifts the focus of Eliot's memorable portrait of male disempowerment onto the women he avoids, then playfully, in a shift towards fantasy, restores a sense of potential happiness and release from his locked-in state of selfhood.

Furthermore, Mansfield's story, unlike Eliot's poem, identifies empathetically with its protagonist's dilemma and imagines a cityscape capable of transformation, contrasting Eliot's depictions of male heroism in decline, urban wastelands, or the collapse of civilization.<sup>30</sup>

Reinforcing her tone of light-hearted irreverence is Mansfield's setting in Paris, home of creative energy and of youthful romance and folly, such as in stories like "The Little Governess" and "Something Childish but very Natural." For Mansfield, Paris was a mecca for her writing, because as she noted "All my observation is so *detailed*, as it always is when I get to France."<sup>31</sup>

Mansfield's female riposte, as the story may be called, opens with comments by various women on the "impossible" nature of her protagonist, a young artist called Ian French, a prototype of Prufrock with his sexual ambiguity, hesitation, and resistance to any overtures for social engagement. He remains detached from human relationships and impervious to the women's blandishments; but in the second half of the story, which represents his desire and dreams through free indirect discourse, he demonstrates the beginnings of self-agency through the dramatic sensation of falling in love, a reprieve that Eliot never grants to his hero. But the witty denouement can be seen as a repositioning of the eccentric, neurotic elements of Eliot's Prufrock in a vision of absurdist possibility. Mansfield's hero addresses the woman with whom he has fallen in love through a mix of a plausible social gesture and the unreal: "'Excuse me, Madame, you dropped this.' And he handed her an egg."<sup>32</sup> Unlike Prufrock's stuttering hesitation,

Mansfield's comic joke confirms that words can be uttered and overtures made to the opposite sex, although the reality they point to is phenomenologically impossible. In 1917, then, she may have been writing indirectly and allusively—as a gesture—in order to communicate beyond the real life limits of her relationship with Eliot, not just as a witty amplification of his vision of the individual's inability to signify and view of life as artifice. That is, the story might be read as a metaphor for their delicately balanced personal relations which even then were being undermined as Eliot penned his satire, "Eeldrop and Appleplex," largely targeting Mansfield. If there is any such correspondence between life and art, then the position of the woman in Mansfield's story as the passive object of the hero's gaze—lacking in voice and unable to see him within her line of vision—suggests a strategic reverse mirroring within the narrative frame of the role of the artist/creator.

In order to approach these speculations, one must consider the ambivalence of Mansfield's responses to Eliot the man, evinced in correspondence from about 1919, a period when both Mansfield and Murry were identifying with the poetic and ideological values of Romanticism rather than wholeheartedly embracing modernism. The earlier feeling of exhilaration in Eliot's company seems to have given way to a more sceptical attitude to which this aesthetic preference might correspond; that is, Mansfield now singles out Eliot's ponderousness and social awkwardness in company, seeing them as a pose or performance, perhaps identified with Prufrock who says: "there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (lms. 26-27).<sup>33</sup> By 1921 her attraction to him was mixed with reservations as she confided to Sydney Waterlow: "Hes a rare delightful being—isn't he? That's what I always feel, even when the bluff oppresses me."<sup>34</sup> Writing to Brett the following year she adds, "He suffers from feelings of powerlessness. He knows it. He feels weak. It is all disguise. That slow manner, that hesitation,

sidelong glances, and so on are *painful*.”<sup>35</sup> The idea of bluff and its phonic counterpart “buff” (as in the game, Blindman’s Bluff, which was originally called buff—in the sense of pushing or nudging the person wearing the blindfold) are useful in considering Mansfield’s suspicion of counterfeit and disguise in Eliot’s manner, for they provide a metaphor for her gender-sensitive approach; that is, in writing “Feuille d’Album” as a response to Eliot’s modernist statement as articulated in “Prufrock,” she plays with Eliot’s bluff (exterior/guise) to present an alternative. Namely she hints, in the form of a buff or nudge, that his poem’s underlying message—the hesitation about speech, the questioning of the self and relatedness to others—can be displaced with a vision of art/life as rooted in natural forces and enhanced by spiritual wonder, even though her story’s comic, absurd ending undercuts any idea of transcendence. In other words, she answers Prufrock’s central quest for a voice with which to propose to a woman, daring to contradict the poem’s main premise that this is impossible.<sup>36</sup>

