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Introduction: Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)colonial

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The articles in this volume of Katherine Mansfield Studies explore Mansfield’s identity as a (post)colonial writer in relation to her foremost reputation as a European modernist. In seeking new possibilities for alignments with, and resolutions to, the contradictory agendas implied by these terms, they address the clashing perspectives between her life in Europe, where her troubled self-designation as the ‘little colonial’ became a fertile source of her distinctive brand of literary modernism, and her ongoing, complex relationship with her New Zealand homeland. As Elleke Boehmer notes, Mansfield’s dualistic personae ‘of modernist artist as outsider and of colonial outsider as modernist’ means that, like other modernist writers such as Jean Rhys, C. L. R. James, and Mulk Raj Anand, she can be positioned in ways that challenge and re-centre commonplace hierarchies: of the metropolitan centre over the underdeveloped periphery, of male modernists like Joyce, Eliot, and Yeats, over women writers, of modernist genres of novel and poetry over that of the short story. Yet this special volume goes beyond generic boundaries and historical periodisation implied by terms like ‘modernist’ and ‘colonial’. Collectively the essays here explore Mansfield as a (post)colonial modernist writer whose anticipatory discourse demonstrates a consciousness about resistance that precedes the founding of the postcolonial state; that is, an already known postcolonial vision. Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)colonial, marks the emergence of a current of Mansfield criticism that has previously lain dormant under the pressure of other theories and approaches: feminist, generic, biographical and social or historical. In reinvigorating this approach, with a synthesis of (post)colonial and modernist readings they increase the momentum in Mansfield studies and will advance possibilities for future scholarship.
The opening up of modernism to alternative inscriptions to those of the Anglo-American canon by exploring the relationship between modernism and colonialism has been the subject of several studies which postulate modernism’s emergence within the broader history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism, especially that of the British Empire. Modernism, through formal innovation in art, loosens its ties to empire as a response to the disruption of cultural and social certainties after World War One, and to the cultural contact between unfamiliar cultures and the impact of the exilic, migrant writers who travelled into the imperial centre. Modernism’s anxiety over colonialism can be aligned to the postcolonial challenge to the imperial mission, as studies of postcolonialism and modernism show. Peter Childs, for example, comments that modernism’s engagement with postcolonial perspectives from the periphery of empire, ‘fashions a distinctive discourse characterized by ambivalence’, because modernism is a literature concerned with ‘worlding’, and the challenge to European identities that it posed was both a provincial and global phenomenon.

Recent essay collections, *Modernism and Empire*, edited by Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (2000), and *Modernism and Colonialism*, edited by Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (2007), have sought to relativise the towering influence of Anglo-American modernism by considering other indigenous cultures, although this reframing is limited by the strong representation of traditional canonical writers. Begam and Moses’ aim to counter the view that traditional modernists colluded with the project of empire, is also at some remove from the critiques of empire and colonialism offered by a more peripheral writer like Mansfield. Nevertheless, they examine the power relations involved in modernism’s dynamic in a questioning of attitudes to the ‘other’ and to colonialism. Among these essays which emphasise heterogeneous indigenous traditions, literary modes and the attitudes of international modernism, at least one paradigm for reading Mansfield appears: James Joyce’s migrant challenge to established norms of Irish nationalism, his interpretation of British imperialism and the project of Euro-modernism. Joyce works at an oblique angle in introducing a ‘vernacular modernism’, comprising the linguistic terms and indigenous traditions of the Celtic twilight that exist in tension with the discourse of international modernism. Mansfield similarly introduces idioms and phrases associated with Maoriland writing, the dominant literary discourse from about 1888 to 1914, before a New Zealand literary national culture was developed, and uses Māori legend and mythology for irony, contrast and local realism. Both Anne Brown-Berens and Emmanouil Aretoulakis comment in their essays on her choice of indigenous terms
such as ‘whare’ and ‘karaka’. Alongside Australian idioms from the popular frontier fiction of writers like Henry Lawson such as ‘boncer’ [bonzer] and ‘sundowner’, they evidence the multi-lingual, generically mixed utterances and diverse lexical strands of Mansfield’s modernist renovation by which she created a transformed verbal environment that can only be described as colonial New Zealand modernist.

