

Katherine Mansfield's Art of Commemoration: Leslie Beauchamp and World War I

For Katherine Mansfield, World War One was experienced as apocalyptic, life defining: the sudden death of her beloved brother Leslie Beauchamp, in a hand-grenade accident in Belgium in 1915 made her profoundly aware of 'tragic knowledge', the destruction of a generation. Her devastation at Leslies' death led her to vow to 'find new expressions, new moulds for our thoughts and feelings'. In her elegiac celebration of her brother's life in stories that returned to their childhood in New Zealand, written in the few years that were left to her, Mansfield developed her modernist technique into an art of commemoration.

This paper addresses Mansfield's process of mourning and her struggle to compensate for a personal tragedy by turning to memory, spirituality and psychic powers. Making reference to Mansfield's letters and notebooks, I will ask what part religion and faith, transcendence and immortality play in the perceptions and apprehensions of death that pervade 'commemorative' last stories like 'The Fly' and 'Six Years After'.

MANSFIELD, ART AND MOURNING

Mansfield's art of commemoration marks a turning point in the orientation of her literary modernism, for unlike her European stories which satirise or record the manners and style of her contemporaries, her stories of childhood in New Zealand are inspired by memory and the wish to create a new vision out of personal loss, to give voice to a sense of the nation. In this wish for renewal and in aiming for a new form for elegy, Mansfield contributes to the darker shadow of European modernism in the post-World War One years. For, according to David Punter, when modernism was "haunting and haunted by a

site of war, the question of rebirth, of the progress of the ‘new’ seemed to be accompanied, as by ‘a dark, secret collaborator’, by the scene of death.” (11-28)

The development of her art of commemoration was precipitated by the tragic death of Mansfield’s brother Leslie Heron Beauchamp in Ploegsteert Wood in Belgium in October 1915. Her initial reaction of shock made her flee to the South of France upon first receiving the news. Later she vowed to discover “a kind of special prose” (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O’Sullivan (eds), *Notebooks vol 2* 33), to give imaginative representation to their early childhood by turning grief into celebration and making visible the places and the country where they had roamed as children:

Now – now I want to write recollections about my own country. [...] because in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. [...] I long to renew them in writing. [...] I want for one moment to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the old world. It must be mysterious, as though floating—it must take the breath. [...] but all must be told with a sense of mystery, a radiance, an afterglow, because you, my little sun of it, are set. You have dropped over the dazzling rim of the world. (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O’Sullivan (eds), *Notebooks vol. 2* 32)

By the end of the war the memorialising urge and search for new forms of writing extended to her “tragic knowledge”¹ of the destruction of a generation. She wrote in 1919, “I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same that as artists we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to [...] find new expressions new moulds for

our new thoughts & feelings.”² By then her resolution was also marked by her awareness of her own mortality, due to the tuberculosis which was diagnosed in 1917.. In the metaphysical sense, she responded to a perception of what Angela Smith calls “the dark doubling of creation” (138), the second or secret self or the shadow. As she wrote of her own suffering, “It has changed forever everything—even the appearance of the world is not the same—there is something added. *Everything has its shadow, ... We resist—we are terribly terrified.*”³

This article aims to differentiate several processes of commemoration that Mansfield moved through, as her personal grief at Leslie’s death gave way to recognition of her own mortality, and finally overshadowing both of these, a wider response to the wanton death and tragedy caused by World War One, into which individual tragedy is subsumed in the symbolic reach of her final works. In these stories she presents a broader vision of humanity and draws attention to the departed souls in post-war Europe (115-130. This development, as Clare Hanson has shown, draws powerfully on the shadow of life, and the uncanny (in Freud’s sense of the *unheimlich*) as that which exists alongside the familiar.

The search for a perfected state of being and a higher state of the soul led Mansfield to spiritual revitalism in the form of an attraction to Eastern mysticism, and occult and esoteric belief systems. The spiritual quest was part of the search for an alternative cure to tuberculosis, as medical treatment inevitably failed, and she came to believe that a mental cure would also bring about physical healing;⁴ at a more philosophical level it reinforced her view that by becoming a purer person, she could also become a better artist. This nexus of beliefs and vague hopes took her to obscure

texts associated with theosophy and Rosicrucianism—most notably *Cosmic Anatomy and the Structure of the Ego* (1921), written by the theosophist Lewis Wallace (originally a financial backer of the *New Age*) under the pseudonym of M.B. Oxon—and drove her to enter Gurdjieff's Centre for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleu for the last three months of her life.

