Chapter 6

Katherine Mansfield

There are two distinct periods in Katherine Mansfield's short writing life. The first covers the years from 1908 until 1917, during which time she moved from her native New Zealand to take up the bohemian life in London, got married, divorced, contracted gonorrhoea, got married again, published her first volume of short stories, the curiously satirical and commercially unsuccessful *In A German Pension* (1911) and suffered the loss of her beloved brother in the First World War. The second period runs from 1917 until her untimely death from tuberculosis in 1923, and although much the shorter, saw her compose all of the stories for which she is now revered and remembered. Within that period there are two events in particular that represent turning points in Mansfield's life and career: the first is her engagement with Anton Chekhov's short stories; the second is her accepting an invitation from Virginia Woolf to write a story for the newly established Hogarth Press.

The question of Mansfield's indebtedness to Chekhov has had a long and at times controversial history, not least because of the accusation, first levelled in 1935, that her story 'The Child-Who-Was-Tired' plagiarized Chekhov's 'Sleepyhead'.[1] Whatever the extent and nature of the debt in that particular story, Mansfield's critical observations, like Woolf's, reveal the importance of Chekhov's interrogative style to her developing sense of the form the short story might take. 'What the writer does is not so much to *solve* the question but to *put* the question,' she wrote to Woolf in May 1919. 'There must be the question put. That seems to me a very nice dividing line between the true and the false writer'.[2] The following month she told S. S. Koteliansky (with whom she translated some of Chekhov's correspondence) that this refusal to 'solve' was 'one of the most valuable things I have ever read. It opens – it discovers rather, a new world'.[3] Reading Constance Garnett's multi-volume translation, she was struck by the stories' irresolute quality, and particularly the way in which consequential relationships between elements in the Chekhovian narrative were suppressed. She wrote, again to Koteliansky, of Garnett's translation of 'The Steppe' (from *The Bishop and Other Stories*) that it had apparently

'no beginning or end', and marvelled at the compositional method by which Chekhov 'touched one point with his pen – and then another point – *enclosed* something which had, as it were, been there forever'.[4]

Like Woolf, Mansfield regarded Chekhov as a potentially liberating force in English letters. Reading him, as she reflected to Dorothy Brett, she came to disdain the routine contrivances of fiction, such as the motivating 'problem' in a story's plot:

> Tchehov *said* over and over again, he protested, he begged, that he had no problem. [. . .] It worried him but he always said the same. No problem. [. . .] The 'problem' is the invention of the 19th-century. The artist takes a *long look* at Life. He says softly, 'So this is what Life is, is it?' And he proceeds to express that. All the rest he leaves.[5]

Chekhov's example also conditioned Mansfield's view of her English contemporaries, who, she claimed, lacked any sense of what the short story form could do or be. In a review of Elizabeth Robins's collection *The Mills of the Gods*, for example, she questioned whether Chekhov's 'The Lady with the Dog' was a 'short story' at all, so wholly different was it from what English readers and writers evidently understood by the term. Robins she berated for writing the kind of 'wholesome, sentimental' stories 'that might have appeared in any successful high-class magazine' – fiction that exuded a certain '[e]xperience, confidence, and a workmanlike style', but that was ultimately 'hollow' and dismally dependent on 'false situations'.[6]

Again like Woolf, Mansfield saw such conventionalism as symptomatic of an essentially 'materialist' mind-set and failure to engage with the deeper mysteries (a favourite term in her criticism) of the human economy. 'Here is a world of objects accurately recorded,' she noted of George Moore's *Esther Waters*, 'here are states of mind set down, and here, above all, is that good Esther whose faith in her Lord is never shaken, whose love for her child is never overpowered – and who cares?'.[7] John Galsworthy's *In Chancery*, meanwhile, she criticized for presenting 'a brilliant display of analysis and dissection, but without any "mystery", any unplumbed depth to feed our imagination upon'.[8] Technical excellence married to emotional timidity she saw even in the work of her more highbrow English contemporaries. E. M. Forster, she declared, 'never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea';[9] while George Bernard Shaw she accused of being 'uninspired': 'a kind of concierge in the house of literature – sits in a glass case – sees everything, knows everything, examines the letters, *cleans the stairs*, but has no part in the life that is going on'.[10]