The familiar framework of postcolonial binaries – empire and colony, centre and periphery – which Homi Bhabha deconstructs by emphasising the unfixing of cultural symbols, the rehistoricising of signs and reading anew, does more than situate Mansfield ambivalently as a white settler writer with contradictory allegiances and affiliations; it also helps to show her modernism being refined in response to the pressure of imperial violence on colonial society, and the impact of the repressed ‘other’ on the subjectivity of the colonial subject. The critical exploration of overtly discordant cultural contacts between self and others is also manifested in Mansfield’s aesthetics of disruption and use of discrepant positions, an important reflex of her mastery of craft and control of form, whereby she brings modernism and postcolonialism into artistic alignment. Such an aesthetics enables narrative performativity of the shock caused by the interruption of that control, and the disruption of narrative continuity caused by shadowy others, manifested as doubles, uncanny apparitions, and other intimations of disturbance of place. Such an angle takes account of postcolonialism’s referencing of the occluded realms of the colonial past, its containment and exposure of the repressed other, the colonised. It can be linked to Mansfield’s ambivalences as a white settler subject and ‘this secret disruption’ that she perceived in herself.

The eight essays in this collection develop previous assessments of Mansfield’s ambivalent identity as a (post)colonial modernist, to investigate the nature of her (post)colonial status (for example, Aretoulakis, Mari, Martin) and to reconceptualise her bifurcated emplacement as a colonial, metropolitan modernist. They focus on her liminal positioning between empire and colony, and colonial, anti-colonial, and decolonised perspectives; and the shift in status when she sought to transcend self-alienation, and her fragmented and disoriented consciousness. Essays by Aretoulakis, Wilson, Brown-Berens, Mari, Gasston, in repositioning Mansfield in relation to her colonial origins, revise the prevailing view of her as restless, displaced and estranged modernist. They point to the alternative colonial sources, influences and communicative modes that she turned to in her aim to transform self-objectification through rupture, movement and division into a spiritual realisation (and reconciliation) of self and other. In contrast, the essays by Emily Ridge and
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Stefanie Rudig, through comparing Mansfield with the novelists Edith Wharton and Robert Louis Stevenson, offer new international critical and literary contexts for her (post)colonial modernism. Collectively, these essays offer insights into her diverse cultural and literary contexts in suggesting other provincial and international stylistic models for her modernism, identifying her ideological critique of society, her wish for psychological and literary re-emplacement as she grew increasingly ill, and her more radicalised postcolonial ambivalence, the new spatial positions and affiliations developed through cultural practices and psychic resources as she renewed her engagement with her New Zealand past. In different ways they pick up on and trace the continuities of her cultural alignments that Mark Williams has noted with reference to Mansfield’s early departure from New Zealand, as marked in her revitalised psychological, emotional attachment to her native homeland. Finally they suggest, given the impossibility of making a physical return, that she recovered a paradoxically distant yet intimate sense of belonging, one that is intersected by alternative positions, for as Emmanouil Aretoulakis comments, in finding her own identity she first had to lose herself ‘in a maze of far more extreme positions of otherness’.

The three opening essays focus on the way that crucial motifs, practices and orientations in Mansfield’s life and work traverse numerous social and cultural boundaries and divisions; these are traceable to her ambivalence about colonisation and later determination to find ways of transcending disruption, loss and death. Aimee Gasston’s prize-winning essay, ‘Katherine Mansfield, Cannibal’, provides a typology of those tropes and images of cannibalism, ingestion, and the gustatory, which Mansfield uses to unsettle the coloniser-colonised binary. Referring to ideas of savagery and primitive force as presented in the Brazilian Oswalde de Andrade’s the ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, and the modernist manifestos in Rhythm, Gasston analyses how Mansfield’s sharp-eyed, anti-colonial critique of Bloomsbury as barbarian in the satirical story, ‘Sunday Lunch’ destabilises cultural and class privilege. Arguing that incorporation is a key to Mansfield’s personal aesthetics, she stresses that a metaphysical and transcendental endo-cannibalism (the Freudian vision of eating one’s kin), appears as she acknowledges the power of death. The eucharistic symbolism of ‘To L. H. B.’, Mansfield’s elegy to her brother, demarcates an ‘anthropophagy of incorporation’ and revivification through writing, as she ‘returns’ to New Zealand through combining spiritual and material transubstantiation, so transcending displacement. Emmanouil Aretoulakis also argues, from a different angle, that Mansfield’s (post)colonialism emerges as a form of excessive identity in her oscillation between colonial, anti-colonial and postco-
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 Colonial positions; this also appears in the hybridisation of pure identity structures, such as beauty and ugliness, purity and impurity. The metaphysical and spiritual reconfiguration that determined Mansfield’s reorientation towards what became her life’s project – to write a new version of her childhood – is marked by the incorporation of death as an integral part of life and source of spiritual richness. This interpenetration of oppositions to show the elided other, death, as the determining force of life, parallels her occupation of the liminal spaces between colonial, anticolonial and postcolonial in ways that might be described as radically postcolonial. My own essay on Mansfield’s rewriting of ‘the contract with death’ also explores the implications for her late work of her vow to commemorate in prose the life of her brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp, and so restore him metaphorically to life. Drawing on recent studies of late Victorian and early twentieth-century cultural practices of the occult, telepathy and mediumship through seances, especially after World War One, I suggest that Mansfield turned to alternative cultural and communicative transmission channels: self-induced vision, hallucinations, telepathic communication, automatism and occult concepts such as ghosts and visions enabled her to access her earliest memories, return to the family and develop her vision of possibility even as her illness was diminishing her grasp on life. In the interweaving of death with life in her later New Zealand stories, she re-accents the (post)colonial modernism of her earlier stories, through focusing anew on place and space as haunted, susceptible to irruption from strange uncanny forces, as she exposes the precarious boundary between civilised and demonic, occulted domains; and to sensations of conflict and ‘difference within’.