Mansfield's grief at Leslie's death, according to Mary Burgan in her psychoanalytic study, *Illness, Gender, Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield*, was initially a response to earlier fears of childhood separation that Leslie had allayed through his role in her affections; in adult life on visits to England he became a vital link between her and the family in Wellington (90, 91, 101). Working through her bereavement meant a process of reconstruction. Through rewriting "The Aloe" (begun in March 1915) into her masterpiece "Prelude" (dedicated to Leslie) in 1916, she developed a new narrative of her life, of a brother-love relationship in which she is reunited with her brother and the mother who rejected them. She converts her awareness of his death into the celebration of his birth—as the longed-for son who will complete the family—as she promised in her journal entry for 16 February 1916.⁵ Commemoration, at this stage responds to overwhelming grief through recreating a family romance, what Burgan calls "reparative reminiscences," and is a form of psychic healing (91). But after writing "Prelude" it took another five years for Mansfield to renew her vow to Leslie (McDonnell 142). In the second half of 1921, when living in Montana in Switzerland, in a burst of intense creativity, she turned to the fictional families of the Burnells and Sheridans in stories set in Thorndon and Karori in Wellington where the Beauchamps had lived and where she had grown up. The period

of late, great stories such as “The Garden Party,” “At the Bay,” and “The Voyage,” drew to a close with “The Dolls House”, written between 24 and 30 October 1921 (Norburn 78-79). After this the family circles of the Sheridans and Burnells and the figure of the young child, Kezia, Mansfield’s fictional counterpart, disappear.

Going beyond Burgan’s position, I argue that Mansfield entered a further and final stage of mourning in stories written between the last months of 1921 and July 1922 (the date of her last story, “The Canary”) in which settings and action are overlaid by an emphasis on disturbances in spatial and temporal relationships, on the appearance of the uncanny, and her own self representation in symbols such as the fly and canary in the stories of those names. Prompted by her awareness of her mortality, her desperate search for a cure for tuberculosis and her spiritual quest for healing the soul, they manifest a consciousness of death’s shadowy presence as infiltrating and pervading life. Aesthetically they develop her formal mode of literary impressionism in its relation to the eschatological: stressing the fleeting moment, mortality and mourning, and using tropes of artifice and symbolism to point to the limits of textual representation. Mansfield extends her personal mission to encompass society and its engagement with politics and history (implying the inadequacy of ritual in post-war society for the grieving process), and the need to extend the boundaries of individual consciousness, as she sought in her engagement with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky’s theories of the occult.

The transition from stories written in celebration of childhood, and obsessed with nostalgia for the past, to the ghostly aura of stories like “Six Years After” and “The Fly” do not merely reflect a shift in a spiritual consciousness. By this time Mansfield was commanding a greater marketability as a professional writer and was writing with an eye

to a popular audience. By May 1921 she had written six stories for Clement Shorter of the *Sphere*, she was sending her work to her agent, the distinguished J. B. Pinker, and as Jenny McDonnell points out, was synthesising “popular” with more “literary” sites of publication (McDonnell 140, 149). Of the handful of stories written in the first half of 1922, some were destined for periodical publication in magazines like the *Sphere*, the *Sketch*, *Nature & the Athenaeum*. I have identified five stories and one fragment from the output of this period following the New Zealand family stories that conclude with “The Dolls House,” a group that reprises their subtly resonating themes of death, loss and mourning. They also rework the engagement with death’s aftermath that is the subject of stories with European settings, “Life of Ma Parker“ and “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (1920), in ways that suggest that individual mourning is incomplete, requiring social definition and integration.⁶ Two with Wellington settings, the fragmentary “Weak Heart” (21 November 1921) and “Taking the Veil” (24 January 1922), tell of adolescent love and the idea of bereavement (Norburn 79, 82, 83).⁷ The companion pieces, the incomplete “Six Years After” (early November 1921) and “The Fly” (20 February 1922), deal with parental responses to a son’s death in the war, and manifest signs of the spectral and uncanny, with ghost-like photographs, hallucinations and disembodied voices (Norburn, 79, 83): the first laments the fate of the souls of the dead, the second the inability to mourn. There is also “The Canary” (7 July 1922), a middle class woman’s elegiac lament on the death of her canary, widely read as Mansfield’s farewell to her art (Norburn 83, 86). Also belonging to this group are the four fragmentary beginnings of a story titled “The New Baby” (one dated 26 February 1922), in which a father announces the birth of his son (Norburn 83).⁸ Although

incomplete, these jottings conclude the “debt” Mansfield paid her brother by “rebirthing” him through writing, of re-establishing his right to be born, and they can be read as another coda to the anticipated birth in “The Aloe” (Burgan 101). All except these fragments are studies of the impact of bereavement on the individual psyche, representing, according to Claire Drewery, transitional moments when the characters “confront both the limits and potential of their own mortality.” (34) Mansfield uses symbolism, imagery and free indirect discourse, and represents memory’s activity through rapid transitions between past and present; the everyday occurrence is interrupted by dream, reverie, and hallucination, while the uncanny presence is marked by tropes of animism, doubling and repetition.