The writers who occupied the rooms in the 'house of literature' were, by contrast, all Russian: Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and, of course, Chekhov. If the impact of translated Russian literature on Virginia Woolf's work became apparent when combined with the new publishing freedoms offered by the advent of the Hogarth Press, something of the same is true of Mansfield, whose transformation of her unfinished novel *The Aloe* into the story *Prelude* was made in response to Woolf's request, in April 1917, for a contribution to the new imprint. Eventually published by the Woolfs in July 1918, *Prelude* began 'the phase on which [Mansfield's] reputation as a writer rests'.[11]

Mansfield recognized that *Prelude* was a major breakthrough in her artistic development. It was the story in which, as she put it in a letter to Dorothy Brett, she discovered a narrative form adequate to the representation of memory and experience:

> What form is it? you ask. Ah, Brett, it's so difficult to say. As far as I know it's more or less my own invention. And how have I shaped it? This is about as much as I can say about it. You know, if the truth were known I have a perfect passion for the island where I was born . . . Well, in the early morning there I always remember feeling that this little island has dipped back into the dark blue sea during the night only to rise again at beam of day . . . I tried to catch that moment – with something of its sparkle and its flavour. And just as on those mornings white milky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it. I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again.[12]

The pattern of revealing and hiding that Mansfield pinpoints here captures the substance of the revision that she made to *The Aloe* as she shaped it into *Prelude*, for in taking a 'giant bite'[13] out of her manuscript, she did away with many of the supporting narrative continuities and conventions of the original novel project. Specifically, she divided the four long chapters of *The Aloe* into twelve sections held together less by any discursive logic than by spatial juxtaposition and contiguity. In addition, she cut several lengthy sections that provided psychological elaboration of her female characters. Comparing the two texts, one notices that while most of the material concerning the central male character, Stanley Burnell, is carried over intact, the sections dealing with his wife, Linda, her mother, Mrs Fairfield, and her sister Beryl are severely curtailed. The effect of this is to imbue the female characters, as Mansfield put it in her journal at the time, with a 'sense of mystery, a radiance, an afterglow'. Like Woolf, her vision of a new kind of fiction – 'No novels, no problem stories, nothing that is not simple, open' – would be more than a matter of transcending

the limitations of her own earlier work, but the means of reaching beneath the 'appearance of things'.[14]

It has been said of *The Aloe*'s redaction into *Prelude* that Mansfield set out to 'eliminate the personal intrusion' in the narrative, to remove traces of the author's voice, in effect, by 'bring[ing] the narration closer to a specific character's consciousness and away from interpretation by an omniscient narrator'.[15] This is true up to a point. Much of what was omitted in the transition *was* material of this sort – novelistic embellishments such as the satirical characterization of the Samuel Josephs' 'swarm' of children, and of Mrs Samuel Joseph surveying them from afar with 'pride . . . like a fat General watching through field glasses his troops in violent action'. Yet it is clear from comparison of the two texts that Mansfield was just as concerned to curtail passages of interior monologue and character-focalized observation where these restricted or simplified the motives of her characters, and that elsewhere the omniscient point-of-view was retained, as for instance in the description of Mrs Fairfield that commences section six of *Prelude*.

But it is in the material concerning Linda's reflections on her mother and domesticity that we see the most profound effects of Mansfield's revisions, and can begin to descry the outlines of her mature story aesthetic. In *The Aloe*, Linda repeatedly considers her lack of interest in her new home: 'The house can bulge cupboards and pantries, but other people will explore them. Not me,' she thinks at one point, and witnesses by contrast her mother's effortless command of the domestic space: 'There was a charm and a grace in all her movements. It was not that she merely "set in order"; there seemed to be almost a positive quality in the obedience of things to her fine old hands. They found not only their proper but their perfect place.' Linda's aversion to the duties of the home creates an antagonism towards her mother that finds direct expression in *The Aloe*:

> 'If I were to *jump* out of bed now, *fling* on my clothes, *rush* downstairs, *tear* up a ladder, hang pictures, eat an enormous lunch, romp with the children in the garden this [afternoon] and swinging on the gate, waving, when Stanley hove in sight this evening I believe you'd be delighted – A normal, healthy day for a young wife and mother – '

