



This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

**Conference or Workshop Item**

**Title:** Katherine Mansfield and anima mundi

**Creator:** Wilson, J. M.

**Example citation:** Wilson, J. M. (2014) Katherine Mansfield and anima mundi. Paper presented to: *Katherine Mansfield and France, Universite Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris III, Paris, 19-21 June 2014.*

**Version:** Presented version

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7005/>



## **Katherine Mansfield and *Anima Mundi***

**Janet Wilson, University of Northampton**

This chapter proposes a speculative reading of Katherine Mansfield's work in relation to the medieval concept of *anima mundi* (world soul), that is, the belief in an animistic universe in which the earth is revived through a *spiritus mundi* (spirit of the world). Although no explicit link can be made, I suggest that Mansfield had affinities with medieval cosmology which fostered a more participatory relationship between the human subject and the created world than the post-Cartesian world view does. I also suggest that this relationship between the self and the 'other' is often marked by a 'decentring' aesthetic that enables her to represent it as odd, disturbing or disruptive.

### **I. *Anima mundi and spiritus mundi***

The concept of *anima mundi* (PPP [1]), that nature is a living creature, both organic and sentient, associated with a mystique of participation and sense of reciprocity between all living things, comes from the Greek theoretician, Pythagoras. The doctrine and Pythagorean cosmology also insists on *spiritus mundi*, (PPP [2]) the presence of the soul in the order of nature. Nature alone rules the cosmos and is deserving of the worship usually directed at gods.

From the third and fourth centuries Nature appears in Orphic hymns, represented as a cosmic power and universal goddess who governs marriage and generation because of her inexhaustible vitality, and who has power over man's souls.<sup>1</sup> Her complaint about mankind (mainly on the grounds of his sexual excesses) allows her to intervene in human history. Like Pan she resembles one of the last pagan gods who survives into Christian thinking although often at odds with it. Even in the work of later medieval writers like Bernard de Silvestris and Alain of Lille, the pantheistic overtones in the veneration of nature (as *spiritus mundi*) are often linked to paganism. Nature personified is considered as being outside the religious philosophical tradition of Christianity.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of nature personified in E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. William R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 106-127 (106-07).

The ideas of Pythagoras and the poetry of the Orphists received fuller exploration in the apotheosis of nature in the twelfth-century Renaissance, in allegories of her in human form: for example, as God's humble pupil, as intermediary between God and man, or traveller through the heavens bringing form to chaos. These appear in the work of the French pagan humanist Bernard de Sylvestris of Tours (*De Universitate Mundi*), Alanus de Insulis (Alain de Lille) *De Planctu Naturae* (1170) and *Anticlaudianus* (c.1185) and in Jean de Meun's continuation of Guillaume de Lorris's courtly love poem, *Le Roman de la Rose*. (1275) where nature is responsible for forging the human race (PPP [3]).

A distinctive iconographic tradition developed round these images. The rhetorical tropes of the twelfth-century Renaissance in which Nature appears wearing a gown made up of birds, flower, herbs, beasts and fishes, were an influence on Chaucer and Spenser. The gown in Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* has 33 birds, 18 fish, 27 beasts, and herbs, trees and flowers. It moves and rustles as nature moves, and the creatures stir into life. This anthropomorphic fantasy of nature's personhood, produced by human artifice, provides an image of numerous individual species woven together in a sprawling ecological tapestry, suggesting the mystery and splendor of the natural world.<sup>2</sup>