Specific details in “Feuille d’Album” are reminiscent of Eliot the man, suggesting Mansfield saw in Prufrock’s identity features of his creator. Eliot’s presence in his own writing evokes a comment from her on his essay on Ben Jonson, and Mansfield’s perception corresponds to the critical consensus about the sources of “Prufrock’s” shifting subjectivity.<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Perloff, for example, says that Prufrock “cannot be separated from the poet who has invented him”; while Elizabeth Scheider also comments that the protagonist is a “hybrid of the poet’s self and Laforgue.”<sup>38</sup> But there are also elements of Mansfield’s own personality in the story’s elevation of art as a guiding principle of life, which for her replaced religion as the highest sources of truth and value; her idealized portrait of the artist figure, Ian French, displays aspects of her own fastidious control over her domestic surroundings. For the first time since “An Indiscreet Journey,” written in 1915, and by contrast to other stories of 1917 such as “Mr Reginald Peacock’s Day,” “The



Common Round,” and “A Dill Pickle,” all set in London, Mansfield returns to France, specifically Paris. This alternative cityscape allows her a vital distance from the metropolitan setting of America, where Eliot’s text is set, and London, her preferred location for stories written then. Further, the aerial positioning of the narrator from the artist’s studio at the top of the building where the protagonist lives, and the panoramic view of the cityscape, presented through cinematic panning shots bring the sense of freedom and lightheartedness that Mansfield associated with the French cultural and social milieu; but the setting is also a reminder that Eliot went to Paris in 1910 to study philosophy (Bergson and Laforgue) at the Sorbonne. Paris as location is further reinforced by the name of her excruciatingly shy and gauche protagonist, Ian French, which recalls her nick-name for Eliot as “French Polish Elliott.”<sup>39</sup> A famous artist, described as “very clever,”<sup>40</sup> Ian French’s buried emotions are glimpsed through images of cultural and artistic value that Mansfield herself subscribed to and would identify with an artist like Eliot. The contents of his studio are arranged to form the pattern of a “still life”; this fusion of art and life and the sequestering of his studio, kept “as neat as a pin,”<sup>41</sup> from all who wish to enter, recalls the *fin de siècle*, Wildean, art for art’s sake aesthetics which she originally embraced. Finally the fact that the girl Ian falls in love with in his fantasy “was the only other person alive who was just his age,”<sup>42</sup> is possibly a coded reference to Eliot’s closeness in age to Mansfield (with only ten days difference between them).

The story’s opening defines character traits of Ian French that recall Prufrock’s capacity to perplex and puzzle because of his inability to give voice to his intentions as in “It is impossible to say just what I mean” (ln. 104): “He really was an impossible person. Too shy altogether. With absolutely nothing to say for himself.”<sup>43</sup> Mansfield continues by playing with the language of blushing to suggest that in addition to signaling self-consciousness the blush belongs to a

performance designed to elicit erotic, tender attention. French's blushes of embarrassment signal his boyishness and unattainability: "How could one resist him? Oh, one's heart was wrung at the sight. And as if that were not enough there was his trick of blushing. . . . Whenever the waiter came near him he turned crimson—" Further, blushing encapsulates the maladroit gesture at the climax when "more crimson than ever" he handed her the egg.<sup>44</sup> The third person narrator voices the suspicion that French's facial changes in reddening are part of a masquerade, stating finally, "It can't all be as innocent as it looks!"<sup>45</sup> These flourishes and the layered, knowing commentary can be read as a further expansion of the monologue of Prufrock whose inhibition and tongue-tied state stem from anxiety about how he will be perceived, mainly by women.

