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Abstract

Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf shared a personal and professional relationship which both recognised as being central to the development of their writing. Their relationship was strongly influenced not only by the many life experiences which they shared, and the similarity of their artistic projects, but also by their different positions in terms of empire. This essay examines the Mansfield/Woolf relationship within the context of the broader imperial relationship during the modernist period, and offers new approaches to considering both writers within modernist literary history.

SARAH AILWOOD

Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and Tensions of Empire during the Modernist Period

Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf shared a personal and professional relationship which both recognised as being central to the development of their writing. Their relationship was strongly influenced not only by the many life experiences which they shared, and the similarity of their artistic projects, but also by their different positions in terms of empire. This essay examines the Mansfield/Woolf relationship within the context of the broader imperial relationship during the modernist period, and offers new approaches to considering both writers within modernist literary history.

Mansfield and Woolf met late in 1916, and the relationship developed over the following years through regular meetings in London, correspondence and the publication of *Prelude* by Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1918. Both writers quickly identified their affinity and the similarity of their artistic projects, particularly their desire to find a new way of expressing human experience. After visiting her for the weekend in August 1917, Mansfield wrote to Woolf: 'We have got the same job, Virginia & it is really very curious & thrilling that we should both, quite apart from each other, be after so very nearly the same thing. We are you know; there's no denying it' (O'Sullivan & Scott vol 1, 327). Woolf expressed similar feelings in her diary entries, writing in 1918: 'As usual we came to an oddly complete understanding' (Bell vol 1, 150); and after seeing Mansfield in August 1920 before her departure for the Mediterranean:

... of a sudden comes the blankness of not having her to talk to. So on my side the feeling is genuine. A woman caring as I care for writing is rare enough I suppose to give me the queerest sense of echo coming back to me from her mind the second after I've spoken. Then, too, there's something in what she says of our being the only women, at this moment (I must modestly limit this to in our circle) with gift enough to make talk of writing interesting. (Bell vol 2, 61)

However, the relationship was also influenced by intense competition and jealousy. Their rivalry was frequently expressed through opinions of each other's work, either in published reviews or personal diary entries and letters to other writers and artists. Woolf's letters and diaries are often critical of Mansfield's work, and express satisfaction in her failures and annoyance at her success and praise. Woolf's final letter to Mansfield indicates that she was not afraid to confront her

about their rivalry, as she describes her response to a literary lecture: ‘Morgan Forster said that *Prelude* and *The Voyage Out* were the best novels of their time, & I said Damn Katherine! Why can’t I be the only woman who knows how to write?’¹

Despite the personal and professional intensity of the relationship, it does not appear to have been maintained by correspondence during Mansfield’s frequent absences in Europe between 1919 and her death in January 1923. However, the few surviving letters from this period reveal a strong affection for each other, a recognition of the unique nature of their relationship, and a nostalgia for the times they spent together. Mansfield wrote to Woolf from Menton in 1920:

I think of you often — very often. I long to talk to you. Here, at last there is time to talk. If Virginia were to come through the gate & were to say ‘Well — Katherine’ — oh, there are a thousand things I’d like to discuss.

I wonder if you know what your visits were to me — or how much I miss them. You are the only woman with whom I long to talk work. There will never be another.

(O’Sullivan & Scott vol 4, 154)

Woolf wrote to Mansfield: ‘I’m always thinking of things to say to you ... probably I shall think a good deal about writing & about Katherine, and get half dazed over the fire. Please Katherine, let us try to write to each other’ (Woolf, Letter to Mansfield, 13 February 1921). Following Mansfield’s death, Woolf wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell, a patron of the arts who entertained Mansfield, Woolf and several other writers during the period: ‘I wish I’d kept up with Katherine, as you did — I found it too difficult. But I keep thinking of her now’ (Bell vol 3, 8); and to their mutual friend Dorothy Brett: ‘It makes me sorer than ever that I did not simply persist’ (Bell vol 3, 17).

The relationship between Mansfield and Woolf has attracted considerable critical attention.² Studies of the relationship tend to focus on the many life experiences which Mansfield and Woolf shared, and also on the influence of their relationship on their writing. What is often overlooked, however, is the important role that the colonial and class differences between Mansfield and Woolf also played in their relationship. This essay seeks to redress this gap by considering the Mansfield/Woolf relationship in terms of Mansfield’s position as a Pacific woman living and writing in the centre of British imperialism during the modernist period. Considering this dimension of the relationship reveals new approaches to understanding the broader cultural tensions of empire during the modernist period.

