FOREWORD

Honorary Vice-President of the Katherine Mansfield Society

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‘Modernism’, our theme for this issue, is a term so broad it is difficult to know where it begins and ends. It belongs to the early years of the twentieth century, is brought into sharper definition by the psychic shock of World War I, and reaches certain literary peaks in works like *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*, both 1922, the year also of *The Garden Party* which represents Mansfield at the height of her powers. Parallel developments in music and the visual arts make it possible to see composers and painters as co-workers with the poets and fiction writers in a grand inter-European experimentalism that aimed to shake off tired conventions in favour of renewal across the whole spectrum of the arts. Modernism, one might say, was to the early twentieth century what Romanticism had been to the early nineteenth. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was... to be deeply troubled.

This is the social, intellectual and literary context in which Katherine Mansfield began to write. She suffered directly, in her soul, the trauma of the war, and was brought by it to a quicker recognition of where her primary material was to be found, and how she was to deal with it. Mansfield’s achievement is not only in the art of the short story in English, but on a broader front in her influence (especially by the effect of her writing on Virginia Woolf) on fictional techniques. She liberated fiction from story without abandoning narrative. She showed, in discovering it, how narrative can grow by accretion around a focal point rather than by chronological sequence. She discovered how much can (and even should) be left unstated; and how attention to detail, to the play of words on the ear as well as on the comprehending intellect, can make sentences say more and mean more. She linked fiction in English with modern French and Russian work, thus profiting

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early from, and making herself part of, a literary internationalism that was an essential part of modernism. Finally she lived (though at dire cost) the life of the 'free' woman, asserting her right to it, and setting an example for those who came after. 'We owe to [Mansfield]', Elizabeth Bowen says, 'the prosperity of the "free" story: she untrammelled it from conventions. [...] She was to alter for good and all our idea of what goes to make a story'.

Mansfield loved the process of writing, and continually recorded, in journals, letters and experimental drafts, what went on in her workshop. She did not, of course, intend that what she called her 'camping ground' should ever be open to the public; but thanks to John Middleton Murry, it has been preserved and, over time, made available to scholars, so that we are able to trace inner self-discovery becoming literary development, and how the two interacted. Not intending to, Mansfield let us into her studio, into her 'life of the mind', the very place post-modernism has craved access to, and has come to value as much as, sometimes even more than, the finished product. Mansfield belonged to the zeitgeist of the early twentieth century; but she has moved imperceptibly into that of the twenty-first.

The Journal of the Katherine Mansfield Society is an on-going record of how much there is still to be learned from the study of her work, and what an international enterprise it has become. The present issue offers some new examples of the many ways in which the words 'Mansfield' and 'Modernism' belong together and can be spoken in the same breath.