Significant rhetorical topoi related to the Goddess Natura tradition are also inherited from the classical tradition of landscape: namely the *locus amoenus* (pleasant place), epitome of the ideal landscape in which nature habitually dwells (PPP [4]), and other forms of the earthly paradise as found in Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. This locus was the antecedent of the garden of love or the *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden setting for medieval courtly love lyrics and poems. There is also the wilder space associated with the mixed forest or grove, subject of "bravura interludes" by Ovid, and later adopted by Chaucer, Spenser and Keats. E.R. Curtius, in his discussion of the Latin rhetorical traditions from pagan antiquity that continued into the Middle Ages, does not mention the sacred tree from pre-Christian pagan societies. Yet beliefs in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Todd A. Boruk, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 40-57; see also Katherine Park, "Nature in Person: Medieval and Renaissance Allegories and Emblems", in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Loraine Dalston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003).

cosmological and spiritual truths of trees identifying them as *imago mundi* (image of the world), axiomatically linked them to Nature as *anima mundi*.<sup>3</sup> An important part of nature, whether as an individual tree or as a wooded grove of different trees, the sacred tree was, like Dame Nature, transformed through the encounter between Paganism and Christianity.

Mansfield's awareness of nature's anthropomorphic presence may have been informed by her reading in the poets of the English Renaissance who had appropriated them for the pastoral tradition as found in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the *Mutability Cantos*, and throughout the works of Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup> With its strong orientation towards and celebration of nature, the pastoral encouraged a vision of human subjectivity rooted in non human nature, and of humans as being dependent on the natural environment for survival. This was for long a somewhat marginalised alternative to the seventeenth-century Cartesian tradition which elevated human enlightenment and reason above nature and the environment.

The belief that a spiritual energy infused organic life on earth, and the pastoral ideal of a responsive, animate landscape, therefore, are starting points for examining Mansfield's arcadian, pastoral orientation, manifested in her empathy with living creatures, flowers, plants and trees often represented as vital forces with independent lives. The sense of wonder and marvel at the created world in response to its mystery and splendour, often noted of her work,<sup>5</sup> are arguably traceable to anthropomorphic attitudes. Embracing the pantheistic powers of the natural world aligns her with fellow modernists like D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, and Virginia Woolf. Yet the impulse towards a wholistic surrender to a natural pantheistic order as found in stories with settings based round the *locus amoenus* and the rooted tree often carries negative overtones of denial or betrayal, while enjoyment of the pleasures of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Carole M. Cusack, *The Sacred Tree: Ancient and Medieval Manifestations* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>4</sup> Mansfield's reading of Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare is attested in her letters and notebooks.

<sup>5</sup> See Anne Mounic, "'Ah, What is it?-- that I Heard': The Sense of Wonder in Katherine Mansfield's Stories and Poems", in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (London: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 144-57.

cultivated, leisure garden also involves irony and self-questioning. To Mansfield images of organic growth and spiritual forces -- one legacy of the tradition of Dame Nature's mediation between god and man -- invite celebration, yet they are also seen as deceptive, illusory and potentially threatening of the individual's autonomy. Furthermore the tradition (fostered through patriarchal, authoritarian figures like Alain of Lille) involved essentialist constructions of gender which Mansfield would have resisted. Nature's association with biological metaphors of generation and reproduction, which dominate bodily processes and the unconscious, clashed with Mansfield's belief in art's power to order;<sup>6</sup> the veneration of natural powers and elemental forces in her work is often undercut by parody, ironic distance and constructions of a reality that is fragmented and discontinuous.

Three major topics can be identified in Mansfield's engagement with the cultural heritage of the *anima mundi* concept:

1. The god Pan or pantheism, a form of nature worship which recalls the medieval goddess *Natura* and the agency of objects.
2. The *locus amoenus* or pleasant place (which began with the classical tradition as the *hortus conclusus* and came into the medieval world as the enclosed garden of courtly love) and the grove or wilderness.
3. Trees as both *axis mundi* (axis of the world) and *imago mundi* (image of the world) and the trope of the arboreal epiphany.