Mansfield may have studied Eliot's technique, adapted from Jules Laforgue, of using judgements made by others—either overheard or imagined—as a means of inhibiting the speaker,<sup>46</sup> for although there is no insight into the enigmatic Ian French's point of view, the opening report of three different female admirers consists of such judgements about the impossibility of any intimacy with him. The focus on the female response recalls the alternative title Eliot considered for the poem—"Prufrock among the Women"<sup>47</sup>—and the mystery of the artist, as they see it, recalls the poem's refrain: "In the room women come and go / talking of Michelangelo" (lms. 13-14; 35-36). French's resistance to their various overtures—to mothering, to a nightlife, to physical intimacy—and his refusal to come alive emotionally and sexually, provokes their threefold choric response, "hopeless."<sup>48</sup>

If the story opens by playing on the "bluff" of Ian French's presence—the women see him as inarticulate and emotionally detached—then the second half constitutes the "buff," the nudge towards another angle of vision, an alternative view of life. Prufrock's extreme self-consciousness, being tongue-tied and unable to formulate "some overwhelming question" as he

wanders “half deserted streets” (lms. 10; 4), and his procrastination are wittily hinted at in the printed notice, “GET UP AT ONCE,” which hangs on French’s bedroom wall.<sup>49</sup> But Mansfield’s protagonist then begins to depart from the Eliot’s character traits as the story’s urban setting leads into a narrative momentum that will culminate in the proposal. The transformation in mood and style (from social realism to fantasy) in “Feuille d’Album” begins with the narrator’s ringing announcement: “Really there was no need for him to go out,”<sup>50</sup> implying that psychological change occurs through attunement to the inner voice, not social engagement. Ian French’s vision occurs in response to the revivification and transfiguration of the natural world: “It had been raining—the first real spring rain of the year had fallen—a bright spangle hung on everything and the air smelled of buds and moist earth.”<sup>51</sup> Anne Mounic points out that the opening of the “two wings of windows”<sup>52</sup> of the girl’s house opposite implies a miraculous soaring of the imagination following the rain soaking the earth, while the daffodils the girl carries, the sight of which catapults him into love, also convey a sense of wonder.<sup>53</sup> Mansfield is showing that through the transformative powers of the imagination, art can become a way of living life, not a substitute for it.<sup>54</sup> A kind of resurrection is suggested by these images of romance, but in an anti-realist move the perspective switches from the hero to the woman he loves who sees only a “hollow in the air”<sup>55</sup> where he might have been, suggesting the spell under which he has fallen is the work of art or magic. This is reinforced by an image that in Eliot-like fashion, like his fog imaged as a cat, balloons away from its referent and assumes a life of its own;<sup>56</sup> in being pierced in love, his heart, imaged as a weapon or spear, plunges down from his window and finds its destination in the flower pot of daffodils below. In the story’s ending, therefore, the irresolvable dilemma of Prufrock, who could never bring himself to propose to a woman, who sees himself as no more than a “pair of ragged claws,” and who suffers cosmic distress at the fear of being laughed at, has

been transformed into Ian French's sudden metamorphosis through "an extended joke."<sup>57</sup>

Prufrock's chronic dithering, hesitation, and prevarication—"Should I, after cake and tea and ices / Have the strength to force this moment to its crisis?" and "And would it have been worth it, after all?" (lms. 79-80; 87)—finds an answer in French's comic statement, as he seizes his chance to make the woman's acquaintance, by claiming, implausibly, to return an egg she supposedly had dropped.

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To examine the Eliot-Mansfield relationship from the other side is to discover, in C. K. Stead's words, "something typically dark and Eliotic."<sup>58</sup> When Eliot met Mansfield he would have been primed by Bloomsbury gossip to see her as impenetrable, masklike, but he also knew of her, as Scofield Thayer wrote to him, as "England's latest short story prima donna."<sup>59</sup> Mansfield at that stage had only published one slim volume, *In a German Pension* (1911), although she was writing extensively for little magazines like the *New Age* and *Rhythm*. Her arrival as a supreme writer of short fiction lay in the future, but she had made a name with the publication of her masterpiece, the long story *Prelude* in 1917, the second volume in the Hogarth Press, and Eliot, who had not yet met the Woolfs but who was their choice for publication number three, was jealous of this modest success.<sup>60</sup> It is therefore perhaps not surprising that when Ezra Pound solicited him for a contribution to *The Little Review* Eliot should produce, in what is his only piece of prose fiction, a satire on Mansfield.<sup>61</sup> The attack appears in Part II of "Eeldrop and Appleplex," written and published in September 1917, ironically around the same time Mansfield was writing "Feuille d'Album." Eliot's protagonists, Eeldrop (alias Eliot) and Appelplex (a version of Apollinax, Eliot's name for Bertrand Russell, with whom Vivien Eliot was then having an adulterous affair) are close friends whose philosophical positions differ: Eeldrop is "a sceptic, with a taste for