The use of spectral and uncanny images to suggest borderline states of mourning and bereavement in stories written at this time points to Mansfield’s revived interest in the occult.⁹ It can be traced to her renewed contact with A.R. Orage, previously editor of the *New Age* and her mentor, to whom she wrote on 9 February 1921 in order to initiate a reconciliation, as the marriage to Murry faltered. When Orage sent a copy of *Cosmic Anatomy* to Murry to review that autumn, it was undoubtedly in response to the renewal of their relationship.¹⁰ With Orage, an acolyte of Gurdjieff, she went to hear P.D. Ouspensky speaking on Gurdjieff in London in early 1922 and after conversations with Orage she entered Fontainebleau with him in October that year. At the same time Mansfield became increasingly conscious of the artist’s moral duty to give voice to the sense of unease at the betrayal represented by war. That other writers had not risen to this challenge is the subject of a letter to Murry, in 1919, describing Virginia’ Woolf’s novel *Night and Day* as ‘a lie in the soul’, claiming that ,‘We have to face our war –

they won't'.¹¹ This sentiment is echoed in April 1922, in a letter to Dorothy Brett about the emergence of Bolshevism: "it's one duty to what remains of civilisation to care for those things, and **that** –CHECK QUOTE) writers who do not are traitors." (Mansfield qtd in O'Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol.5* 157) In the rest of this paper I will trace Mansfield's understanding of the spiritual as it developed over the last eighteen months of her life, and as shown in "Six Years After" and "The Fly," works which mark the anniversary of Leslie's death by contrast to the celebration of his birth and life in "The Aloe," "Prelude," and "The Garden Party."

COSMIC ANATOMY AND GURDJIEFF'S HARMONIOUS INSTITUTE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MAN

Mansfield and John Middleton Murry had always been attracted by the esoteric and exotic. Murry in his autobiography *Between Two Worlds* (1936) stresses how they had in common an acute sensitivity to the "corruption" around them, a preoccupation with occult speculation, and an awareness of general morbidity in the times (Burgan 96). But this differs from the urgency of Mansfield's quest as her health failed. She wrote to Murry about her spiritual longings in October 1920:

Does your soul trouble you? Mine does. I feel that only now... I realise what salvation means and I long for it... But its to myself I cry—to the spirit, the essence of me—that which lives in Beauty... I long for goodness—to live by what is permanent in the soul. (Mansfield qtd in O'Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol. 4* 82-83)

At that time, staying at the Villa Flora in Menton, with her cousin Connie Beauchamp and her friend Jinnie Fullerton, Mansfield had just resisted their attempts to convert her to Catholicism, only going so far as to acknowledge “I knew there was a God.” (Alpers 311-12)

The new turn to the occult and esoteric occurs round January 1922, between writing “Weak Heart” and “Taking the Veil,” and other stories which focus on suffering, death and bereavement. It coincides with a renewed search for a cure for her tuberculosis, leading her to visit in Paris in January 1922 the fraudulent Doctor Manouhkin who irradiated her spleen with X-rays. Earlier that month, Mansfield records her “furious reading” of *Cosmic Anatomy and the Structure of the Ego*, alongside the Bible and Shakespeare. She was drawn to this study, she said in a letter to Violet Schiff, after “a state of awful depression about work... What saved me finally was reading a book called *Cosmic Anatomy* and reflecting on it.” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol.5* 8) It seems that the book enlarged her mind and, in her search for a world in which “instances of waking” are united, showed her the relationship between things; as she wrote to Koteliansky, “What is important is to try & learn to live—really live, and in relation to everything—not isolated.” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol.5* 304) It would also have offered a different way of thinking about her illness: the argument that the mind, once freed from the body, would develop its spiritual potential, suggested a way to lift herself above the disease, and to firm her resolve “to get the dying over [...] and then all hands to the business of being reborn again.” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan and Scott (eds), *Letters vol.5* 294)¹² As she noted, “To

escape from the prison of the flesh—of matter. To make the body an instrument, a servant.” (Mansfield qtd in Scott (ed) *Notebooks vol. 2*, 313)¹³ This might be suggestively aligned with the thinking of her contemporary, May Sinclair, whose idealist philosophy moved toward the belief in life after death as a “perfected self.” (Drewery 76)¹⁴ Mansfield’s comment to Schiff—“I see my way now, I think”—implies this new direction in her thought (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan and Scott (eds) , *Letters vol. 5*, 76).¹⁵