### **The god Pan**

That Mansfield was keenly aware of contemporary views about pantheism — a form of nature worship -- appears in scattered comments about the god Pan (the half-goat, half-man Greek god of shepherds, flocks and music in Arcadia) who was then in vogue among writers and naturalists. She wrote a review of *The Triumph of Pan*, a volume of poetry by Victor Neuberg, an occultist and associate of Alastair Crowley,<sup>7</sup> and also a poem, "To Pan", which celebrates the continuing power of Pan, "the munificent giver" over human lovers, as he "[f]ashioned the

---

<sup>6</sup> Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> See *Rhythm*, 2, July 1912.

song of our firebound heart”.<sup>8</sup>

Mansfield’s question, “Do you believe in Pan?” on first meeting William Orton, suggests the name Pan was a code for being instantly attracted to someone.<sup>9</sup> This phrase is repeated in “Epilogue II” in which the protagonist’s friend Violet Burton tells her about falling in love with a kindred spirit.<sup>10</sup> Their shared belief in Pan gives him instant access to her soul, and drawing on Pan’s associations with sexuality, is also the prelude to a physical embrace.

“We danced together seven times and we talked the whole time [...] we talked of everything. You know . . . about books and theatres and all that sort of thing at first, and then – about our souls.”

“... What?”

“I said -- our souls. He understood me absolutely [...] I must tell you the first thing he ever said to me. He said, ‘Do you believe in Pan?’ Quite quietly. Just like that. And then he said, “I knew you did.” [...]. And . . . shall I go on?”

“Yes, go on.”

“He said, ‘I think I must be mad. I want to kiss you’ – and – I let him.”<sup>11</sup>

Mansfield’s critique of romantic love, and the ironic deflation of her narrator’s expectation of a story that will satisfy her craving for romance, is reflected in the location of this encounter: an idealised garden setting that recalls the *hortus conclusus* in which medieval scenes of courtly love were rehearsed, sealed off from reality. The little garden on the opposite side of Rue St Leger in Geneva where the narrator is staying is unnaturally perfect: “Although autumn was well advanced, not a leaf had fallen from the trees, the little shrubs and bushes were touched with pink and crimson, and against the blue sky the trees stood sheathed in gold” (CF 1, 332)—just like the non-seasonal, artificial setting of the *hortus conclusus*. Yet this idyllic setting is undermined by human connotations of

---

<sup>8</sup> The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield, vol. 3; *The Poetry and Critical Writings of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Angela Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. TO COME

<sup>9</sup> William Orton, *The Last Romantic* (London: Cassell & Co Ltd., 1937), pp. 269-70.

<sup>10</sup> Written in c.1913 this story was published by John Middleton Murry as “Violet”.

<sup>11</sup> The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield, vol. 1. *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield 1898-1915*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Vincent O’Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 355. (References to this edition will be hereafter included parenthetically in the text as CF, 1).

the sound of water: the nearby fountain sounds to the narrator “like a half-forgotten tune, half sly, half laughing”. To Violet, though, it is ““Like weeping in the night”” – appropriately -- for the story she tells is one of betrayal in love (*CF I*, 333). The narrator concludes with a pathetic fallacy: the fountain seems to be laughing at her at for wanting a more scandalous story.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast to these veiled allusions to Pan as either a benevolent or treacherous love deity, Mansfield’s contemporaries turned to paganism and the god Pan to urge a closer link with nature and to critique modern technology. Although E.M. Forster’s story, “The Story of Panic” (1911), turns on nature’s regenerative potential for mankind, a more explicit statement comes from D.H. Lawrence in “Remembering Pan”.<sup>13</sup> Lawrence sees nature as a “repressed force, a forgotten deity”, and Pan as a priapic demonic creature: a “lurking rustic god with a goat’s white lightning in his eyes”, more like a demon than a god.<sup>14</sup> Humans to Lawrence were part of the biosphere and did not have superior status to other living beings. In urging man’s union with nature he implies modernism’s repudiation of mechanization and a concern for the environment:

The Pan relationship which the world of man once had with all the world, was better than anything man has now [...]. Because when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe, sun, moon, stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything – and not in a ‘conquest’ of anything by anything.