mysticism,” and Appelplex “a materialist with a leaning towards skepticism.”<sup>62</sup> In Part II their conversation dwells entirely on the character and activities of Scheherazade (alias Edith), a name which Carole Seymour Jane says was inspired by fin de siècle sexuality and decadence and which would have invoked the image of Nijinsky dancing the Golden Slave in the Ballet Russes production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s ballet in London in 1912.<sup>63</sup> For Mansfield, it would have been associated with “Sumurûn,” the dramatic production adapted from the story in the *Arabian Nights* about a slave girl, which played to full houses in London’s Coliseum for six weeks in January 1911 and about which she wrote a creative response.<sup>64</sup> Two recent studies of Eliot and his wife argue for different contenders for the real-life counterpart to Scheherazade: Vivien Eliot and Mansfield.<sup>65</sup> Commonplace gossip about both women and Bertrand Russell had been circulating among the Bloomsbury circle.<sup>66</sup> But Eliot in fact acknowledges Mansfield as the target of his libellous attack in a letter to Ezra Pound of 1935.<sup>67</sup> Close scrutiny identifies features of her life and character, notably the phrase “what is called her impenetrable mask” probably echoes Lytton Strachey’s observation that she had “a passive mask of a face.”<sup>68</sup> Appelplex’s defense of Eeldrop’s charge of her “passion for experience,” that she has a “shrewd observation,” recalls Russell’s comment about Mansfield as being “full of alarming penetration,”<sup>69</sup> while the observation about “her sarcasm at the expense of her friends” seemingly alludes to Mansfield’s capacity for the cutting phrase. Eeldrop’s malicious critique of Scheherazade as artist also rings true of Mansfield: she is too conscious of how she presents herself and too rational, “her experience [. . .] already digested by reason”; she uses herself as the material for her art unlike the “true artist” who “disintegrates or solidifies” when separated from his work, and who lives by instinct.<sup>70</sup> Underlying this is the judgement that Edith/Scheherazade is not as great an artist as she and others think, a view that matches Eliot’s doubts about Mansfield’s talents. Finally are the facts

of Scheherazade's personal life: she "married a celebrated billiard professional in San Francisco after an acquaintance of twelve hours, lived with him for two days, joined a musical comedy chorus, and was divorced in Nevada."<sup>71</sup> These details recall Mansfield's brief marriage to George Bowden which lasted for just one night in 1909, after which she left with her lover, Garnett Trowell, for Liverpool, joining the chorus of the Moody-Manners Opera Company, as well as her idea about getting a divorce in America in 1912.<sup>72</sup>

Whether Mansfield knew of this satire, which Eliot refused to have reprinted, or saw herself as a target, is not known.<sup>73</sup> Relations with the Eliots declined upon her first meeting Vivien at a dinner at the Murrays on May 14, 1920: her dislike of Vivien, and recoil from Eliot's solicitousness towards her, were palpable. She wrote to her wealthy American friends, Sydney and Violet Schiff:

The Elliots [*sic*] have dined with us tonight. They are just gone—and the whole room is *quivering* [. . .] Mrs E's voice rises "Oh don't commiserate with Tom; he's *quite* happy." I know its extravagant; I know [. . .] I ought to have seen more—but I dislike her so *immensely*. She really repels me. She makes me shiver with apprehension . . .<sup>74</sup>