Cosmic Anatomy was widely considered an eccentric, eclectic work that drew on Oriental religion, Rosicrucianism, theosophy, cosmic and astrological imagery and similar sources for its system of thought. It was dismissed by Murry as a “book of occult doctrines.” (qtd by Scott in *Notebooks vol. 2* 311) With links to science, psychoanalysis and relativity, it shows parallels with Gurdjieff’s teachings in arguing that the expansion of the consciousness and voluntary suffering would help integrate the physical, emotional and mental centres (Webb 229). The text’s mystic orientation echoes some of the loss of confidence during the post-war period in Christian religion: for example, as Claire Tomalin points out, the idea, lacking any scientific foundation, that civilisation has thrown itself out of balance so that its physical, social and intellectual parts have ceased to act in accord appears in this opening diagnosis of the age’s ills (232): “Mankind is now moving from reason and Intellect towards Feeling and Emotion, and needs instruction therein.”(Oxon [Wallace] 1) The image of a directionless and disoriented humanity would have confirmed Mansfield’s perception of a moral decline in society after the War, due to the widespread loss of life and the failure of social and religious ritual to deal with tragedy.

Also congenial to modernist thought more generally is *Cosmic Anatomy*'s understanding of consciousness as discontinuous: "It has been suggested that our consciousness is not continuous but is made up of rapid pulses," (Oxon [Wallace] 192) a view which recalls Murry's descriptions of the short story writer's art as consisting of "vivid moments of consciousness" (Murry 142), and Mansfield's wonder at nature's mystical presence, the single moment of experience and flash of perception (Gunsteren 143). She recorded in her diary entry of 1920

these "glimpses" before which all that one ever has written... all... that one ever has read pales... The waves, as I drove home this afternoon and the high foam, how it was suspended in the air before it fell... What is it that happens in that moment of suspension? It is timeless. In that moment (what do I mean?) the whole life of the soul is contained.(Mansfield qtd in Scott, *Notebooks vol. 2* 209)

Mansfield saw spiritual revelation in similar terms, as reaching out for authenticity. She said of herself that "she has led, ever since she can remember, a very typically false life. Yet, through it all, there have been moments, instants, gleams, when she has felt the possibility of something quite other."(REFERENCE?)¹⁶ Wallace's comment in *Cosmic Anatomy*—"This real expression of consciousness is this taking up of possession within our reach [...] that yearning toward unity which we feel to be inseparable from a real universe" (91)—would also have resonated with her "mysterious belief in a self which is continuous and permanent," undivided rather than plural and conflicted. This concept explains her attraction toward memorialisation, for what she sees as the "rage for

confession, autobiography, especially for memories of earliest childhood,” that might lead toward unity of the soul within a larger repository of universal being, and to “the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal.” (Mansfield qtd in Scott, *Notebooks vol. 2* 204).¹⁷

It is hard to estimate how much Mansfield’s preoccupation with mortality can be attributed to reading *Cosmic Anatomy* or indeed of any occult system of thought. Vincent O’Sullivan, who has closely studied the last year of her life, notes that phrases and terms in her diaries and letters from this time echo the writing of Wallace, Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (18). Yet she disclaimed a direct influence, saying that their ideas were like hers but “bigger ones, far more definite ones.” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol. 5* 285)¹⁸ Gurdjieff’s esoteric system of holistic living for people who wished to remould their character by aiming for new forms of unity attracted her only when she realised that medical science had failed.¹⁹ Her spiritual aspiration in entering the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man on 17 October 1922 was to “be all that I am capable of becoming” (Mansfield qtd in Scott (ed), *Notebooks, vol. 2* 286-87) - - as she later wrote to Murry, “*I want to be REAL*” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol. 5* 341) -- to undertake spiritual repair in the belief that the health of the moral or spiritual nature was inseparable from that of the body. Nevertheless the confluence of esoteric ideas about revelation through moments of heightened consciousness, the merging of the self into a unified being, the belief in a universal mind, the need “to get the dying over [...] and then all hands to the business of being reborn again” (Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol. 5* 294), all inform the psychological terrain of Mansfield’s late stories which dramatize the arbitrariness of

the conscious mind's access to vulnerable psychic and emotional spaces, and modes of connectivity to the souls of the dead.