And whether we are a store clerk or a bus conductor, we can still choose between the living universe of Pan and the mechanical conquered universe of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Lawrence’s attitude recalls Mansfield and John Middleton Murry’s manifesto published in *Rhythm* in 1912, that urged reaching towards a deeper sense of self, and familiarization with our “outcast selves” in order to provide an art with “its roots below the surface, and [... that is] the rhythmical echo of the life

---

<sup>12</sup> W.H. New, *Reading Mansfield and Metaphors of Form* (Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> See Maurizio Ascari in “Katherine Mansfield and the Gardens of the Soul”, *Katherine Mansfield Studies* 2 (2010), pp. 39-55 (47-48).

<sup>14</sup> “Remembering Pan” was published posthumously in 1936 as part of “Pan in America”. It is reprinted in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco-Criticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000). See pp. 62, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence, “Remembering Pan”, *Green Studies Reader*, p. 70.

with which it is in touch [...] the primitive harmonies of the world that is and lives.”<sup>16</sup>

## **2. The *Locus Amoenus*:**

Mansfield's animistic view of reality as anthropomorphic and vitalistic stems from her potential for transitivity, for crossing over from the self to the other; this is due to her sense of intimacy with nature and identification with natural phenomena. Nature is not an external being or force, therefore, but an energy with which she felt in touch. Such empathetic associations appear in all the genres in which she wrote and often propel her towards the fantastic and marvelous, modes which, as Rosemary Jackson says, are dominated by “an attempt [...] to resist separation and difference, to re-discover the unity between self and other”.<sup>17</sup> William Orton remarked of her symbolism for example, that it resembles Chekov's: things are made to speak for themselves, often through the device of prosopopeia.<sup>18</sup> Inanimate objects seem to come alive, showing a tendency towards motion that amounts to quasi-agency: even if not part of the natural world, the perceptions of the viewer render them life-like. In “Prelude” Linda Burnell traces a poppy on the wallpaper and “under her tracing finger the poppy seemed to come alive. She could feel the sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud. Things had a habit of coming alive like that”.<sup>19</sup>

The sexual connotation of the images springing to life suggests this represents an awakening. But the objects become a society:

But the strangest part of this coming alive of things was what they did.  
They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important

---

<sup>16</sup> John Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield, “The Meaning of Rhythm”, *Rhythm*, 2.5 (1912).

<sup>17</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 52. Cited by Maurizio Ascari in “Katherine Mansfield and the Gardens of the Soul”, *Katherine Mansfield Studies* 2 (2010), p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Orton, *The Last Romantic*, p. 271.

<sup>19</sup> The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield, vol. 2. *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield 1916-1922*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 68. (References to this edition will be hereafter included parenthetically in the text as CF2).

content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled. But it was not for her, only, their sly secret smile; they were members of a secret society and they smiled among themselves. (*CF 2*, 68)

Linda's imagined community of animated objects can be read as a modernist version of the Pythagorean creed (inherited from Hermes Trismegistus and espoused by hermetic texts such as the *Asclepius*) in what Todd A. Boruk calls its "ethical consideration of non-humans", which states: "There is a community of souls, the souls of the gods commune with the souls of humans, those of humans with souls of unreasoning things".<sup>20</sup> Reminiscent of "the great chain of being" this community of fellowship with the created world is her fantasy, one in which she does not participate for it has a separate existence.

