

Katherine Mansfield in the World of Modernist Magazines

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Mourant, Chris. *Katherine Mansfield and Periodical Culture.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019. 301 pages. ISBN 9781474439459. Hb. £80.

For scholars interested in the modernist short story writer Katherine Mansfield, the recent decades were a momentous and stimulating time. Mansfield scholarship underwent a major project with two mutually interconnected aspects. On the one hand, there was the effort to bring this remarkable yet largely neglected writer into the spotlight of modernist studies where she rightly belongs. On the other hand, in order to accomplish this goal, it was also imperative to reassess almost everything that had been written about her earlier, due to the large-scale manipulation of Mansfield's works and reputation by her husband, the editor and writer John Middleton Murry. This new generation of scholarship would not be possible without the reliable (re-)publications of all her extant papers, including letters, diaries, fiction, poetry, and reviews.

Chris Mourant's highly innovative *Katherine Mansfield and Periodical Culture* is one of the best indications that, with the groundwork mostly done by now, the focus of Mansfield scholarship is shifting and broadening. Murry and his legacy are, of course, inescapable but not the central concern anymore, and with scholars no longer being haunted by the inevitable constraints of rehabilitating Mansfield, the more recently established claims and theories are being scrutinized and challenged. As a matter of fact, Mourant does indeed challenge many of the previously held theories and assumptions and reads Mansfield's works within the context of the periodicals in which they were originally published "as a means of defamiliarising and recontextualising her life and work" (2). He demonstrates that this approach helps to "fundamentally change . . . how we understand and interpret her writings" (2).

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the book consists of four chapters; each of the first three is dedicated to one literary magazine Mansfield contributed to (*The New Age*, *Rhythm*, and *The Athenaeum*), whereas the fourth discusses the advent of her posthumous reputation created by Murry in *The Adelphi*. The three appendices respectively offer a complete list of Mansfield's periodical contributions (with notes on cases of disputed authorship), the full texts of her lost short story "A Little Episode"

discovered recently by Mourant himself, and of her yet unpublished 1911 aphorisms, “Bites of the Apple,” found in 2015 by Gerri Kimber in the Newberry Library in Chicago. The monograph is enriched by a large number of photographs, pictures, and reproductions of magazine pages, aptly illustrating the relevant analyses in the text.

Although ordered somewhat chronologically, based on Mansfield’s association with different journals throughout her career, Mourant’s approach is only remotely biographical. More important than the facts of her life is the intellectual atmosphere and exchange of ideas within and among the contemporary modernist magazines and the ways in which Mansfield negotiated this fluid environment and responded to the most pressing topics of discussion.

The first chapter, “*The New Age*: Gender, Nation and Empire,” contests the claims that Mansfield’s opposition to the suffrage movement indicated her lack of political engagement and argues that “it was precisely Mansfield’s aversion to the suffrage movement that connects her to the feminist movement” (33). Mourant examines Mansfield’s early writings taking into consideration the radical feminist ideas of one of the magazine’s editors, Beatrice Hastings, which “responded to a contemporary cultural discourse linking gender and empire” (24). Mourant contends that it was “in the context of this public discourse that both Hastings and Mansfield formulated remarkably similar, coterminous ideas about female suffrage, marriage and maternity” (24). The discussion of Beatrice Hastings’s place within the magazine, her publication practices (the multiple pseudonyms under which she would present mutually opposing opinions), and affinities with Mansfield constitute one of the most compelling parts of this book. Moreover, it is complemented by the reproductions of the fragments of typescripts of Hastings’s work, another of Mourant’s discoveries, which are among the very few surviving remnants of her personal papers.