“SIX YEARS AFTER” AND “THE FLY”

Although few concrete parallels between the ideas in *Cosmic Anatomy* and Mansfield's last stories can be noted, nevertheless their spectral, evanescent character suggest an awareness of Lewis's views on ghosts and visions: notably the attribution of the visibility of the ghost to the makeup of the observer and their mental condition at the moment of its appearance; the ghost as a spectre of the self (166). This is comparable to the “spectral personality,” a mind predisposed towards subjective hallucinations, haunted by death and the past, that has been identified in recent research on ghosts and the occult in Victorian and early modern times (McCorristane 2). “Six Years After,” as the title suggests, and “The Fly” are explicit memorials of Leslie's death which record death's haunting effects on the living. The anniversary is signalled in “The Fly” when the boss broods “six years ago, six years” (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan, *Collected Fiction, vol. 2* 479) before embarking upon his seemingly absent-minded torture of the fly. Both texts show an advance in her technique of literary impressionism in the stress on the perceiving consciousness at the edge of its own mortality, experiencing flickering revelations. In “Six Years After” Mansfield writes what is closest in her oeuvre to a ghost story, what Claire Drewery calls an “uncanny story,” like those of May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf, about the haunting of the psyche rather than a supernatural disturbance (68-69). She returns to the country of childhood, the most

memorable time of her relationship with Leslie, and recasts the dead young man as a ghostly child.

The story opens with the reflections of a married couple on a steamer, then passes through several transitions of mood: the mother's reverie shows the operation of memory on the consciousness as a spectral presence emerges. As she looks out to sea in a moment bordering on hallucination a buried self signals this shift in consciousness, as her dead son reappears as a child.

She gazed through the rust-spotted railing along which big drops trembled, until suddenly she shut her lids. It was as if a warning voice inside her had said, "Don't look!"

[...]

But, immediately, she opened her eyes and looked again. Lonely birds, water lifting, white pale sky— how were they changed?

And it seemed to her there was a presence far out there, between the sky and the water; someone very desolate and longing watched them pass and cried as if to stop them — but cried to her alone.

"Mother!"

Don't leave me sounded in the cry. Don't forget me!

(Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan, *Collected Fiction*, vol.2 423)

The mother's shifting state of mind suggests that this ghostly presence is an aspect of her own psyche; her subliminal level of consciousness is registered in changes in external phenomena; birds, waves and sky mutate, evoking a mystical sense of their

relationship to her inner life. The dead son's haunting appears in her internalisation of his sorrow: "And it was as though from her own breast there came the sound of childish weeping" (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan *Collected Fiction*, vol. 2 423), while the overlapping identities of parent and child explain the cognitive mistakes of her address to her husband as "Father" or "Daddy."

How was it possible that she was there sitting on that quiet steamer beside Father and at the same time she was hushing and holding a little slender boy—so pale—who had just waked out of a dreadful dream?

(Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan (eds), *Collected Fiction*, vol.2 423-424)²⁰

Semantic play and visual images reconstruct Mansfield's haunted memories and representations of Leslie after his death. The mother's verbal slippages recall her cryptic use of words when she refers to him as "you my little sun of it [the world] are set," in her most intense period of mourning (Mansfield qtd in Scott (ed), *Notebooks* vol. 2, 32). The flashback to the child's premonitory nightmare about his death links emblems of real life with Mansfield's earlier imagery of Leslie:

I dreamed I was lying in a wood—somewhere far away from everybody--and I was lying down and a great blackberry vine grew over me. And I called and called to you—and you wouldn't come—you wouldn't come—so I had to lie

there for ever. (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan (eds), *Collected Fiction* vol. 2 424)

This recalls Ploegsteert Wood in which Leslie died; the suffocating blackberry is a reminder of the poisoned berries which in her poem to him, "To LHB," he invites her to eat, creating a tryst with death: "By the remembered stream my brother stands/Waiting for me with berries in his hands/'These are my body, Sister, take and eat.'"(Mansfield qtd in Scott (ed), *Notebooks* vol. 2 29)