Indicative of her sentiment about Eliot is her announcement of his place in her affections: "I am so fond of Elliott. [. . .] But this teashop creature . . .";<sup>75</sup> her violent reaction to Vivien, though, suggests that she considered his marriage to her a betrayal of some sort. To make matters worse, Vivien told her she had previously visited the Murry's flat, and Murry, in explaining the circumstances of the meeting, implied an attraction between them. Mansfield concludes bitterly, speaking of both Vivien and Murry: "I feel as tho' I've been stabbed."<sup>76</sup>

Mansfield's "deep sympathy" for Eliot remained as evidenced in a letter to Violet Schiff in October 1921: "Poor Eliot sounds tired to death. [. . .]—as though he were being tortured."<sup>77</sup>

Although Eliot's satire in "Eeeldrop and Appleplex" suggests he was from the beginning more foe than friend, his critical attitude may not have registered with Mansfield until 1920. In this year Eliot denounced her in a letter to Ezra Pound—"I believe her to be a dangerous WOMAN"<sup>78</sup>—while Vivien's highly strung fears and anxieties led her to see Mansfield as predatory and untrustworthy. These signs of dislike developed into what seems like irrational hatred in 1922 when Eliot's new journal, *Criterion*, was thought to be at financial risk. Mansfield had met Lady Rothermere, one of the journal's financial backers, when both were staying at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, and the latter claimed that she was the most intelligent woman she had ever met. The Eliots and Pound feared that Mansfield might influence their patron negatively in favor of Eliot's rival, John Middleton Murry and his journal the *Athenaeum*, especially as Lady Rothermere's response to the first issue of the *Criterion* had been negative on account of its dullness. Vivien attacked Mansfield in flamboyant terms, writing to Pound on November 2, 1922:

She [Lady R.] is unhinged—one of those beastly raving women who are the most dangerous. She is now in that asylum for the insane called La Prieuré where she does religious dances naked with Katherine Mansfield. "K.M.", she says in every letter -- "*is the most intelligent woman I have ever met.*" K. M. is pouring poison in her ear (of course) for K. M. hates T. more than anyone.<sup>79</sup>

Eliot, not to be outdone, discredited Mansfield even more vigorously to Pound five days later: "[she] is not simply the most intelligent woman Lady R. has ever met. She is simply one of the most persistent and thick skinned toadies and one of the vulgarest women Lady R. has ever met and is also a sentimental crank."<sup>80</sup>

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Both “Feuille d’Album” and its successor, “A Dill Pickle,” according to C. K. Stead, show “the subtlety, refinement and cleverness of Mansfield at her best”; he argues that these stories with their continental settings represent the beginning of a new departure in her work.<sup>81</sup> Her awareness of psychological distance in “Feuille d’Album” as well as her appropriation of stylistic innovations of “Prufrock” anticipates later developments: the dark, metropolitan humor of “Je ne parle pas français,” for example, with its handling of metaphor, metonymy, and image as well as the experimentation with cinematic technique. Neither Mansfield’s borrowings nor her critical engagement with Eliot’s developments in literary modernism, however, quite explain the hostilities of the Eliot-Mansfield relationship after 1920. The fact that Eliot labelled her a “thick skinned [. . .] toady” suggests that, even apart from the crisis over Lady Rothermere’s loyalties, he perceived her as false and inauthentic, perhaps in reaction to the many masks that she wore. His own Prufrock-like mask of being inarticulate, awkward, and shy was not only densely consistent, by contrast, but comprised a significant part of his personality then. Lady Ottoline, for example, spoke of him as “dull, dull, dull. He never moves his lips and he speaks in an even and monotonous voice.”<sup>82</sup> Significantly, Mansfield’s own comment about him in 1922, that “he is too serious about himself, even a little bit absurd [. . .] he wants kindly laughing at and setting free,”<sup>83</sup> is corroborated by another woman who knew him well. Mary Hutchinson had a long-term close friendship with Eliot but found him a silent and tongue-tied companion. Speaking in ways reminiscent of the women who talk of Ian French in “Feuille d’Album,” she commented in her diary: “Had I seen clearly, I could have been bolder, perhaps, stimulated his imagination, perhaps, given him experience, perhaps.”<sup>84</sup> Mansfield’s masks and guises, by contrast, never seemed to match with a “real” self at this time of her life. Eliot, in presenting himself to the world through



his “bluff,” may have become trapped in his own projected images of her bluff or disguises, so they both existed in a kind of counter transference with each other.