All of this material is absent from the *Prelude*. Section five of the story, where this passage would initially have stood, moves from Linda's waking dream of her father and the bird that is transformed into a baby, through her conversation with Stanley, to her anthropomorphic imaginings about the objects in the room. Mrs Fairfield appears in section six, but when Linda briefly contemplates her then, it is without any trace of the antagonism or threat that was so prominent

in *The Aloe*. Instead, the stress falls on Linda's complicated and conflictual need for her mother:

> Linda leaned her cheek on her fingers and watched her mother. She thought her mother looked wonderfully beautiful with her back to the leafy window. There was something comforting in the sight of her that Linda felt she could never do without. She needed the sweet smell of her flesh, and the soft feel of her cheeks and her arms and shoulders still softer. She loved the way her hair curled, silver at her forehead, lighter at her neck, and bright brown still in the big coil under the muslin cap. Exquisite were her mother's hands, and the two rings she wore seemed to melt into her creamy skin. And she was always so fresh, so delicious. The old woman could bear nothing but fresh linen next to her body and she bathed in cold water winter and summer.

Where in *The Aloe* these observations are dominated, and therefore disintricated, by the association of Mrs Fairfield with an oppressively domesticated femininity, Linda's response to her mother becomes a less determinate matter in *Prelude*. Irritation at Mrs Fairfield's 'simply maddening' manner of doing things is reserved to Linda's unmarried sister Beryl, who feels herself to be 'rotting' in the matrifocal environment. Mansfield makes Linda's feelings much more problematic to untangle, and indeed it becomes possible to argue that Linda sees in her mother a version of feminine self-containment that she envies as much as abhors. Linda does not simplify her mother as Beryl does – in fact, it is precisely those passages in *The Aloe* where she does reflect on her mother's limitations that Mansfield removes in the revision.

Those omissions, so characteristic of the interrogative modernist short story, open up further dimensions in the relationship between Linda and Mrs Fairfield, including the possibility that Linda recognizes and even envies the curious power and liberty her mother's competence, modesty and contentment seem to bring. Feminist readings of the story frequently assert that Linda sees in her mother's life an oppressive destiny. The scene in section eleven when the two women go into the garden at night is taken as evidence of this tension and difference between them: while Linda contemplates the 'hate' she feels for Stanley, her mother thinks about harvesting the fruit trees and currant bushes to make jam, thereby revealing an 'ideological commitment to marriage and motherhood' that Linda does not share.[16] But this is to reckon without Mansfield's interrogative narration, which renders Linda's feelings about her mother one of the 'questions put' in the story, as it does Mrs Fairfield's comprehension of her daughter's unhappiness. It is equally valid to infer, for example, that Mrs Fairfield embodies an alternative kind of independence and

self-containment that Linda feels herself falling short of, yet which she needs and craves. In the passage quoted above, it is her mother who successfully counters Stanley's 'firm, obedient body', not with Linda's sort of late-sleeping languidness, but with an orderly and eloquent physicality of her own. When they enter the garden together in section eleven, Linda wishes to communicate using 'the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave'. That Mrs Fairfield responds with thoughts of harvesting the fruit trees and of 'pantry shelves thoroughly well stocked with our own jam' is neither demeaned by Linda nor invalidated by the narration – it is not, as Linda has it in *The Aloe*, a symptom of her mother's confinement. Rather, Mrs Fairfield represents one of several possible fulfilments of feminine identity that her young granddaughter Kezia encounters in the course of the story and that she must negotiate as part of her own journey into womanhood.

The transformation of *The Aloe* into *Prelude* marks the moment when Mansfield began to reckon creatively with the 'note of interrogation' in her short stories. Everything about the revisionary process is aimed at preserving multiplicity and heterogeneity in characterization and meaning. As with Woolf, however, it is necessary to locate the development of that fictional aesthetic within the larger cluster of modernist cultural values. And for this, it is necessary to look at some of the critical material Mansfield collaborated on with her husband John Middleton Murry.