 These three essays show Mansfield’s preoccupation with metaphorical re-emplacement in her homeland, combined with a metaphysic of transcendence through art in her reckoning with her mortality as the defining endeavour of her last years. They go some way to suggest a new image, of a Mansfield whose restlessness and wandering become part of a search for a new pattern which would offer hope for the future and a possibility of unity or wholeness, even while she continued to negotiate a presence within the interstices of colony and empire, and present sharp critiques of colonial patriarchy, domination and possession as in the classic story, ‘The Daughters of the Late Colonel’.

 Other essays examine the New Zealand cultural contexts, potential sources of stylistic influence, and Mansfield’s social critique, including self-critique of her ambivalence as colonial outsider. Mansfield’s early experimental, New Zealand regional stories – ‘Millie’, ‘Ole Underwood’, ‘The Woman at the Store’ – and sketches like ‘Ole
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Tar’, ‘Tui and Kezia’, and ‘Summer Idyll’, and the planned novel, Maata, show a preoccupation with the racially mixed society of colonial New Zealand, its uneven processes of colonisation, and imperial English underpinnings, demanding new understandings of the self in relation to a cultural other. This underpins her critique of provincialism, yet her stylistic synthesis of its diverse literary modes with metropolitan symbolism and Wildean fin-de-siècle aesthetics. Anne Brown-Berens challenges perceptions of Mansfield’s colonial outsider status by showing her as potentially linked to a local community of writers and their hybridised provincial-Victorian literary response to colonial conditions. Mansfield’s New Zealand writing is located alongside novels by English and Scottish diasporic writers of the late nineteenth century, such as Dugald Ferguson, Clara Cheeseman, Charlotte Evans and Alexander Bathgate, whose cultural and natural symbols demarcate an imagery of settler displacement in the disjunctions between the gendered frontier of the masculine outdoors (a form of landscape primitivism), and the feminised genteel interior (a morally civilising presence). These are compared to Mansfield’s exhibition of fake genteel interiors and imported artefacts in stories about the primitive frontier environment like ‘Millie’ and ‘The Woman at the Store’, of urban displacement in ‘Ole Underwood’ and of working-class life in ‘The Garden Party’. Brown-Berens shows Mansfield moving beyond her predecessors by using impressionist effects to intensify her psychological realism, while her cultural symbolism disrupts their cultural assumptions and provides alternative versions of the colonial world.

Likewise opening up new territory, Lorenzo Mari considers how Mansfield expanded the national imaginary through transgressive constructions of home and belonging in her fable, ‘The Kidnapping of Pearl Button’. Mari explores the implications of this story’s ethnic and indigenous point of view for New Zealand nationalism in his gendered reading of it as a version of the Freudian family romance, a feminised treatment of the oedipal scheme through focusing on a female child, and a reconfiguration of the Künstlerroman. Drawing on Jameson’s theories of third-world allegory which claim that the individual destiny can be metonymic of that of the entire society, he argues that Mansfield locates herself obliquely to the white settler in ideological terms, in order to expose society’s fissures and fractures, in this (post) colonial national allegory. The kidnapping of Pearl Button constitutes an interruption of the colonial patriarchal discourse that would present New Zealand as a utopian arcadia linked to the masculinised sphere of empire; yet patriarchy is reasserted in the story’s conclusion when Pearl Button is ‘rescued’ by the men in blue. Mari reads the story as a
momentary disruption of the national order that briefly opens up space for the indigenous viewpoint. He concludes that subsequent interventions in the allegory of the nation by Māori writers like Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace have built on the model of violent imposition, brutal interruption, contradiction and ambiguity between the family and colonial nation, that Mansfield provides through her national allegory.