“An Album Leaf” was revised and published in *Bliss and Other Stories* in 1920 with its French title “Feuille D’Album.” It is unlikely that Eliot ever read it as a comment on his own life, yet he probably read the later story, “The Escape,” published in the *Athanaeum* in July 1921, a story about a crisis in a dysfunctional marriage which, in the view of C. K. Stead, is in all probability about Eliot and Vivien, even though Mansfield wrote to Violet Schiff that the story was written for her and that it included “your tree.”<sup>85</sup> If the Eliots read this story, then this might explain why Vivien wrote to Eliot three weeks later asking him to intervene with Sydney Schiff: “Write to Schiff [. . .]. Must not let him fall into K. M.’s hands.”<sup>86</sup> It may be another reason why Eliot remained unforgiving of Mansfield. The article he promised Murry he would write on her work after her death never appeared; he may have given up the intention to “deal with” her “inflated reputation,” as he wrote to Richard Aldington.<sup>87</sup> In his lectures published as *After Strange Gods*, however, he criticized her story “Bliss” for its lack of “moral and social ramifications,” adding that her skill was in handling the “*minimum* material” and that this limitedness makes the writing “feminine.”<sup>88</sup> These terms were swiftly taken up by other male critics such as H. E. Bates<sup>89</sup> and later Frank Sargeson, preeminent New Zealand story writer in the 1930s.<sup>90</sup> Sargeson used these adjectives to launch an assault on Mansfield’s posthumous reputation which led her to be relegated to the margins of the New Zealand national literary tradition as it developed through the mid to late twentieth century, just as she was by the time of her death on the periphery of Bloomsbury and hence considered in the eyes of most critics as being tangential to mainstream modernism.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), 410.

<sup>2</sup> C. K. Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot: A Double Centenary," *Answering to the Language: Essays on Modern Writers* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), 149-50; Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Wasteland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015), 267.

<sup>3</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 76.

<sup>4</sup> She wrote of him, "it's all disguise." Katherine Mansfield to Dorothy Brett, 26 February 1922, in *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008): 5:75. All subsequent letters from Mansfield are from this source; Eliot's prose piece, "Eeldrop and Appleplex" (1917), published in two parts in *The Little Review*, targets "Scheherazade," possibly Mansfield, as "perfectly impenetrable" and mask-like. See T. S. Eliot, "Eeldrop and Appleplex" in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: Apprentice Years, 1905-1918*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 525-532. Project MUSE, <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

<sup>5</sup> C. K. Stead, "Battle of the Wasps," *London Review of Books* 33, no. 5 (March 3, 2011): 19-21.

<sup>6</sup> Kaplan, *Origins of Modernist Fiction*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> See Sue Thomas, "Revisiting Katherine Mansfield: Virginia Woolf and the Aesthetics of Respectability," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 94, no. 1 (2013), 64-82; C. K. Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and the Fictions of Continental Europe," in *Katherine*

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*Mansfield and Continental Europe: Connections and Influences*, ed. Janka Kaščáková and Gerri Kimber (London: Palgrave, 2015), 236-51.

<sup>8</sup> The poem was first published in *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1915 and in England in *Prufrock and Other Observations* by the Egoist Press in June 1917. See *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 368. All future references to Eliot's poems will be to this edition with line numbers indicated in textual citations.

<sup>9</sup> Katherine Mansfield to Ottoline Morrell, 24 June 1917, 1:312.

<sup>10</sup> Alpers, *Life*, 244. Alpers makes this observation of Mansfield's letter to Ottoline Morrell, 16 June 1917, 1:311.

<sup>11</sup> Mansfield to Morrell, 24 June 1917, 1:312.

<sup>12</sup> C. K. Stead, *The Secret History of Modernism* (London: Harvill Press, 2001), 159-61; *Mansfield: A Novel* (London: Harvill Press, 2004), 1-11.

<sup>13</sup> Stead, "Battle of the Wasps," 19.