In *A Public Of Two* Angela Smith examines the many ways in which Mansfield and Woolf occupied liminal or threshold spaces ‘between’ throughout their lives, in terms of their childhood (particularly their responses to their late Victorian upbringing and the constructions of gender which it offered), their sexuality, health, professionalism, relationships with their editor husbands, and their childlessness (Smith 7, 31), and also considers their exploration and

representation of boundaries and in-between spaces in their personal writing and their fiction. Woolf commented on the similarity between them in her letter of 1921: 'I sometimes think that though we are so different we have some of the same qualities' (Woolf, Letter to Mansfield, 13 February 1921). Smith writes that 'liminars are often traditionally regarded as polluting, taboo, or inauspicious to other people because their in-between state can be experienced as threatening or anarchic in relation to an established order, be it social, political or artistic' (Smith 11). While Smith argues persuasively for the experiences which Mansfield and Woolf shared as liminars, this essay examines how, as a Pacific woman living and writing in self-imposed exile in Britain, Mansfield was also a liminar within her relationship with Woolf and other writers of the period.

Mansfield arrived in London at the age of nineteen determined to make a career for herself as a writer. Her reception in London was influenced both by her New Zealand background and the impact which it had on her class status: although she was born into and educated in the upper classes in Wellington, the fact that she was from New Zealand, and that she was poor compared to many of her artistic counterparts, resulted in her being considered their inferior in both social and artistic terms. Mansfield was viewed as a potentially threatening and disruptive liminar because of her colonial heritage and its effect on her compromised class position.

Mansfield understood that many of her contemporaries, particularly the elite London literati, viewed her as an inferior 'colonial'. Elleke Boehmer has commented on European modernists' extensive practice of 'othering' artists and writers of empire as 'barbarian hero or civilized savage, withal inchoate, dark, and strange' (Boehmer 145), in order to distance them as culturally and socially different from themselves. Mansfield knew that she was considered by her contemporaries as a 'colonial liminar' and used this position to disrupt their established social and artistic order. She did this by constantly experimenting with her own subjectivity:

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 at 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. (Stead 199)

Mansfield's interest in the nature of selfhood and the concept of identity, particularly in terms of nationality and gender, pervades her writing. Her quest in Europe was for reconciliation of her New Zealand heritage within British imperial culture, and she explored this by incorporating her experimentation with subjectivity into her own personality and her self-presentation. Her experimentation with subjectivity and personality was not only for her own personal fulfillment but also designed to disrupt conventional European conceptions of selfhood and identity and to elicit a response from her

contemporaries. Her comments to her friend Dorothy Brett on the publication of *Prelude* suggest that in her self-presentation and her fiction she aimed to disrupt the established artistic order: ‘won’t the “Intellectuals” just hate it. They’ll think it’s a New Primer for Infant Readers. Let ’em’ (O’Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 169). Many of her initial collaborators, such as the writers A.R. Orage and Beatrice Hastings, found her unpredictable, changeable temperament fascinating but ultimately alienating (Carswell 75). Dorothy Brett wrote:

Her changes of mood were rapid and disconcerting; a laughing joyous moment would suddenly turn through some inadequate remark into biting anger.... Her great delight was a game she played of being someone else ... riding a bus or eating in a Soho café.... She would act the part completely until she even got herself mixed up as to who and what she was. (Dorothy Brett qtd in Boddy 62)

This opinion was also shared by D.H. Lawrence. Although he knew Mansfield for several years, for a time living closely in the same neighbourhood, he found that he understood her much better following his travels to Australia. He wrote to their mutual friend S.S. Koteliansky: ‘If you were here you would understand Katherine so much better. She is very Australian — or New Zealand’ (Roberts et al 241). Mansfield’s adoption of the ‘colonial liminar’ persona was a two-edged sword: on one hand it enabled her to disrupt the established social and artistic order; but on the other it failed to challenge the prejudiced view of ‘colonial’ artists held by the London cultural elite.

Mansfield and Woolf clearly came from very different backgrounds in terms of empire, and occupied very different positions within British culture and society. Their personal writings reveal that their relationship — in both its affinity and its hostility — was influenced not only by their artistic attitudes but also by their different positions in terms of empire. Their attraction to each other is the result not only of the similarity of their artistic projects — their desire to find a new way of writing — but also their mutual curiosity in the quality of difference which each offered the other. In her letters Mansfield presents Woolf as embodying the confidence and stability of the imperial centre; concurrently, in Woolf’s letters and diary entries, Mansfield is presented as a colonial ‘other’ who is at the same time attractive because of her deep familiarity. However, the colonial difference between Mansfield and Woolf did not only result in mutual attraction; it also led to Mansfield’s rejection of Woolf for her class and imperial prejudices, and to Woolf’s representation of Mansfield as a potentially ‘polluting, taboo, or inauspicious’ colonial liminar.

Mansfield’s letters reveal that part of her attraction to Woolf is her desire for the apparent stability and certainty of imperial culture. She wrote to Woolf in 1917:

My God I love to think of you, Virginia, as my friend. Don’t cry me an ardent creature or say, with your head a little on one side, smiling as though you knew some enchanting secret: ‘Well, Katherine, we shall see’... But pray consider how rare it is to find some one with the same passion for writing that you have.

