

Mansfield in the Act of Writing¹

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David Marr's absorbing 1991 biography of the Australian novelist, *Patrick White: A Life*, refers seven times to the New Zealander Katherine Mansfield. Mansfield's writings fascinated White, although—or perhaps because—he did not consistently admire them. A revealing reference occurs in a letter which White wrote in 1961 to his editor, Marshall Best, while visiting Wellington and after Antony Alpers had given him the chance to look at Mansfield's manuscript letters and notebooks. "‘Letters are the devil,’ he wrote to Best. ‘I always hope that any I have written have been destroyed. . . . Katherine Mansfield is a good example of the letter-writer traduced. . . . [H]er original letters and notebooks . . . have lingered on to accuse her as a monster of sensibility and egotism. I would prefer to remember her by her stories, although I confess to being tremendously intrigued by the private, sometimes automatic outpourings.’"² Within the decade, White would reread the stories and find them "overpolished," but later still, in 1975, working on his novel *The Twyborn Affair* and writing from the south of France to his cousin Peggy Garland, he turned again to Mansfield's letters and diaries, declaring that (despite their sometimes painful self-consciousness) they "‘do jump at one. . . . At their best they’re as perfect in their imagery as early morning.’"³ No reader of the biography can escape the obvious irony that it is White's surviving letters that reveal these intrigues and estimations. What interests me also in these comments, however, is the implied tension between two sets of criteria, those of biographical and aesthetic critical judgment, each set itself divided. On the one hand, White is fascinated with and yet attacks the creative "monstrosity" of privacy and ego; on the other, he admires the "perfect image"

¹ The research for this project was aided in part by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I wish gratefully to acknowledge this support and also to thank Margaret Scott for her generous advice concerning Mansfield's handwriting, as well as the librarians and staff at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, in Wellington, and the librarians and staff at the Newberry Library, Chicago, for their courteous assistance.

² David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life* (Knopf, 1991), p. 376.

³ Marr, p. 567.

and yet resists what he calls "overpolishing." Mansfield's manuscript notebooks frequently lead commentators to biographical generalizations (Alpers, for example, or Cherry Hankin) and at the same time offer much to the reader who is less compelled by the life than by the specifics of language choice.

The diaries that White had access to in France in 1975 were, of course, the volumes⁴ that Mansfield's second husband, Middleton Murry, had prepared for publication in the three decades following her death in 1923. As more recent biographies have made amply clear, Murry had his own agenda for the version of Mansfield which he wished to have the diaries record; he selected and paraphrased sections, omitted unflattering references to himself, and, as he could not in any event read his wife's handwriting very consistently, was sometimes inventive in what he had the notebooks say. Fundamentally, moreover, he distorted the public impression of how Mansfield wrote, for by selecting and arranging various bits of writing as though they had been initially shaped as separate diaries, fiction manuscripts, letters, and commentaries, he contrived an illusion of a compartmentalized mind.

Contrary to the implications of Murry's editorial practice, Mansfield did not keep one notebook for fiction, another for personal observations, a third for correspondence, and so on. For her, writing was a continuous act. All writing was influenced by all other writing; the difference was that the forms it took, in her estimation, did not always tell the truth. The challenge was to find the right form.

From childhood on, Mansfield kept a journal—writing in pencil and with a series of different fountain pens, about which she sometimes complained—on a range of stationery, from day-diaries to four-by-six-inch black-bound booklets to what were called "US style" scribblers (Turnbull qMs [1284]),⁵ variously printed with plain, lined, and crosshatched pages.⁶ Sometimes she would begin at both ends and write toward the middle, sometimes start at various points throughout, sometimes turn the booklet upside down. Annual diaries, repeatedly begun in self-declared earnest, with full daily comments, always peter out in February, with only occasional (and often cryptic) notations marking other days in the year. This series of notebooks contains, all mixed together, stories and fragments of stories, revisions, drafts of letters, comments on her reading, judgments of people and books, expense records, doodles, lists (a recurrent organizational strategy), brief critiques of her own composition, assorted self-assessments, and various forms of literary exercise, from descriptions to technical analyses. She repeatedly chastised herself for not writing every day, or for not being able to transfer onto the page the sensations that she conceptualized in her head, or for being overly preoccupied with herself and thus permitting ego and temper and jealousy to interfere with her identifying with her characters and scenes.⁷ At once she

⁴ The book entitled *Scrapbook*, for example, and the so-called "Definitive Edition" of the *Journal*.