Further sections of this chapter offer analyses of Mansfield’s “Pension Sketches,” which would later be collected in the volume *In a German Pension* (1911) along with the two recent discoveries included in the appendices. Both the “Pension Sketches” and the short story “A Little Episode” (1909) are read alongside Hastings’s *Whited Sepulchres* (1908-09) and, according to Mourant, they demonstrate “a striking ‘parafluence’” between the writings of the two authors (51). The influence of the famous editor-in-chief of the *The New Age*, A. R. Orage, is explored on the example of the aphorisms “Bites from the Apple.”

The following chapter, “*Rhythm*: Parody and (Post)Colonial

Modernism,” problematizes the claims that Mansfield’s stories for this periodical subscribe to its celebration of brutality and primitivism in art as well as challenges the commonly presented belief that *Rhythm* was an egalitarian, anti-colonial magazine free from gender constraints. Instead, it shows how the contributions often featured “the rhetoric of the colonial quest narrative” (113) and reveals Mansfield’s awareness of the connection between modernist primitivism and cultural imperialism. Mansfield places herself in the liminal position between metropolitan center and colonial periphery and uses “parody and satire as modes of critique throughout her contributions to *Rhythm*, ironising the tropes of imperial discourse in order to encode anti-colonial, anti-imperialist political commitments” (113).

Not only from the Central and Eastern European perspective, a fascinating part of this chapter is dedicated to the discussion of Mansfield’s engagement with nationalist movements in Eastern Europe in the form of “fraudulent translations” (116) from Russian, by an invented poet Boris Petrovsky, which were in fact written by Mansfield. Mourant explains how Mansfield’s poems, originally written for *The New Age* and later collected under the title *The Earth Child* (1910) but never published, were “repurposed” (119) within the context of *Rhythm*. He argues for reading them as “a dialogue-in-print between *Rhythm* and *The New Age*” (120) and suggests that Mansfield’s pseudonym Boris Petrovsky was inspired by Paul Selver’s translations of Slavic poetry in *The New Age*.

The third chapter, “*The Athenaeum*: ‘Wanted, a New Word’ (World),” is mostly dedicated to the reviews that Mansfield wrote for almost two years for *The Athenaeum* under Murry’s editorship (1919-20). While Mourant acknowledges the generally mediocre quality of the publications she reviewed, he, once again, disputes the habitual interpretations, this time the persuasion that Murry secretly doubted Mansfield’s intelligence and/or education as being sufficient for more important writers. Instead, he presents Mansfield’s review page as unique and important, “a part of a vital post-war project of cultural rejuvenation” (186) and considers the “middlebrow” production as important for providing “balance” and enabling Mansfield to “carve out her own ideas about the ‘thrilling possibilities’ of formal innovation” (186). This chapter also examines how Mansfield connected the notion of “the new word” symbolizing the modernist innovation to the spatial metaphor of the “new world” or “undiscovered country” and how she used them in her reviews. A section is dedicated to, what Mourant reads as, the dialogue in reviews between Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. He also offers a convincing argument against the usual dismissal of the short-lived magazine *Signature* as

a “sorry endnote” but regards it “as the beginning of a trajectory that culminated . . . in Murry’s resounding success at the helm of *The Athenaeum* and in the extensive body of critical writings that Mansfield produced for the latter periodical” (190).

The last and the shortest chapter, “*The Adelphi*: Katherine Mansfield’s Afterlives,” illustrates how all the radical, ambiguous, and innovative aspects of Mansfield’s writing argued for in the previous three chapters, notably her feminism, post-colonialism, and modernism, were “erased and smoothed over” (257) by Murry’s rewriting of her life and editing and contextualizing of her published and unpublished works. It also demonstrates, however, that Murry’s sentimental image of Mansfield as a pure, saintly, childlike soul “owed much to the periodical contexts in which it was first formulated” (257).

Mourant’s astute, meticulously researched, and highly original monograph responding to the recent developments in the field of modernist studies not only demonstrates the significant potential of such new directions, but is yet another proof that, in spite of the sustained academic interest in Katherine Mansfield, there is no end to new readings of and approaches to her unique artistic creations.

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