Such proximity between self and other (involving some transfer of agency from subject to object) is associated with Mansfield's doctrine of impersonality in art: the creative principle which is life is also an animalistic quality in which she participates, and which cannot be separated from art: "The artist must give himself so utterly to life that no self qua personal self remains".<sup>21</sup> The merging of self and object- so taking the direction away from the self-- is a moment of increased inwardness yet paradoxically, as seeing the essential otherness of thing, perceiving what Hopkins calls its inscape.<sup>22</sup>

When I write about ducks I swear that I am a white duck with a round eye, floating in a pond fringed with yellow blobs and taking an occasional daart at the other duck with the round eye, which floats upside down beneath me [...]. There follows the moment when you are more *duck*, more *apple* or more Natasha than any of these objects could ever possibly be, and so you *create* them anew. (*Letters 1*, p. 330)

---

<sup>20</sup> From the *Asclepius* (35); cited by Boruk, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 5 vols, ed. V. O'Sullivan and M. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904-2008), 4, pp. 180-81. Hereafter referred to parenthetically as *Letters 1*, *Letters 2* and so on.

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan discusses this in terms of Bergson's intuition: "the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within a object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible". Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr. T.E. Hulme (New York; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 7. Cited in Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, p. 182.

On the other hand this identification has consequences for the perspective and point of view, of being both an observer and then part of the scene so splitting the subject/narrator's viewing position.

I've *been* this man, *been* this woman. I've stood for hours on the Auckland Wharf. I've been out in the stream waiting to be berthed. I've been a seagull hovering in the stern and a hotel porter whistling through his teeth. It isn't as though one sits and watches the spectacle. That would be thrilling enough, god knows. But one IS the spectacle, for the time (*Letters* 4, p. 97).

This contrast between the narrator either as spectator or participant in a scene can be mapped onto the divisions in nature and landscape that Mansfield observes. Nature cultivated, domestic and picturesque is distinct from nature as wild or primitive. These personifications configure the different psychological states of rapture or engulfment, leading to fear, hesitation or withdrawal. So by contrast to the Pythagorean *anima mundi* tradition where the garden is a metaphor for the soul, a plant-like entity that blooms from the environment and disintegrates into it; or the courtly love tradition where the enclosed garden is a place for courtship, and social and cultural reinforcement, landscapes, gardens and other natural settings are for Mansfield sites of self discovery, for making psychic connections, renewing the soul, but also experiencing spiritual alienation and distance.

These divisions appear in the early prose poem piece, "In the Botanical Gardens" (1907), in which the enclosure where "the spring flowers are almost too beautiful" (*CF* 1, 84) recalls the artifice of the enclosed garden or *hortus conclusus*. The narrator is an onlooker or spectator, but after moving beyond the enclosure to the bush, "silent and splendid" (*CF* 1, 85), where she encounters the *genius loci* (the spirit of the place) she becomes part of the scene, revelling in the power of the prehistoric world outside human time: "I am old with the age of centuries, strong with the strength of savagery". This landscape is equivalent to the classical *locus amoenus* which according to Curtius "is a beautiful, shaded, natural site" with one or more trees, a meadow, spring or brook, and possibly including birdsong, flowers and a breeze.<sup>23</sup> Yet the "persistent feeling" (*CF* 1, 85) that she must become one with it and immerse herself in the stream, recalling

---

<sup>23</sup> *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p. 195.

the seductiveness of Tennyson's "Lotus Eaters", conjures danger:<sup>24</sup> "this is the Lotus Land – the green trees stir languorously, sleepily-- there is the silver sound of a bird's call" (*CF* 1, 85). The rapturous yielding to nature invokes an imagined encounter with the spectral forces of the dispossessed:

Shall I, looking intently, see vague forms lurking in the shadow staring at me malevolently, wildly, the thief of their birthright? Shall I [...] see a great company moving toward me, their faces averted, wreathed with green garlands, following the little stream in silence until it is sucked into the wide sea . . . (*CF* 1, 85)

This recalls Freud's linking of the unknown or prehistoric to the workings of the unconscious (of his condensation of the two) as in a spatial geological metaphor.<sup>25</sup> The unconscious exists prior to time and beneath the conscious just as prehistory lies beneath history and knowledge. Freud also talks of the survival of traces which precede consciousness and cannot be expressed as that which escapes signification: "there probably exists in the mind of the individual not only what he has experienced himself, but also what he brought with him at birth, fragments of phylogenetic origin, an archaic heritage".<sup>26</sup> Gillian Beer has shown Virginia Woolf's indebtedness to Darwin's theories of evolution; Mansfield also intuits Darwin's view that history is inextricable from prehistory. But her response to these moments of near immersion, as elsewhere in her early work (for example, the early story "Die Einsame"), is of inexplicable sensations of alienation and fear of engulfment invoking spectral manifestations of the uncanny.