⁵ Reproduced in *Manuscripts in the Alexander Turnbull Library*, p. 42. All subsequent references to this source are parenthetical.

⁶ Surviving copies of these booklets are held in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, New Zealand, and in the Newberry Library in Chicago.

⁷ By way of example, a 1920 diary note about her strained relationship with Middleton Murry reads: "I thought of Jack contained in the little house against which I leaned—within reach—within call. I remembered there was a time when this thought was a distraction. Oh it might have been a sweet distraction—but there it was! It took away from my power to work. . . . I, as it were, made him my short story. But that time belongs to the Past. . . . He has passed beyond it" (Turnbull qMs[1269]).

imagined herself (in her role as writer) as a sort of conduit through which experience might flow and as the deliberate chooser of words and shaper of nuance. This double sense of role was perhaps what led Patrick White to be so ambivalently intrigued and annoyed by her work; it certainly emphasizes a split in critical reactions to Mansfield, which in a variety of ways duplicate the extremes of White's impatience and fascination: critical reactions both to Mansfield the person and to Mansfield the writer, beings sometimes equated with and sometimes differentiated from each other.

In her later years, debilitated by tuberculosis, Mansfield sometimes complained about being ill and then complained about complaining, chastising herself for using illness as an excuse not to write. Like it or not, however, the external world repeatedly impinged on the act of creativity. The modern reader gets some sense of the conditions of writing by the fact that her notebooks so often break off with some such phrase as *I am so cold!* Such phrases also suggest why critics have used the notebooks primarily as a kind of repository of biographical information; the asides, the complaints, the conditions, the impatience, the absorptions, the aspirations, and the delighted responses to people and places and books: all have been rendered as revelations of personality, as indeed they can be, with justification. It has been possible, too, to read some of the manuscript preoccupations—the recurrent motif of dead babies, for example, and the recurrent effort to construct fairytales of happy childhood—for the psychological insights which they provide into the adult writer's motivations. But to read these passages for their referential or revelatory information only is to read past the shape that they take, as though form, or the writer's concern for form, were not in itself important. For Mansfield, however, the act of writing (and I am conscious of the ambiguity in this phrase) always involved language choices. The notebook practice—the analytical comments, the doodles, the lists of ideas, the trial sentences, the revisions, the pleasure in what seems an effective style, the impatient marginal glosses that candidly dismiss stylistic failures—this practicing indicates, in addition to states of mind, a passionate commitment to the possibility that specific arrangements of words could engender particular effects.

For the language-centered critic, therefore, the notebooks constitute a kind of active guide to the process of reading Mansfield's texts. They provide examples of what Richard Wendorf (writing about Alexander Pope) calls "the poetics of abandonment";⁸ they demonstrate scenes and sentences in the throes of construction—of words underway—and they provide instances of theorizing about the possible effects of particular verbal arrangements: all of which emphasize the importance of reading any Mansfield text for how it says in order to appreciate—however one interprets this phrase—what it has to say.

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In 1991, I had the opportunity to read through sixty of these notebooks and manuscript papers. While manuscripts do not exist for all the published stories, nor do all the journal entries relate clearly to published works,⁹ the available materials offer a clear sense of

⁸ Richard Wendorf, "Alexander Pope: *An Essay on Man*, Epistles I–III," in *The Marks in the Fields: Essays on the Uses of Manuscripts*, ed. Rodney G. Dennis with Elizabeth Falsey (Houghton Library, Harvard University, 1992), p. 47.

⁹ Many are fragmentary—vignettes and stories abandoned in mid-draft.