Although Mansfield and Murry always regarded themselves as outsiders among the so-called Bloomsbury set, of which Woolf and her husband Leonard were part, they were nevertheless deeply attracted to the idea of the exclusive avant-garde coterie. In particular, they shared the contempt that many in the Woolfs' circle harboured towards commercialism and the spread of mass popular culture. Early in her career, Mansfield had become associated with the Fauvist group of artists, for whom the function of art was to uncover the strange and barbaric impulses that fester below the surface of civilization. She had formed a particularly close relationship with the painter J. D. Fergusson, who together with Murry launched the magazine *Rhythm* to publicize Fauvist work and thinking and to pass comment on the state of contemporary art and culture. Much Fauvist thinking was explicitly elitist and anti-materialist in nature, taking its lead from Arthur Symons, whose *Symbolist Movement in Literature* envisaged a modern art in 'revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition'.[17] In the essays she co-authored with Murry for *Rhythm*, Mansfield harnessed Symons' aesthetic credo to an unabashedly elitist sociocultural agenda. 'The History of Art has been the history of a misunderstanding of a minority by a majority', the couple asserted in 'The Meaning of Rhythm',

for example, going on to argue that the quasi-divine capacities of 'inspiration' and 'intuition' on which the artist depends had themselves become degraded by use in the common parlance.[18] Against the 'arch-democrat' of popular taste, and against the 'incursion of machine-made realism into modern liteature', the patrician freedoms of the creator must be defended:

> Individuality in the work of art is the creation of reality by freedom. It is the triumphant weapon of aristocracy. It is that daring and splendid thing which the mob hates because it cannot understand and by which it is finally subdued. Only by realizing the unity and the strength of the individual in the work of art is the mob brought to the knowledge of its own infinite weakness, and it loathes and is terrified by it.[19]

In 'Seriousness in Art', similarly, the focus fell on those commercially orientated writers who pander to the mob and who are responsible for turning the 'craft of letters' into a 'trade instead of an art'. Again, it is a symbolist aesthetic derived from Symons that provides the conceptual basis for the social criticism. Art, which should be motivated by 'a perpetual striving towards an ever more adequate symbolic expression of the living realities of the world', languishes instead in dismal compliance with the culture that sustains it, replicating the 'comfortable competence' and 'absolute conformity' upon which 'financial success' and the very 'life of democracy' depend. In that superficial and materialistic world of 'trademarks', 'bagmen' and 'book financiers', where everything has 'a purely external value', the true artist is known by his 'enthusiasm and . . . seriousness', which qualities 'wedded together are the hall-mark of aristocracy, the essentials of the leader'.[20]

That the question of art's place and significance in a money society had long been a concern of Mansfield's is evident from 'Juliet', the unfinished manuscript of a novel composed around 1907. There she depicts her young heroine caught between, on the one hand, a bourgeois colonial existence dominated by her 'commonplace and commercial' father with his 'undeniable *trade* atmosphere', and on the other, life in a dismal London flat: 'This struggle for bread, this starvation of Art. How could she expect to keep art with her in the ugliness of her rooms, in the sordidness of her surroundings'. A journal entry from the same period records Mansfield's growing estrangement from her family and their materialist values. 'Damn my family!' she declares at one point, 'O Heavens, what bores they are! . . . Even when I am alone in my room, they come outside and call to each other, discuss the butcher's orders or the soiled linen and – I feel – wreck my life.'[21] In the signature stories of her major period, Mansfield would return again and again to the image of a bourgeois world whose values and identity are inscribed in the commodities it fashions and

exchanges, and like Woolf, she used interrogative, open-ended narrative forms in an effort to convey the ungraspable, unaccountable qualities of singular personhood that such materialism neglects.

Mansfield's most frequently anthologized story, 'The Garden Party', provides a particularly good example of how these formal and ideological considerations came together in the mature work. The story tells of a young middle-class New Zealand girl called Laura and her encounter, on the day of her mother's garden party, with the dead body of young man from a poor neighbouring family. In Laura's tentative embrace of a more emotionally 'strenuous life' than is thought healthy or appropriate for a girl of her class, she comes not only to recognize the density and human familiarity of lives purportedly different from her own, but to question the materialist values and habits of perception that organize that sense of class difference in the first place.

The questioning begins early in the story when Laura finds herself contemplating the 'absurd class distinctions' that quarantine her life from those of the workmen erecting the marquee in her garden. But it is when she is upbraided for her 'extravagant' suggestion that the party be cancelled on account of the dead man and mourning family nearby that the mechanisms by which her family and her class justify and console themselves come into focus:

> 'I don't understand,' said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided. And somehow that seemed the best plan.