Mansfield’s range and confidence as a writer in opening up to modernist exploration, means that her (post)colonial mask is just one of several when her entire oeuvre is considered. A story like ‘The Tiredness of Rosabel’, written before she left New Zealand, reveals a highly self-reflexive, layered metropolitan awareness and anticipates future stories about *la seule femme* like ‘The Little Governess’, ‘Dark Hollows’, ‘The Swing of the Pendulum’ and ‘A Cup of Tea’. Nevertheless in early stories using a first person narrator her complex position is nuanced through self-concealing masks and silences that betray insecurity about her place, identity and social standing. Todd Martin in his essay engages with the colonial underpinnings of Mansfield’s fractured identity and uncertain loyalties upon her arrival in Europe, as discernible in her apparently indefinable national status while living in Wörishofen in Germany in 1909. Stories written at that time and published as *In a German Pension* show deference to British or imperial anti-German feeling in this pre-World War One era, while also implying cultural differences in New Zealand’s national attitude to Germany at that time. Focusing on Mansfield’s self-perception as alienated stranger in the midst of Germans, and her obscurity in national terms – as to whether she is English or American – as several stories record, Martin suggests that these doubled identity structures and contradictory affiliations emerge through the complex prism of her narrative technique: Mansfield ‘performs’ a metropolitan satirical critique through the implied author, while in the voice of the first-person colonial narrator, she identifies with the German characters, sharing their excitements and sympathising with them, because, in Martin’s terms, she is still seeking a way to belong. Martin points to the complexity of Mansfield’s (post)colonial status in writing that, on the one hand, beneath the satiric overtones is dependent on recognisable, hegemonic and national, imperial modes, and on the other, the subversive impulses that might undermine them.

Mansfield’s somewhat ambiguous position in the modernist canon means that her attitudes to the writing of others that might reflect her paradoxical determination to distance herself from her colonial nation and past, yet reclaim them as new, have not always been read in the light of this dualism within her literary modernism. Yet the strength of her commitment to a (post)colonial aesthetic or understanding
of art appears through comparisons with other writers. Emily Ridge in her essay refers to Mansfield’s critical review of Wharton’s seminal novel, The Age of Innocence, written in 1920. Mansfield invokes her earlier fascination with the primitive and savage, in her reaction to the Anglo-American emphasis on manners, polished speech and politeness, pointing out that the characters are ‘like portraits in a gallery […] arranged for exhibition purposes’. Ridge points out that Mansfield is indirectly appraising the ambivalent quality of her own modernism by challenging the cultivated metropolitan urbanity of Wharton’s prose and advocating her preference for the wild and ‘a dark place or two in the soul’. Similarly illuminating is the comparison of her work with that of Robert Louis Stevenson. Stefanie Rudig, in her unexpected pairing of two writers in exile, whose independent migrations from their homelands were in diametrically opposed directions, emphasises their shared spatial constructions of South Pacific locales, and the instability of their concepts of home, as a diasporic place which combines alienation with belonging. But the contrasts are palpable: Stevenson’s novella, ‘The Beach at Falesa’, transforms European representation with a hybridisation of discrepant styles, forms and cultures in his rewriting and entails a reinscription of European-based stereotypes of a cross-cultural romance; whereas Mansfield introduces fluid concepts of identity and home in her novella ‘Prelude’.

These comparisons of Mansfield with other European writers go some way to further rehabilitate her reputation in the canons of modernism, in their demonstration of significant literary intersections as well as the light they shed on Mansfield’s artistic values and literary preferences, as reflecting her insider/outsider dualism. Mansfield’s rising status is evidenced in recent essays published in the Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers (2010), the second edition of The Cambridge Companion to Modernism (2011), and Claire Drewery’s study of modernist women writers (2011).20