Mansfield's characteristic manuscript practice. In some cases, the author altered phrasing as she composed in the first place; sometimes she went back over a first draft, changing words, modifying phrasing, inserting or deleting whole passages.¹⁰ She then recopied this first draft as a fair copy, making the handwriting clear—and I should pause at this point to sympathize with John Middleton Murry, who often had difficulty reading it; as Margaret Scott, the current editor of the papers, has observed about Mansfield's handwriting in "Summer Idylle":¹¹ "To the uninitiated it looks like the seismological chart of an unstable region."¹² At the fair copy stage, Mansfield often added or changed punctuation,¹³ although she seldom modified phrasing further. From here she went on to one (or sometimes two—as, for example, with a vignette called "Westminster Cathedral") typed versions of the story; these were the texts submitted to publishers, which were then modified only by editorial intervention (often Murry's, as with his successful effort to suppress the original ending of "Je ne parle pas français").

Romantic versions of Mansfield at work sometimes envision a writer working at white heat, producing creative masterpieces while scarcely blotting a word. This is a nice notion. But it is a version of reality that conveniently overlooks the dailiness of this writer's life—the humdrum interruptions of ordinary living, as well as the extremes of sentimentality and anger which she sometimes indulged; it is a version of creativity that the journals amply dispute. While it is true that one later story, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," was written quickly, with remarkably few changes, it would be a mistake to see this particular achievement as typical. It would also be misleading to think that the fluency implied by her later stories had nothing to do with the amount of writing recorded over twenty years in her notebooks. To illustrate Mansfield's writing practice further, therefore, I should like to single out three kinds or categories of manuscript commentary and revision: those that emphasize figure and performance, those that alter lexicon and syntax, and those that deal with agency and other larger strategies of arrangement.

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I draw attention to figure and performance together because Mansfield (as I have argued elsewhere in relation to "At the Bay"¹⁴) repeatedly used space to affect rhythm. Among the published stories, for example, narratives such as "At the Bay" proceed segmentally, the spatial divisions working both to pace the forward movement of recorded external action and to underline the duration and revelation of intervening experience. Similar forms of such constructed fragmentation occur in many of the journal entries. But of further interest in the journals are the drawings or doodles, which might at first glance seem only the irrelevant wanderings of a tired hand, pauses in creation, or signs that creativity is sometimes a resistant muse. In the manuscript of "The Aloe," for example (Turnbull, qMs [1253]), close to the point at which Linda is walking with her mother, Mrs. Fairfield, contemplating and rejecting

¹⁰ A change of ink or pen often distinguishes the later of these two sets of modifications.

¹¹ This is the manuscript that she herself found most difficult to decipher.

¹² "Unpublished," p. 128.

¹³ Mansfield's first drafts are sometimes cavalier in their use of commas.

¹⁴ DREAMS 137, pp. 211–20.

suicide, and the mother says to her daughter, "'Are you cold, child are you trembling? Yes, your hands are cold,'"¹⁵ a note on the opposite page expresses Mansfield's anxiety about being able to write at all. The next sentence then counters, "What I have done seems to me to be awfully, impossibly good compared to the STUFF I wrote yesterday." Resolving, then, "to write a letter from Beryll [sic] to Nan Fry," the manuscript note dissolves into drawings of treble clefs, two cello players, a violinist, a performer at a concert grand, a cello, a singer holding sheet music, and a line of music for a bass instrument. And then one more sentence: "This is all too laborious!"

Drawings elsewhere—in "Mouse," an early version of "Je ne parle pas français," (Turnbull qMs [1259])—show crocuses and wine-glasses; and in materials recorded in Newberry MS group 44, several other visual designs ornament the written work. For example, the title page of "The Garden-Party," dated 14 September 1921, begins with a line of ten shrubs or flowering plants;¹⁶ a page of "Young Country" is covered in stick figure drawings of dancers;¹⁷ and both a fair copy version of "Je ne parle pas français"¹⁸ and the manuscript of "A Married Man's Story"¹⁹ use treble clefs as narrative division markers. One way of responding to all of these designs is to dismiss them as indications that Mansfield's creative talents did not extend to the visual arts; another is to think of them as concrete images, parallel to or evocative of literary metaphor; a third is to take account of the repeated subjects: music and the seasonal cycle of nature—in other words, rhythmic movement. It is perhaps important to remember that Mansfield was an accomplished cellist before she became known as a writer. But what seems to me more important is the suggestion in these visual images that she intended language, too, to be performed. The scenes that she was writing take their referential meaning from their depiction of characters and events, but achieve their effects (and hence suggest the consequences of meaning) at least in part through the conscious choice of prose rhythm. Music and spring, in this context, can be heard not as static symbols but rather as signs of the active playing of relationships in time.