The transformational power of the hat allows Laura escape into an impression of herself, relieving her, for as long as she admires the image, from the tangled burdens of subjectivity and conscience. The hat objectifies her, in short; and it induces self-forgetfulness again a moment later when she passes her brother Laurie on the stairs: intending to tell him of the dead man and solicit his agreement to cancel the party, her resolve is 'blurred' by his mentioning her 'absolutely topping hat': 'Laura said faintly "Is it?" and smiled up at Laurie and didn't tell him after all'. During the party, her costume brings further distracting compliments: 'Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look

so striking,' one guest declares. Only afterwards, when her mother proposes that she take a basket of leftovers to their stricken neighbours, is she forced to grapple again with the question of her own moral identity.

As she sets off down the road with her gifts, she is still in thrall to the fetishized object-world of her mother and the party:

> Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn't realize it. Why couldn't she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, 'Yes, it was the most successful party'.

What ensues is Laura's discovery that the commodities that are the outward show of class and privilege are not, as she has been led to suppose, coterminous with identity. Her sudden awareness that her flamboyant hat and dress are inappropriate to the errand on which she is embarked marks the moment when her sense of her true self clashes with her public image. From that point forward in the story every human encounter becomes unsettling and mysterious to her. She gains admittance to the dead man's house 'as though she were expected', and is greeted with a disconcerting familiarity and foreknowlege by the widow's 'fond and sly' sister, whose literal opening of doors and ushering over thresholds has its spiritual corollary in the access she instinctively enjoys to Laura's deeper needs and longings. She it is who uncovers the dead man for Laura to gaze upon, an encounter that completes the separation between what she thinks of as her 'self' and the counterfeit reality of fungible goods she inhabits: 'What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things.' When, at the very end of the story, Laura comes upon Laurie for the second time, it is not to seek words of consolation from her older sibling, but to sound the note of interrogation with him: '"Isn't life," she stammered, "Isn't life – " But what life was she couldn't explain . . . "*Isn't* it, darling?" said Laurie.'

Mansfield said of 'The Garden Party' that she had tried to convey in it the 'diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything, Death included . . . But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it.' Her mature stories are littered with moments when those who aspire to comprehension and order are confronted with the inadequacy of their systems of belief, from Monica Tyrell's encounter, in 'Revelations', with the image of her hairdresser's dead child, to Constantia's ineffectual and inarticulate apprehension, in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel', that her life of enforced 'running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them

back to get more things on approval, and arranging father's trays and trying not to annoy father', is really no life at all. And, as in 'The Garden Party', such moments of insight yield not new or alternative certainties in Mansfield's narratives, but perpetual equivocations: 'What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now?'

That the answers to such questions are permanently deferred in Mansfield's stories (as they are in Woolf's) reflects her impatience with the superficiality of popular fiction and its hackneyed conventions; but it also reveals her attitude towards the broader middle-class culture and its infatuation with what she and Murry in one essay termed 'purely external value'. More than a formal device, the 'question put' creates an interrogative space in a Mansfield narrative that is insusceptible to the rational-materialist world-view – a space in which the self can be preserved against the inauthentic, mass-mediated representations that threaten to swamp it. Characters in her stories can be separated into those, like Laura, who learn to resist such representations, and those, like Laura's mother, who capitulate to them. Growing up in a Mansfield narrative is invariably about discovering whether one has the stomach for the fight, as Kezia must in 'The Doll's House', for example, when her familiy's class-conscious prohibitions debar her from knowledge of the outcast Kelvey children. For those already grown, the struggle is to retain a sense of authentic selfhood in a culture replete with fake identities. When, in 'The Escape', a man retreats from his complaining wife into fantasy and silence, he retreats too from the world that she represents – a snobbish world of appearances, conspicuous consumption, fetishized commodities and (for others, of course) dehumanizing labour. In the only direct observation he makes of her in the story, it is the things she carries that spur his resentment:

> The little bag, with its shiny, silvery jaws open, lay on her lap. He could see her powder-puff, her rouge stick, a bundle of letters, a phial of tiny black pills like seeds, a broken cigarette, a mirror, white ivory tablets with lists on them that had been heavily scored through. He thought: 'In Egypt she would be buried with those things'.