### **3. The Sacred Tree and the Arboreal Epiphany**

While flowers in Mansfield's work have powerful symbolic associations and are associated with domesticity, colour and scent, trees have a framing function as architectural features of the landscape, and often symbolise release or escape from human concerns, revelation or transformation. Hints of pagan beliefs about sacred trees, that they "could express profound cosmological and spiritual

---

<sup>24</sup> On readings of this sketch by Angela Smith, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, see Ascario, "Katherine Mansfield and the Gardens of the Soul", pp. 45-6.

<sup>25</sup> Gillian Beer, *Virginia Woolf: the common ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Beer, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 23

truths” and that minor and major deities lived in individual trees and groves of trees,<sup>27</sup> can also be detected in Mansfield’s work. In keeping with the medieval tradition of *anima mundi*, trees represent *imago mundi* -- the image of the world — in the form of a giant human being (the trunk is likened to the human body, the branches to arms). Trees with human speech called Ents (from the Anglo Saxon word for giant) appear in Tolkien’s epic *Lord of the Rings*.<sup>28</sup> The anthropomorphic tree in “At the Bay”, although not an animated speaking tree, displays other human characteristics: “Then something immense came into view; an enormous shock-headed giant with his arms stretched out. It was the big gum-tree outside Mrs Stubbs’s shop” (*CF* 2, 343).

The sacred tree was also valued by pagans as *axis mundi* (the axis of the world), because it was crucial to their idea of the centre.<sup>29</sup> The tree that connects the earth to the underworld below and the heavens above, is identified by D.H. Lawrence as representing the might of Pan:

[it] is a strong-willed, powerful thing-in-itself, reaching up and reaching down [...] it thrusts green hands and huge limbs at the light above and sends huge legs and gripping toes down, down between the trees and rocks, to the earth’s middle.<sup>30</sup>

In the story “See Saw” (1919), Mansfield presents a feminist reinterpretation of the pagan tradition of the sacred tree and its derivative, the phallic-shaped, upright pillar, as markers of the centre (to tame and make meaningful hostile territory), and she overturns their associations of ritual and the sacred.<sup>31</sup> As the title “See-Saw” implies, the tree is both a topographical fulcrum and an axis for diverse human activities. Her tree is a female version of the sacred tree.

Positioned next to a small green mound with a bench beside it, to which all and sundry make their way, it is “a young chestnut [...] shaped like a mushroom” (*CF* 2, 175). But humans introduce the mundane and profane, symbolically decentring this position by undermining its connotations of ancient ritual and the sacred: a small boy urinates in the cavern below the tree, and an elderly man

---

<sup>27</sup> Cusack, *The Sacred Tree*, pp. xiv-xv

<sup>28</sup> Cusack, *The Sacred Tree*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> Cusack, *The Sacred Tree*, pp. xv, 9, 21, 23, 25.

<sup>30</sup> “Remembering Pan”, *Green Studies Reader*, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> Cusack, *The Sacred Tree*, p. 11.

waves his hat around to frighten off a bird singing in the tree's branches, saying to his wife, "Don't want bird muck falling on us" (CF 2, 177).