Further evidence of the relation between rhythm and meaning shows up in a list of what Mansfield called "Stories for my new book," dated 27 October 1921 (Turnbull qMS [1277]). Of the eight stories in this list (they were to alternate between London and New Zealand settings), only some were completed, including "The Doll's House," here referred to as "At Karori"; and six appeared posthumously, with several other works, in Murry's edition of *The Dove's Nest and Other Stories* in 1923. One of the uncompleted works, here called "Mr Maude," is described both by its subject and by a metrically scored motif: "Husband & wife play duets and a *one a two a three a one a two three one!*" The significance of this technical paradigm is that it uses rhythmic phrasing to identify an effect—perhaps the relationship between husband and wife—that the story was to achieve. It is not the only instance of the technique in Mansfield's work. An early fair copy of a story called "This Flower," for example (Turnbull qMs [1264]), contains the passage:

¹⁵ Katherine Mansfield, *The Aloe with Prelude*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan (Port Nicholson Press, 1982), p. 145.

¹⁶ Micro MS 251, reel 1, item 18.

¹⁷ Micro MS 251, reel 2, item 1, notebook 2.

¹⁸ Reel 1, item 26.

¹⁹ Reel 2, item 4, notebook 5.

Roy had been really *too* right about the kind of man the doctor was. He gave her a strange quiet leering look, and taking off the stethoscope with shaking fingers he folded it into his bag that looked somehow like a broken red canvas shoe.

"Dont you worry," my dear, he said, huskily, Ill see you through."

Odious little toad to have asked a favour of. She sprang to her feet & picking up her purple cloth jacket went over to the mirror. There was a soft knock at the door, and Roy, he really did look pale, smiling his half-smile, came in and asked the doctor what he had to say.

"Well!" said the doctor, taking up his hat, holding it against his chest and beating a tattoo [sic] on it "all Ive got to say is that Mrs. hm-Madam wants a bit of a rest. Shes a bit run down. Her hearts a bit strained. Nothing else wrong."

In the street a barrel organ struck up something, gay, laughing, mocking, gushing, with little trills, shakes, jumbles of notes.

Thats *all* I got to say to say

Thats *all* Ive got to say

it mocked. It sounded too near; she wouldn't have been surprised if the doctor were turning the hands. (pp. 11-13)

The technique turns up again in published form in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," when the daughters, Josephine and Constantia, run to give an organ-grinder sixpence in order to keep him quiet, only to remember that their father is now dead and cannot actually complain any more at the noise outside his window:

The organ-grinder might play there all day and the stick would not thump.

It never will thump again,

It never will thump again,

played the barrel-organ.

What was Constantia thinking? She had such a strange smile; she looked different. She couldn't be going to cry.

"Jug, Jug," said Constantia softly, pressing her hands together. "Do you know what day it is? It's Saturday. It's a week to-day, a whole week."

A week since father died,

A week since father died,

cried the barrel-organ. And Josephine, too, forgot to be practical and sensible; she smiled faintly, strangely. On the Indian carpet there fell a square of sunlight, pale red; it came and went and came-and stayed, deepened-until it shone almost golden.²⁰

The point is not just that "Daughters" finally uses a scene that had been conceptualized much

²⁰ Anthony Alpers, ed., *The Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Jonathan Cape, 1980), p. 400.

earlier in the journals, but also that the musicality of the prose—the rhythm of arrangement and the crafting of sound sequence—constitutes at least one dimension of the story's substance. The sound of the reverberating barrel organ suggests heartbeat and life (a connection made more explicit in the earlier "This Flower"); in both passages, it is also associated with color responses, suggesting further a narrative interest in the effects of synesthesia. For Mansfield, form is meaning, rhythm is form, and rhythm (or meaning) is a process in time, a form that does not need to be plotted so that a story may be told, but that can convey narrative, because it can be both enacted and visualized, by the way words can score the space of the page.