<sup>14</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Conversation Galante," 1:27.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: Poetry and Critical Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Gerri Kimber and Angela Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 110-12.

<sup>16</sup> Sue Thomas, "Revisiting Katherine Mansfield," 66-67; 69.

<sup>17</sup> Kaplan, *Origins of Modernist Fiction*, 76-7.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," in *The Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: The Collected Fiction*, 2 vols, ed. Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 2:94. Verbal correspondences suggest certain phrases have been adapted from the poem.

Consider, for example:

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“Prufrock”: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all—” (Ins. 94-95)

“Feuille d’Album”: “but that was all. [. . .] those far-seeing women were quite right. It wasn’t all.” (2:94; 2:95);

“Prufrock”: “Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.” (ln 67)

“Feuille d’Album”: “the concierge [...] wrapped up in a filthy shawl” (2:94)

“Prufrock”: “Is it perfume from a dress / That makes me so digress?” (Ins. 65-66)

“Feuille d’Album”: “She [. . .] leaned over him so that he might smell the enchanting perfume of her hair” (2:94).

<sup>19</sup> Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 278.

<sup>20</sup> Clive Bell, *Old Friends* (London: 1956), 122; Mansfield, *Letters* 1:313n4; Alpers, *Life*, 239.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine Mansfield to Sydney Waterlow, late March 1921, 4:201-202; Katherine Mansfield to Violet Schiff, 24 August 1922, 5:256.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Scott, ed., *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, 2 vols. (Canterbury New Zealand: Lincoln University Press and Daphne Brasell Associates, 1997), 2:83.

<sup>23</sup> Stead, “Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot,” 154.

<sup>24</sup> The exact date of composition of “Feuille d’Album” is not known, but as previously noted it appeared in *New Age* in September 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Mansfield to Woolf, c. 12 May 1919, 2:318. The Hogarth Press published Eliot’s *Poems* on May 12th (2:318n1).

<sup>26</sup> Alpers, *Life*, 238-39.

<sup>27</sup> Mansfield to Woolf, c. 12 May 1919, 2:318.

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- <sup>28</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Circulating Genius: John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield, and D.H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 20; 86-7.
- <sup>29</sup> Mansfield to Woolf, c. 12 May 1919, 2:318.
- <sup>30</sup> Kaplan, *Origins of Modernist Fiction*, 75.
- <sup>31</sup> Katherine Mansfield to S. S. Koteliansky, 19 November 1915, 1:199-200.
- <sup>32</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:97.
- <sup>33</sup> T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," 5-9.
- <sup>34</sup> Mansfield to Waterlow, late March 1921, 4:201.
- <sup>35</sup> Katherine Mansfield to Dorothy Brett, 26 February 1922, 5:75.
- <sup>36</sup> Elizabeth W. Scheider, *T. S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet* (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 1975), 30.
- <sup>37</sup> Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry, 19 November 1919, 3:104.
- <sup>38</sup> Marjorie Perloff, *Twenty-First Century Modernism: The New Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 24; Scheider, *The Pattern in the Carpet*, 24.
- <sup>39</sup> Katherine Mansfield to Ottoline Morrell, 16 June 1917, 1:311.
- <sup>40</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>41</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95. On Mansfield's views of still life, that one must gather "round bright fruits [. . .] and become them, as it were," see her letter to Dorothy Brett, 11 October 1917, 1:330.
- <sup>42</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>43</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:93.
- <sup>44</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:93; 2:97.
- <sup>45</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:94.