Like "Life of Ma Parker" and "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Six Years After" suggests that the real world offers no rituals to satisfy mourning and therefore no redemption or resolution for the grieving survivor—here the mother who is powerless to answer her son's needs—any more than it does for the souls of the dead. The narrator says, "it is not the idea of her suffering which is unendurable—it is his. Can one do nothing for the souls of the dead? And for a long time the answer had been—Nothing!"²¹ But "Six Years After" differs from the earlier stories in registering the social consequences of wide-scale tragedy, hinting at unacknowledged mourning of the war dead as well as the impossibility of mourning to answer their suffering. In this it shows parallels with Virginia Woolf's memorial to the generation of dead soldiers in her story "Kew Gardens" (Drewery 34-37). The narrator's lament strikes a chord which resonates in post-World War One literature; and the story's narrative technique with its shifting time sequences, theatrical imagery to suggest a performance or acting out of events rather than access to a truth ("softly without a sound the dark curtain has rolled down" (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O'Sullivan (eds), *Collected Fiction* vol. 2 424),and

juxtaposed points of view, destabilise temporal and spatial boundaries into borderline states in order to evoke the characters' lack of resolution in the face of death's finality, and their encounter with their own mortality.

Complementing the mother-son relationship of "Six Years After" is that of the father-son relationship in "The Fly," which shows the grieving process being disrupted and distorted by the boss's displacement activity, by contrast to grief's disruption of life's continuum in "Six Years After." The boss is distracted from the weeping fit he feels coming upon him by the desire for revenge and proceeds to torment and then drown the struggling fly with ink blobs from his pen. The loss of connection to his own feelings and so to his dead son, contrasts to the narrator's plea for attention to the souls of the war dead in "Six Years After."

In both stories Mansfield critiques patriarchy through the use of a religious and gendered discourse, drawing on imagery of control, power and mortality to highlight masculine evasiveness toward the suffering and loss experienced in the Great War. The husband of "Six Years After," forgetful of his wife's traumatised state, sees her life as sacrificial, claiming this as a marital right, and so magnifying her self abnegation in the moment of her child's spectral return. The heightened consciousness with which she registers her son's dream of terror at being abandoned by her denies her own identity and in this circular reverie she becomes, like Ma Parker, an emblem of grief. As a vehicle for the voice of suffering, unable to articulate her own loss, her limited subject position points to the failure of language to represent. The repeated word "sacrifice" resonates widely in linking her identification with their dead son to the wholesale sacrifice of a generation of young men; the capitalisation of the word "Father" carries

semi-religious implications.²² As with “The Fly,” the personal blends into the universal and the Great War becomes a metaphor for the tragic fate of humankind (Dunbar 70).

In “The Fly,” the anonymous figure of the boss, both callous tormentor and victim (the son’s death is a reminder of his own mortality), caught in a repetitive cycle due to the cryptic, incomplete internalisation of bereavement, is variously identified with forms of patriarchal power operating in society—for example, Mansfield’s father, Harold Beauchamp (she describes the protagonist as a “Bank Manager,”(Mansfield qtd in O’Sullivan & Scott (eds), *Letters vol. 5* 76)) those associated with the machinery of war such as politicians or the Generals of the Great War—or with a malign God. This recalls Wallace’s identification of a “jealous and vindictive God, who is connected with the fragmentary data [...] of a scheme of life [...] man is now left a solitary mariner shipwrecked on an uncharted ocean overwhelmed by the injustice of his condition” (Oxon [Wallace] 6), a view in sympathy with Mansfield’s suggestion in 1919 that if God existed at all he was malevolent.²³ In both stories the impending fates of the protagonists, positioned on the border between the living and dead, registering suffering at the edge of their consciousness, but not living it out, are imaged in iconic conclusions. The linguistic ambivalence at the end of “The Fly,” recording the boss’s loss of memory, the interruption of his stream of thought and the blocking of grief—“For the life of him he could not remember” (what he was thinking of before)—suggests the son’s death is a harbinger of his own (Mansfield qtd in Kimber & O’Sullivan (eds), *Collected Fiction, vol. 2* 480). The ellipses in the statement in “Six Years After,” that the steamer throbs on its way “as if at the end of the journey there waited ...”²⁴ implies the mythic dimension of a journey to death.²⁵