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The second category of manuscript revision involves lexicon and syntax—those changes that derive directly from word choice and sentence structure rearrangement or displacement. Clearly these changes, too, have an impact on cadence, but the effects generally go beyond aural or kinesthetic association. Diction directs interpretation, and grammar directs relationship.

That Mansfield was conscious of grammar and the function of grammatical choices is perhaps not something one needs to argue, but evidence is supplied by her notebook comments on reading Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, especially those concerning act III scene V:

tawny . . . *slimy* . . . —and the adjectives seem part of the nouns when Shakespeare uses them. They grace them so beautifully attend and adorn so modestly and yet with such skill. It so often happens with lesser writers that we are more conscious of the servants than we are of the masters, and quite ~~lose~~ forget that their office is to serve, to enlarge, to amplify the power of the master.

"Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in my ears

That long time have been barren."

Good lines! And another example of the choice of the place of words. I suppose it was instinctive. But fruitful seems to be just where it ought to be to be resolved (musically speaking) by the word "barren." One reads fruitful expecting barren almost from the "sound" sense . . . (Turnbull qMs [1280], p. 2).²¹

The musical vocabulary here reads grammar as a harmonic progression, but it also openly declares an insistent belief in the singular power of word choice. Each word, in this conception of language, invites particular associations, both semantically and syntactically, by the way it resonates and the way it is placed.

Sometimes Mansfield's revisions reveal relatively simple semantic substitutions. The word "masculine" in a 1904 song cycle called "Little Fern Fronds" is changed to *gaunt* (Turnbull qMs [1240]); the adjective "tired" changed to "weary" to describe the faces of primroses in an early vignette called "My Potplants" (Turnbull qMs [1241]); the word "oily" replaces

²¹ An edited version appears in *Critical Writings*, p. 122, at which point Shakespeare's word *slimy* is mistranscribed from Mansfield's manuscript journal entry as *shiny*.

"gleaming" to characterize the spinach green paint on the doll's house in "The Doll's House" (Turnbull qMs [1277]); the adjective "shining" replaces "white" to describe faces in "A Suburban Fairy Tale" (Turnbull MS Papers 4011, folder 6). In a slightly more complex move, in the last of these manuscripts, "boss" replaces the first draft version "manager" to describe one of the central characters.²² The general effect of such changes is to intensify connotative value, establish greater referential precision, clarify action, and speed up the pace. Abstractions disappear in favor of concrete images—as Mansfield wrote about her own intent for the style of "At the Bay" and "The Garden Party," she wanted the "simple" to replace the "wispy" (Turnbull qMs [1278])—and wandering passages (as some of the longer and more dramatic crossings-out demonstrate) are wholly, summarily cut.

The specific effect of changes, however, can be both to reveal nuance and to transform social implications. The word "boss," for example—deriving from *baas*, the Dutch word for "master"—found its first English-language home (in its sense of "superintendent" or "head") in nineteenth-century America, the word "master" itself apparently being considered unworthy of use, unacceptable in the new republic because of the connotations of social slavery that it now carried. By the 1920s, the word "boss" had also become current in England, but only in working-class slang, functioning there as a subversive or resistant voice.²³ For the term to appear in "The Fly," then, written in 1922, suggests a specificity of social discourse, not a casual semantic alteration; it implies class categories in action, and potentially an undercutting of the social power ostensibly enjoyed by the story's erstwhile "manager." But the term "boss" also carries metaphoric possibilities here, especially if its other etymological roots are taken into account. As a medieval word deriving from the French *boce*, or "bump," the word "boss" (as in the modern "emboss") refers to a prominence or protuberance, one that is sometimes hollow. And the phonologically associated term "boss-eyed" (meaning "crooked" or "one-sided") derives from an English dialect usage meaning "make a mess of" or "bungle." Hence, with a few single-term revisions, Mansfield added an allusive complexity to this story, hinting at qualities of personality, motivations for behavior, and limitations of sympathy and vision.