This volume also features some of the most significant reports yet published in Katherine Mansfield Studies, namely on the important acquisition of Murry /Mansfield papers by the Alexander Turnbull Library and the discovery of papers relating to Katherine Mansfield in the archive of Miron Grindea, the editor of ADAM International Review, held in the King’s College London Archives, both in 2012. In his report, Chris Mourant, a PhD student, describes the five previously unknown Mansfield stories and collection of Wildean aphorisms that he came across in the ADAM archive. Most significant for Mansfield scholars is ‘A little Episode’, a story which belongs to a painful moment in her life in 1909 after Mansfield had been abandoned by her lover, the musician
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Garnet Trowell by whom she had become pregnant, and briefly married the music teacher, George Bowden. This vivid, emotionally charged vignette illuminates a period in Mansfield’s life of which little other record now exists. Fiona Oliver reports on the acquisition of the Murry/Mansfield archive by the Alexander Turnbull Library after two years of negotiation with the Murry family. Her reference to earlier purchases from Murry is a story of an emerging national resource, but also, as she points out, of the resuscitation of Mansfield’s spirit. The latest purchase is the largest acquired by the ATL since the 1950s. As well as Murry’s papers, there are documents relating to D. H. and Frieda Lawrence, photographs, Hogarth Press first editions, locks of Mansfield’s hair, her cloak and typewriter, and a Māori head carved from gum. An important discovery in this collection was made by Gerri Kimber, ‘Sumurun: An Impression of Leopoldine Konstantin’ (1911), a previously unknown creative impression of a play that Mansfield saw in London in January 1911. Andrew Harrison reports on the famous postcard sent by D. H. Lawrence to Mansfield from Wellington on 15 April 1922, on which the word ‘Ricordi’ is inscribed. Part of the recent Murry acquisition by the ATL, the postcard actually includes Frieda Lawrence’s greeting as well, and the two inscriptions demolish the view that Lawrence was reminding Mansfield of her Wellington roots: ‘Ricordi’ is now read as his and Frieda’s thoughts of her. Gaining the entire text of the postcard sheds new light on the Murry-Lawrence estranged relationship and anticipates the partial reconciliation between them after Mansfield’s death. Gerri Kimber provides a report on two French books once owned by Mansfield which have recently come to light (now in a private collection): La Femme de Trente Ans (A Woman of Thirty) by Honoré de Balzac and La Jeune Fille Bien Élevée (The Well-Bred Young Girl) by René Boylesve, offering a tantalising glimpse into Mansfield’s life at a specific moment in 1916. In another report, Penelope Jackson tells of her purchase of the Nigel Brown portrait of Mansfield, which adorns the cover of this volume. The painting belongs to Brown’s Names series, which celebrates Mansfield along with other famous New Zealanders, and Jackson explains the iconographic and pictorial clues to the portrait, taken from Mansfield’s early years in Wellington, the photograph from which Brown worked and the portrait’s inscription of Matthew 3.3 (found in a letter by Mansfield).

Finally, this volume showcases new creative writing, some of which was inspired by the two European conferences on Mansfield held in 2012. The short story by Witi Ihimaera, ‘Waiting for La Petite Anglaise’, was commissioned by Gerri Kimber on the occasion of his participation in the ‘Footsteps of Katherine Mansfield’ conference held at Montana,
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in Switzerland in September 2012. Ihimaera is well known for his attraction to Mansfield as a hybrid European/New Zealand precursor, as found in the bicultural, intertextual stories in *Dear Miss Mansfield*, and this is a very welcome addition to an already famous repertoire. A poem by C. K. Stead, ‘Names and Places’, reflects on his travel to the Katherine Mansfield Society conference held at Ruzomberok, Slovakia in June 2012 and his meeting with the organiser, Janka Kaskacova; while Kathleen Jones, the most recent biographer of Mansfield and Murry, offers three poems, including ‘Excavating the Bones’, her musings about the archaeological work of scholarly excavation on Katherine Mansfield that took place at the same conference, and which she dedicates to Gerri Kimber, and another poem, ‘Nightmare’, a reflection on a Mansfield comment that she had died in a dream. The three poems by Gladys Cole are also occasional; the first recreates a visit to Mansfield’s Chalet Des Sapins home in Montana-sur-Sierre; the second, to the lake at Fontainebleau and Mansfield’s grave with its Shakespearean inscription, while the third poem is dedicated to Mansfield’s sister Jeanne Renshaw at her home in Gloucestershire, while also recalling the family home in Wellington.

This fifth volume of *Katherine Mansfield Studies*, now in a longer ‘yearbook’ format, reflects the importance of the subject of Mansfield as (post)colonial modernist, a cross-disciplinary area which has been somewhat under-researched, and until recently has attracted little attention from scholars outside of New Zealand. The efflorescence of new Mansfield research is evident, for example, in three international conferences held in three different countries in the last eight months, and the discoveries of previously unknown papers relating to Mansfield, including new stories, in two important archives. All this bodes well for the future of Mansfield studies and the continuing ascendency of her reputation.

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5. See, for example, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 156–60.


12. A tree cultivated by the Māori for its fruit.

13. See also boncer [bonzer] in ‘Prelude’ cited by Rudige, an Australian borrowing – like Sundowner in ‘The Woman at the Store’


15. See Alison Rudd’s reading of ‘The Woman at the Store’ in Postcolonial Gothic Fictions from the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p. 145.