Gardens, fields, forests and other natural landscapes associated with the *locus amoenus* constitute pastoral settings for what Josiane Paccaud-Huguet defines as the arboreal epiphany: when the subject's inner forces are released in a form of *jouissance*, through an encounter with the natural world brimming with plenitude.<sup>32</sup> In "The Luftbad", the narrator's fleeting sense of escape from social constructions and identifications leads to her communion with sky, tree and cloud. She climbs onto a swing: "Above, white clouds trailed delicately through the blue sky. From the pine forest streamed a wild perfume, the branches swayed together, sonorously. I felt so light and free and happy – so childish!" (CF 1, 177)

In "The Escape", the very idea of escape from social and domestic constraints becomes problematic, for the experience is paradoxically one of being assailed as well as enlightened and so eludes meaningful interpretation. A hen-pecked, unassuming husband seems to lose himself within the plenitude of nature when he dismounts from the carriage in which he and his wife are travelling. The epiphanic moment is triggered by the sight of an "immense tree with a round thick silver stem and a great arc of copper leaves that gave back the light and yet were sombre". Like the tree as *axis mundi* it seems to link the heavens to the earth: "It seemed to grow, it seemed to expand in the quivering heat until the great carved leaves hid the sky, and yet it was motionless" (CF 2, 221). But the woman's voice that floats from within its depths or beyond it -- a reminder of the earlier intrusive presence of pagan deities and ancient tree spirits -- interrupts his moment of peace and silence:

Suddenly, as the voice rose, soft, dreaming, gentle, he knew that it would come floating to him from the hidden leaves and his peace was shattered. What was happening to him? Something stirred in his breast. Something dark, something unbearable and dreadful pushed in his bosom, and like a great weed it floated, rocked . . . it was warm, stifling. He tried to struggle, to tear at it, and at the same moment -- all was over. Deep, deep, he sank into the silence, staring at the tree and waiting for the voice that came floating, falling, until he felt himself enfolded. (CF 2, 221)

---

<sup>32</sup> "A Trickle of Voice: Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Moment of Being", in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield*, pp. 131-43 (136).

Here as elsewhere in Mansfield's work, the climax of "oceanic amplitude" is compromised;<sup>33</sup> her epiphanies respond to heightened emotions, but do not always offer genuine introspection or potential resolution to their underlying causes. As "In the Botanical Gardens" also shows they can expose the individual to deeper, uncontrollable powers that threaten to submersion and annihilation of the experience.

In conclusion, Mansfield's engagement with the classical and medieval traditions of the *spiritus mundi* and *anima mundi*, is indirectly influenced by the tradition of Dame Nature as defined in the writings of Alan of Lille, in her liminal role as an intermediary between man and god who helped create order out of chaos, vitally recalling paganism and fertility rites. But it also belongs to the modernist reshaping of time, space and consciousness. Such earlier representations of the natural world in which primeval, savage forces existed before the presence of humans and the subjection to and regulation by human clock time, attracted Mansfield and her modernist contemporaries like Woolf and Lawrence. For Mansfield and Woolf the engagement with nature and natural phenomena helps activate changes of consciousness; their epiphanies suggest that being in touch with a spirit of nature or the world (*spiritus mundi*) enables rejuvenation of the life forces: these belong to prelinguistic states of being that include clouds, sky and waves, elements outside history that have existed from the beginning of time and that show the simultaneity of prehistory in the present moment. Both writers show traces of unconscious, archaic memory resurfacing to trouble and disturb the present; Mansfield shows this return in forms of the uncanny and unfamiliar. Like Woolf the prehistorical and primeval demand attention not just because of their potential for spiritual renewal but as a way of overcoming the tyranny of linear narrative. This form of defamiliarisation allows for the creation of temporal discontinuity and spatial dislocation. Mansfield, Woolf and Lawrence all insist on the untransformed nature of human experience as inevitable in any participation in the natural world, and incorporation of this into new and innovative representational form was a key focus of their modernist endeavours.

---

<sup>33</sup> Paccaud-Huguet, "A Trickle of Voice: Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Moment of being", p. 136.