Sometimes it took several drafts to get a single sentence right, and sometimes, even then, no story would develop beyond it. The opening sections of such abandoned stories as "Late Summer," "All Serene," "Our Hilda," and "Love—lies—bleeding" all provide examples. The last of these "wants rewriting," Mansfield wrote in her journal, putting a circle round this observation, because "Its all over the garden wall," and on the next page a second draft begins. The first version opens:

At half past two the servant girl stamped along the narrow passage from the kitchen to the dining room, thrust her head in at the door and shouted in her loud, impudent voice:—"Well, I'm off, Mrs Eichenbaum. I'll be here tomorrow, Mrs Eichenbaum."

Muffi waited until she heard the servant's steps crunch down the gravel path, heard the gate creak and slam, listened until those steps died away quite, and silence,

²² Newberry MS Group 22, Micro MS 251, reel 1, item 16, pp. 2, 3.

²³ Perhaps re-imported from the United States to Europe for that purpose, or perhaps absorbed as fashionable from the lexicon of the First World War.

like a watchful spider began to spin its silent web over the little house..[sic]
Everything changed.

The parallel passage from the second draft maintains the same phrasing, in which the sound sequence serves the author's purpose, but it also adds a conjunction to change the rhythm (and the sense of consequentiality) at the end of the paragraph; it alters verbs and nouns to heighten the impersonality of the setting; and it alters word source and speech idiom to heighten the impersonality of the relationship:

At half past two the servant girl stamped along the narrow passage from the kitchen to the dining room, thrust her head—in at the door and shouted in her loud, impudent voice:—"Alors, je vais, Madame. A demain, Madame!" Muffi waited until she heard the front door slam, until she heard the servant's steps ring and clatter down the stone stairs, listened until those steps died away quite, and silence, like a watchful spider began to spin its silent web all over the little flat. And everything changed.²⁴

One further example consists of the five drafts of the opening sentences of a late story called "The New Baby." The first version dates from September 1921 and begins:

VERSION 1: It is late night, very dark, very still. Not a star to be seen. And now it has come on to rain. What happiness it is to listen to rain at night; joyful relief, ease, a lapping round and hushing and tenderness all are mingled together in the sound of the fast-falling rain, God looking down upon the rainy earth, sees how faint are these lights in little windows—how easily put out . . . (Turnbull qMS [1275]).

At the top of the page of this version, Mansfield wrote to herself in the second person: "You ought to keep this my girl, just as a warning to show what an arch-wallower you can be!" A year later she returned to the story and began again:

VERSION 2: At half past ten the yacht steamed into the sound, slowed down. "Hullo!" said someone, "we've stopped!" For a moment, and it seemed like a long moment, everybody was silent. The crying of little waves sounded from the distant beach; the soft moist breath of the night wind came flowing over the dark sea. And looking up at the sky one fancied that the bright-burning moon had stopped too and was waiting to see what was going to happen. [This is the version printed in Murry's *Scrapbook* 206–07.]

VERSION 3: At half-past ten the yacht steamed into the Sound, slowed down... "Hullo!" said some one, "we've stopped!" For a moment, and it seemed like a long

²⁴ Newberry, MS Group 44, MS Papers 4268, folder 1, item 36.

moment, everybody was silent. They heard the crying of little waves ~~sounded~~ from the distant beach,—the soft, moist breath of the large wind came flowing gently ~~from the boundless~~ over the dark sea. And, looking up at the sky one fancied that even those merrily-burning stars were telling one another that the yacht had anchored for the night.

VERSION 4:²⁵ At half past ten the yacht steamed into the Sound, slowed down "Hullo!" said some one, "we've stopped!" For a moment, and it seemed like a long moment, everybody was silent. They heard the crying of little waves on the distant beach, they felt the moist, soft breath of the ~~night~~ large wind breathing so gently from the boundless sea. And looking up at the sky ~~it seemed~~ one fancied that even those merrily-burning stars accepted the fact that they were anchored for the night.