These conclusions contribute to the impression of the stories that incomplete bereavement and mourning cause a shift in consciousness, a glimpse of something different but an inability to act on this vision, as the inner turmoil that the characters experience lacks any resolution. The imagery of stasis and the encryption of mourning in both stories can be read in the light of “The Canary,” Mansfield’s final story (Drewery 45-48). Drawing on Mansfield’s image of herself as an artist being caged and therefore able to sing, “The Canary” has been read as her literary epitaph, an enshrinement of her dedication to her art (Dunbar 72). It is entirely characteristic of Mansfield, whose ideas of salvation were based on an idea of art as religion, and who said that “It’s only by being true to life that I can be true to art. And to be true to life is to be *good, sincere, simple, honest,*”²⁶ that her spiritual quest should have culminated in the perception of a new aesthetic pattern, as she admitted to A.R. Orage in the Harmonious Institute for the Development of Man:

I could not write my old stories again, or any more like them: and not because I do not see the same details as before, but because somehow or other the pattern is different. The old details now make another pattern; and this perception of a new pattern is what I call a Creative attitude towards life.²⁷

At a time when she had ceased writing stories, the “Creative attitude towards life” may have developed from the underlying pattern of the final stories, informed by the artistic resolutions to the problem of making of a final reckoning—in which fragments like

“The New Baby” as well as completed stories all play their part. This may have included an aesthetic response to her resolve of December 1920 to accept her fate:

There is no limit to human suffering... I do not want to die without leaving a record of my belief that suffering can be overcome. For I do believe it. What must one do? ... One must submit. Do not resist... Accept it fully. Make it part of Life. (Mansfield qtd in Scott (ed), *Notebooks vol. 2* 201)

In “Six Years After” and “The Fly,” Mansfield demonstrates heightened consciousness about suffering’s lack of resolution and the inevitability of mortality. In evincing death’s uncanny manifestations through the use of paradox, dream and symbol, and the incompleteness of the human response to death, she formally completes her art of commemoration and her distinctively modernist response to the cultural trauma that followed in the wake of the social and historical rupture of the Great War.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Baker, Ida. *Katherine Mansfield: The Memories of L.M.* London: Virago, 1985.

Kimber, Gerri and Vincent O’Sullivan, eds. *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 1: 1898-1915*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012.

Kimber, Gerri and Vincent O’Sullivan, eds. *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 2: 1916-1922*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012.

Middleton Murry, John. *Discoveries: Essays in Literary Criticism*. London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1924.

Middleton Murry, John, ed. *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield: 1904-1922*. London: Constable & Co., 1962

Orage, A.R. "Talks with Katherine Mansfield." *The New English Weekly*, 19 May 1932: 109-111.

O'Sullivan, Vincent and Margaret Scott, eds. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volumes One to Five*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008.

Oxon M.B. [Lewis Wallace]. *Cosmic Anatomy and the Structure of the Ego*. London: John M. Watkins, 1921.

Scott, Margaret ed. *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks Volumes One and Two*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Sinclair, May. *A Defence of Idealism: Some Questions and Conclusions*. London: Macmillan, 1917.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Alpers, Antony. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. New York: Viking Press, 1980.

Barker, A. L. "Introduction." *Katherine Mansfield: The Memories of L.M.* By Ida Barker. London: Virago, 1985.

Burgan, Mary. *Illness, Gender, Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994.

- Drewery, Claire. *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf*. London: Ashgate, 2011.
- Dunbar, Pamela. *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997.
- Hanson, Clare. "Katherine Mansfield's Uncanniness." *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*. Ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 115-130.
- Kimber, Gerri and Janet Wilson, eds. *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Kaplan, Sydney Janet. *Circulating Genius; John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield and D.H. Lawrence*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2010.
- Kimber, Gerri. "'A Child of the Sun': Katherine Mansfield's Spiritual Journey", Unpublished paper presented at 'In the Footsteps of Katherine Mansfield' Conference held at Crans Montana, Switzerland, September 2012.
- McCorristane, Shane. *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England 1750-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- McDonnell, Jenny. *Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace: At the Mercy of the Public*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Moore, J. *Gurdjieff and Mansfield*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1980.
- O'Sullivan, Vincent. "Signing Off: Mansfield's Last Year." *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*. Ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 13-27.

- Norburn, Roger. *A Katherine Mansfield Chronology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Smith, Angela . *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life*. London: Palgrave, 2000.
- Tomalin, Claire. *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*. London: Viking, 1987.
- Punter, David. "Hungry Ghosts and Foreign Bodies." *Gothic Modernisms*. Ed. Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace. London: Palgrave, 2001. 11-28.
- Van Gunsteren, Julia. *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism*. Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1990.
- Webb, James. *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers*. New York, G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1980.

NOTES

¹ 'Katherine Mansfield Letter to J. M. Murry', 16 November 1919, in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters*, vol. 5, 75.