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- <sup>46</sup> Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 125
- <sup>47</sup> Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 160.
- <sup>48</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:93-94.
- <sup>49</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>50</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:94-95.
- <sup>51</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>52</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>53</sup> Anne Mounic, "'And he handed her an egg': The Art of Memory in 'Feuille d'Album', Katherine Mansfield and Proust," *Katherine Mansfield Studies* 1 (2009): 42-43.
- <sup>54</sup> See Keith Gregor, "Blissful Thinking: Katherine Mansfield and the En-gendering of Modernist Fiction," *Cuadernos de Filología Inglesa* 611 (1977), 65.
- <sup>55</sup> Mansfield, "Feuille d'Album," 2:95.
- <sup>56</sup> Perloff, *Twenty-First Century Modernism*, 25.
- <sup>57</sup> Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (London: Harvester Press, 1981), 41-44.
- <sup>58</sup> Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot," 158.
- <sup>59</sup> Stead, "Battle of the Wasps," 19.
- <sup>60</sup> Carole Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivien Eliot* (London: Robinson, 2001), 194; Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, 2nd ed. (London: Vintage, 1998), 106.
- <sup>61</sup> Eliot, "Eeldrop and Appleplex," 531n1.
- <sup>62</sup> Eliot, "Eeldrop and Appleplex," 525-26.
- <sup>63</sup> Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow*, 194.

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<sup>64</sup> Katherine Mansfield, “Sumurûn: An Impression of Leopoldine Konstantin” in Kimber and Smith, *Collected Works*, 3:386-87.

<sup>65</sup> Seymour-Jones argues that Vivien is the prime target but concedes that Katherine Mansfield may also have been a source (194); see Gordon, *An Imperfect Life*, 106.

<sup>66</sup> See Seymour-Jones, *Painted Shadow*, 195; Alpers, *Life*, 233.

<sup>67</sup> T. S. Eliot to Ezra Pound, 13 August 1935, YCAL MSS 43, Box 15, Folder 666. The Pound Papers, The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>68</sup> Eliot, “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” 530; Alpers, *Life*, 210; 248.

<sup>69</sup> Eliot, “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” 530; Alpers, *Life*, 234.

<sup>70</sup> Eliot, “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” 530-31.

<sup>71</sup> Eliot, “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” 529.

<sup>72</sup> Alpers, *Life*, 85-92; 145.

<sup>73</sup> Eliot, “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” 532n3. By 1935 Eliot saw it as a piece of juvenilia.

<sup>74</sup> Katherine Mansfield to Sydney and Violet Schiff, 14 May 1920, 4:11.

<sup>75</sup> Mansfield to Sydney and Violet Schiff, 14 May 1920, 4:11.

<sup>76</sup> Mansfield to Sydney and Violet Schiff, 14 May 1920, 4:11.

<sup>77</sup> Mansfield to Sydney and Violet Schiff, 14 May 1920, 4:11; Mansfield to Violet Schiff, 24 October 1921, 4:303.

<sup>78</sup> T. S. Eliot to Ezra Pound, 3 July 1920, in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, vol. 1, rev. ed., ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber, 2009), 473. All subsequent letters from T. S. and Vivien Eliot are from this source.

<sup>79</sup> Vivien Eliot to Ezra Pound, 2 November 1922, 770; Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 416-20.

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<sup>80</sup> T. S. Eliot to Pound, 7 November 1922, 775.

<sup>81</sup> Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and the Fictions of Continental Europe," 239.

<sup>82</sup> Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 253.

<sup>83</sup> Mansfield to Brett, 26 February 1922, 5:75.

<sup>84</sup> Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 267.

<sup>85</sup> Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and the Fictions of Continental Europe," 246-47. Stead suggests that the "hollow man" of Mansfield's story might have provided Eliot with the title "The Hollow Men" for his poem, written several years later (247).

<sup>86</sup> Vivien Eliot to T. S. Eliot, 16 August 1920, 492.

<sup>87</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield; A Secret Life* (London: Penguin, 1988), 240-41; Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T. S. Eliot," 158.

<sup>88</sup> T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London 1934), 35-36. See Pamela Dunbar, "What does Bertha Want: A Re-reading of Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss,'" in *Essays on Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Rhoda B. Nathan (New York: R. K. Hall, 1993), 128.

<sup>89</sup> See Gregor, "Blissful Thinking," 66-67.

<sup>90</sup> Frank Sargeson, "Katherine Mansfield," in *Conversation in a train and Other Critical Writing*, ed. Kevin Cunningham (Auckland and Oxford: Christine Cole Catley, 1983), 29; 173; see Janet Wilson, "The 'Burden' of the Feminine: Frank Sargeson's Encounter with Katherine Mansfield," in *Katherine Mansfield and her Legacy*, ed. Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 207-18.