VERSION 5: As the little steamer rounded the point and came into the next bay they noticed the flag was flying from Putnam's Pier that meant there were passengers to bring off. The captain swore. They were half an hour late already and he couldn't bear not to be up to time. [five illegible crossed-out words] But ~~as they came in the little~~ Putnam's flag, cherry red against the green bush on this brilliant morning, jiggled gaily, ~~independently carelessly~~ to show it didn't ~~at~~ care a flick for ~~what the Captain felt. And~~ the Captains feelings.²⁶

The middle modifications involve mostly punctuation and pacing (although it might be interesting to speculate on why several stories involve the half-hour rather than the hour). Subsequent modifications experiment with different word choices—will it be a *night* wind or a *large* wind, a *dark* sea or a *boundless* sea?—and then even larger syntactic units start to change: is it the *yacht* that is anchored, or the *stars*? But what the fourth rewrite indicates is that sometimes it is neither the tempo nor the word choice that is not working to the author's satisfaction, but the general conceptual strategy.

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Among the changes in agency or strategy that Mansfield's notebooks demonstrate are the alteration of narrative mode and sign (as in "The New Baby," which shifts from night to morning, yacht to steamer, evocative description to recorded event), the alteration of narrative perspective (as when the point of view in "The New Baby" shifts from the abstract "one" to the concrete, if still nameless, "they"), and the alteration of tense (as in "See-saw," which shifted from past to present at the recopying stage,²⁷ emphasizing immediacy and perhaps indeterminacy in place of completed and finite action).

The reasons for such large changes are neither uniform nor simple, but some sense of the

²⁵ This revision is dated 26 February 1922.

²⁶ Newberry MS Group 44, MS Papers 4268, folder 1, item 40.

²⁷ Newberry MS Group 44, Micro 251, reel 1, item II.16.

motivations for revision can be gleaned from the succession of self-reflexive critiques that are to be found in the notebooks and manuscript pages. These range from single words to extended meditations: "Enough" (Turnbull qMs [1241]), a word that suspends a story draft with a double line scored across the page; "Nonsense" (Turnbull qMs [1242]), a word written after she crossed through a sentence that read "Dragging her into the room and over to the light, her pale face full of a frail peace"; "No good" and "revise" (Turnbull MS Papers 4006, folder 6), words written in a notebook containing "Pic-Nic" and "Dame Seule"; "Too vague. Too much in the air Un-telling," "facile," "pompous," "underdeveloped," "thoroughly bad," "inadmissible" (Turnbull qMs [1262]), comments on her own reviews for the *Atheneum*; "Everything I think of seems false" (Turnbull qMs [1270]), a notebook comment on liars, full of implied impatience with Murry; "This story won't do. It is a silly story" (Turnbull qMs [1272]), a note appended to a draft of a story about another "Boss";²⁸ and a note on the need to read as well as to write: "If there is a book to be read: no matter how bad that book is, I will read it. Was it always so with me? I don't remember. Looking back, I imagine I was always writing. Twaddle it was, too. But better far write twaddle or anything, anyway, than nothing at all" (Turnbull qMs [1284]).

While many of Mansfield's diary entries are directed expressions of anger, and many others chide herself for not being a good enough writer and for procrastinating (by using diary notes and letters as substitutions for writing stories), it is important to point to the moments of pleasure and verbal laughter in the notebooks, too—the neologisms, the bilingual puns,²⁹ and even the mordant limericks about her own physical condition (Turnbull qMs [1267]). It is also important to remember that Mansfield often delighted in her surroundings and sometimes found satisfaction in her own work, particularly in getting the voice right (something she worked on especially in "At the Bay" and "The Daughters of the Late Colonel"), and in succeeding at a technique she admired in Chekhov, selectivity of scene and image, about which she wrote in her diary of January 1922:

Tchehov made a mistake in thinking that if he had had more time he would have written more fully [. . .] The truth is one can get only so much into a story; there is always a sacrifice. One has to leave out what one knows and longs to use. Why? I havent any idea but there it is. Its always a kind of race to get in as much as one can before it disappears. (Turnbull qMs [1282])³⁰

Repeatedly, her comments on writing distinguish between action and pretence: on the part of the writer and also in the language the writer chooses to arrange and employ. Which writer, Mansfield asks, can really see—and which one merely pretends to see? A sharp critique of E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, for example, declares:

its not good enough. E.M. Forster never gets any further than warming the tea pot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this tea pot. Is it not beautifully warm! Yes, but

²⁸ Which Murry, in *Scrapbook*, pp. 227–31, entitled "The Office Boy."