Her need for objects (she prizes her parasol more than she can say) is matched by her need to objectify those around her, denying the 'idiotic hotel people', 'hideous children' and 'Horrid little monkeys' she encounters any semblance of inner life while complaining about their insensitivity to her own. Her greatest fear, unsurprisingly, is loss of face: 'Had he expected her to go outside, to stand under the awning in the heat and point with her parasol? Very amusing picture of English domestic life.' At the end of the story, as the couple travel by train through a darkened landscape, she continues to number him among

her possessions – 'My husband . . . My husband' – registering the fact but not understanding the reasons why he is so introverted with her.

A similar estrangement exists between Bertha and Harry Young in 'Bliss', though with the gender roles reversed. Most readings of this story concentrate on the theme of lesbian desire encoded within it, but it is important to note how the subtle and indirect expression of Bertha's feelings towards Pearl Fulton contrast with the acquisitive materialism of the society in which she lives and moves. As in 'The Escape', an opposition emerges between 'self' and 'culture', but unlike that story the conflict that exists between the married couple is played out too in the mind of the protagonist, Bertha. We see it early on when she buys fruit to decorate her home:

> There were tangerines and apples stained with stawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: 'I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table'. And it had seemed quite sense at the time.
>
> When she had finished with them and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect – and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air. This, of course, in her present mood, was so incredibly beautiful. . . . She began to laugh.

The fruit, once Bertha arranges it, becomes more than the sum of its parts – indeed, it seems to be a further expression of that imperishable bliss she feels on several occasions during the day. It certainly exceeds Bertha's original intention in buying it, which was to complement her home's interior decoration. A few moments later, she experiences something similar with her baby, Little B, who is transformed from a charming object whom Bertha looks upon 'like the poor little girl in front of the rich little girl with the doll', to a breathing, masticating infant, the loving, needy reality of whom triggers in Bertha another 'feeling of bliss'. She may have lost the keys to her own front door, but she has gained access to something beyond the 'absolutely satisfactory house and garden' that is her public life with Harry.

In that public life, it is objects and commodities – the 'books', the 'music', the 'superb omelettes', the 'money' – that provide the lingua franca of culture and class. From Mrs Norman Knight's 'amusing orange coat with a procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts', to her husband's

'tortoiseshell-rimmed monocle', to Eddie Warren's 'immense white silk scarf' and matching socks, to Harry's box of Egyptian, Turkish, and Virginian cigars, this is a world where personality and status are mediated through possessions. Bertha is part of that world, of course, and she trades in its currency when she invites Pearl and the others to inspect her new coffee machine after dinner. But as before, the *matériel* of Bertha's domestic existence is transformed, this time when the drawing-room curtains are opened to expose the pear tree that stands as the multivalent symbol of her longing for Pearl. That the pear tree, in its various manifestations, is a vividly sexual metaphor should not blind us to its function as an image of Bertha's longing for 'another world', a world of authentic relationships and unmediated intimacy. It is that longing that makes her wish to be alone with Harry, to withdraw from the sham of hospitality and have the Norman Knights and the other guests gone. The 'best of being modern', she reflects, is that she and her husband can be 'such good pals' despite the absence of sex. But in the final pages of the story, it is not just Harry's infidelity but modernity itself in its capitalized, commoditized forms that crowds out togetherness. 'We are the victims of time and train,' the Norman Knights declare, taking their leave, while the image-conscious Eddie seeks refuge from the trials of intimate conversation in what for him is an '*incredibly* beautiful' line of (someone else's) poetry, but which fails to transcend the counterfeit culture it presumes to mock: 'Why Must it Always be Tomato Soup?'. It is left to Harry to state, quite carelessly on his part, the truth of what their life and home have become: 'I'll shut up shop'.

As I have described them, both Woolf's and Mansfield's stories attempt, in various ways, to transcend the forces of commodification; and in both writers' critical statements, we see evidence of what Nicholas Daly considers modernism's concerted effort to 'theorize . . . writing practice as something outside the wasteland of commercial culture'.[22] Of course, it is important to remember that the notion of standing outside of the market and contemporary capitalist culture was one of the central delusions to which the modernists clung. It is more accurate to see modernism as occurring within its own specialist segment of a fragmented literary marketplace, than operating independently of it. Nevertheless, in the way they were able to utilize the short story to reflect the values and ambitions of the cultural elite, Woolf and Mansfield elevated it from its modest origins in oral and popular print culture to a central form of British literary modernism.

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ADRIAN HUNTER

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