² Katherine Mansfield Letter to J. M. Murry', 10 November 1919 in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters* vol. 3, 82.

³ 'Katherine Mansfield Letter to J. Middleton Murry', 18 October 1920 in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters* vol. 4, 75.

⁴ On 20 January 1922 Mansfield wrote, "the real cause of my illness is not my lungs at all, but something else. And if this were found and cured, all the rest would heal." Scott (ed.) *Notebooks* vol. 2, 319.

⁵ In aiming to improve on "The Aloe" Mansfield wrote: "The last chapter is your birth, your coming in the autumn, you in Grandmothers [sic] arms under the tree, your solemnity, your wonderful beauty, your hands, your head, your helplessness... And you must mean the world to Linda." Scott (ed.) *Notebooks* vol. 2, 60.

⁶ I am indebted to Claire Drewery's discussion (33-49) of incomplete mourning as a liminal condition outside conventional social strictures.

⁷ "Taking the Veil" was published in the *Sketch* on 22 February 1922.

⁸ Kimber and O'Sullivan in Volume 2 of *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, 481-81 at 484 prints two versions of "The New Baby," with the comment:

"Mansfield made several attempts at beginning this story, as well as later paragraphs, without arriving at an apparent a sequence." This is almost the last of Mansfield's surviving jottings. "The New Baby" fragments appear as the penultimate entry in Mansfield's final notebook, Newberry 3 (one of the Mansfield manuscripts held by the Newberry Library in Chicago), but Scott in her edition places it last; see Scott (ed.) *Notebooks* vol. 2, 345-49.

⁹ An earlier occult phase in 1909-11, which included socializing with Alistair Crowley, and a theosophist community, encouraged by A.R. Orage and his mistress, Beatrice Hastings, testifies to her abiding interest in eastern spirituality and mysticism, but most records from this period have been destroyed. See Gerri Kimber in an unpublished paper, "'A Child of the Sun': Katherine Mansfield's Spiritual Journey."

¹⁰ O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters*, vol. 4, 177; Webb 229; Alpers 353-54.

¹¹ *Letters*, 4.

¹² She also comments on resurrection in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters*, vol. 5, 290

¹³ See also Barker, xviii.

¹⁴ Sinclair's views are outlined in *A Defence of Idealism*.

¹⁵ Moore discusses *Cosmic Anatomy* but offers little analysis of its attraction for Mansfield, as O'Sullivan notes in "Signing Off: Mansfield's Last Year" 13-27 at 14.

¹⁶ Middleton-Murry (ed.), *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, 330; October 3 1922 . Moore 137. See also Mansfield in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters*, vol. 5, 294: "We were a nothingness shot with gleams of what might be."

¹⁷ Mansfield in Scott (ed.) *Notebooks* vol. 2, 204.

¹⁸ Also cited in O'Sullivan, "Signing Off" 20. Dunning was another theosophist from New Zealand (like Lewis Wallace) with whom Murry in particular was friendly.

¹⁹ Yet when Mansfield read *Tertium Organum* in December 1922, she wrote to Murry: "For some reason it didn't carry me away" O'Sullivan and Scott (eds) *Letters*, vol. 5, 332.

²⁰ The incorrect appellation of her husband as "Daddy" appears earlier when memory intrudes as the couple walk on the deck: "But she just had time to breathe, 'Not so fast, Daddy, please,' when he remembered too and slowed down" (422).

²¹ Mansfield in Kimber and O'Sullivan (eds.) *Collected Fiction*, vol.2 424. This echoes the conclusion of "Life of Ma Parker"—"There was nowhere."—underlining Ma Parker's placelessness and hence her inability to mourn her grandson's death. See Drewery 39-41.

²² The manuscript has "oh my hatred!" written at the end; see Mansfield in Scott (ed.) *Notebooks* vol. 2, 295.

²³ Mansfield in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds.) *Letters* vol. 3, 37; cited by Smith 139-40.

²⁵ The story is usually considered as incomplete but this breaking off may have been intentional. The two-volume EUP edition of the stories publishes a fragment from an earlier draft after the ellipsis. A version of this is in Scott (ed.), *Notebooks* vol. 2, 294-95. In previous editions the story concludes with the unfinished sentence.

²⁶ Mansfield in O'Sullivan and Scott (eds.) *Letters* vol. 4, 170; Mansfield in Middleton-Murry (ed.) *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, 237.

²⁷ Orage, "Talks with Katherine Mansfield," 109-111 at 111; cited in Webb 252.