²⁹ "Daisy! Daisy! giv me your onze heures, do!" Turnbull qMs [1266].

³⁰ This is also found in *Critical Writings*, p. 124.

there aint going to be no tea. And I can never be perfectly certain whether Helen was got with child by Leonard Bast or by his fatal forgotten umbrella. All things considered I think it must have been the umbrella. (Turnbull qMs [1257])³¹

Two passages from her 1921–22 notebooks examine further this relation between conscious design (agency, or authorial intentionality) and verbal effect (which involves the impact on the reader). A combined entry for 16 October and 21 November 1921 explicitly sets out the tension between the real writer and the actor; perhaps it's the same distinction which Patrick White observed—or sensed in the Mansfield lines which he read—between the demands of the ego and the perfection of the early morning:

But the late evening [Mansfield wrote] is the time of times—then with that unearthly beauty before one it is not hard to realise how far one has to go. To write something that will be worthy of that rising moon, that pale light. To be simple enough as one would be simple before God. . .

Nov. 21st Since then I have only written *The Doll house*. A bad spell has been on me. I have begun 2 stories but then I told them and they felt betrayed. It is absolutely fatal to give way to this temptation. . . . Today I began to write, seriously, "The Weak Heart" . . . a story which fascinates me deeply. What I feel it needs so peculiarly is a very subtle variation of "tense" from the present to the past & back again—and softness, lightness, and the feeling that all is in bud, with a play of humour over the character of Ronnie, and the feeling of the Thorndon Baths, the wet, moist, oozy . . . no, I know how it must be done. May I be found worthy to do it! Lord make me crystal clear for Thy light to shine through the book. (Turnbull qMs [1278])

The entry for 2 May 1922 includes another observation, one about life, language, and literary organization; it demonstrates in part the way these notebooks reveal Mansfield in the act of writing—the way they emphasize the writer's own sense of the craft of short story composition:

I must begin writing for Clement Shorter today. 12 "spasms" of 2000 words each. I thought of the Burnells but—no, I don't think so . . . Much better the Sheridans—the three girls and the brother and the Father and Mother and so on, ending with a long description of Meg's wedding to Keith Fenwick. Well, there's the first flown out the nest. The sisters Bead who come to stay. The white sheet on the floor when the wedding dress is tried on . . . Yes, I've got the details all right. But the point is—where shall I begin? (Turnbull qMs [1278]).³²

³¹ Printed in *Critical Writings*, p. 28.

³² J.F. Kobler, using Murry's edition of the *Journal*, identifies the story in question as "The Dove's Nest" (*Katherine Mansfield: A Study of the Short Fiction* [Twayne, 1990], pp. 114–15).

To this observation should be added the passing comment about short narrative form that Mansfield made in a 1920 *Athenaeum* review of Elizabeth Robins' *The Mills of the Gods*:

Suppose we put it in the form of a riddle: "I am neither a short story, nor a sketch, nor an impression, nor a tale. I am written in prose. . . . I may be only one page long, but . . . there is no reason why I should not be thirty. I have a special quality. . . . In fact I am often given away in the first sentence. I seem almost to stand or fall by it. It is to me what the first phrase of the song is to the singer. . . . "What am I?

It does not appear . . . that the question has ever troubled Miss Elizabeth Robins. . . . Experience, confidence, and a workmanlike style—the author has all three, and they go far to disguise the hollowness beneath the surface, but the hollowness is there. . . . How is it that the author can bear to waste her time over these false situations, . . . the great-hearted, fearless, rude, swearing, murdering toughs who frequent the Golden Sand Gambling Hell at Nome . . . [and the] little golden-haired innocent child . . . whom they adopt and send to Europe to finish her studies. . . . Oh, Miss Robins! We are very, very weary of this kind of tale. . . .³³

But these observations, taken together, also hint at Mansfield's own role in challenging the formal character of twentieth-century prose. By drawing attention more to the manner of storytelling than to the fixed messages—the conflict and closure—of conventional plots, the manuscript notes announce Mansfield's own critical commitment to language: not as a neutral carrier of determinate propositions but as a deliberate design and a conscious field of revelation.

³³ Mansfield, *Critical Writings*, pp. 99–100.

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