(O’Sullivan & Scott, vol 2, 332)

Mansfield is clearly delighted at finding in Woolf another person who is equally passionate about writing, with whom she can share her ideas and enthusiasm. Simultaneously, however, the image of Woolf that Mansfield presents is coloured by the curiosity and almost blind admiration of an apparently naïve ‘colonial’: indeed, that is how Mansfield has chosen to construct herself in this letter to Woolf, drawing on her experimentation with subjectivity and exploiting her position as a colonial liminar to appeal to Woolf’s sense of her own British cultural superiority. By describing Woolf with her head on one side and her knowing ‘some enchanting secret’, Mansfield represents her as a picture of certainty, comfort and self-satisfaction. As a Pacific woman in exile, who was searching for reconciliation of her national identity and also plagued by poverty and illness, Mansfield spent most of her life in search of these feelings. To Mansfield, they seemed to be embodied in Woolf, and this is clearly attractive to her. Perhaps Woolf’s ‘enchanting secret’ is her sense of self and place which does not require such reconciliation: knowledge which Woolf is unwilling or perhaps unable to share with Mansfield. Mansfield elaborated on this image of Woolf as the embodiment of security and ease in later letters, writing to her husband John Middleton Murry in 1919: ‘How I envy Virginia; no wonder she can write. There is always in her writing a calm freedom of expression as though she were at peace — her roof over her — her own possessions round her — and her man somewhere within call’ (O’Sullivan & Scott vol 3, 127–28); and to Woolf the same year: ‘A husband, a home, a great many books & a passion for writing — are very nice things to possess all at once — It is pleasant to think of you & Leonard together — I often do’ (O’Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 314).

While Mansfield wrote fondly and enthusiastically to Woolf herself, her comments about Woolf to others also reveal her adoption of the ‘colonial liminar’ persona in her relationship with Woolf in order to exploit Woolf’s sense of cultural superiority. Mansfield’s comments to Ottoline Morrell in 1917 suggest that she was curious about Woolf, particularly with respect to the fact that she had lived in her own country all her life, and also reveal a perception of weakness and perhaps disadvantage in Woolf which contradicts her depiction of Woolf as stable and confident:

I think that she is still VERY delicate — and I shouldn’t imagine she was ever well enough to leave her own home and surroundings ... I do like her tremendously — but I felt then for the first time the strange, trembling, glinting quality of her mind — and quite for the first time she seemed to me to be one of those Dostoevsky women whose ‘innocence’ has been hurt — Immediately I decided that I understood her completely. (O’Sullivan & Scott vol 1, 314).

The latter part of this quote — particularly Mansfield’s confidence in her judgment of Woolf — indicates that Mansfield did not feel herself to be at all disadvantaged compared to Woolf and other metropolitan artists and writers; on the contrary, Mansfield’s comments suggest that she believed that her more varied cultural

experiences actually gave her an advantage, and perhaps shifted the power relationship between them in a way which Woolf may not have recognised, and certainly would not have welcomed.

Clearly, Mansfield's attraction to Woolf was a mixture of admiration and curiosity about her difference from herself. Similarly, Woolf viewed Mansfield as a curious novelty, particularly in relation to her cultural difference, her liberty as a comparatively free agent, her dismissive attitude to restrictive social conventions and her thirst for life experience. Woolf, wrote to her sister Vanessa Bell in 1917: 'I had an odd talk with K. Mansfield last night. She seems to have gone every sort of hog since she was 17, which is interesting; I also think she has a much better idea of writing than most. She's an odd character' (Nicholson vol 2, 159). Woolf emphasised the mixture of affection and curiosity in the relationship when she wrote in her journal in 1919: 'We have been intimate, intense perhaps rather than open; but to me at any rate our intercourse has been always interesting & mingled with quite enough of the agreeable personal element to make one fond — if that is the word — as well as curious' (Bell vol 1, 242). Woolf's curiosity about Mansfield appears to lie in the fact that she was very different from herself in her cultural background, her attitude to social convention and her varied life experience, yet at the same time took a remarkably similar approach to writing. Woolf's comments about Mansfield often combine elements of their difference and their similarity: for example, in her letter of 1921 quoted above, she writes 'though we're so different we have some of the same difficulties'. She also wrote in her diary in 1918: 'As usual, I find with Katherine what I don't find with the other clever women a sense of ease & interest which is, I suppose, due to her caring so genuinely if so differently from the way I care, about our precious art' (Bell vol 1, 258). Woolf's attraction to Mansfield — her curiosity about her — lies in her simultaneous similarity and difference from herself. However, Woolf presented Mansfield as different from herself not only in the context of her curiosity about their similarities, but also as a method of distancing her and positioning her as a colonial 'other'.

While the cultural difference between Mansfield and Woolf clearly influenced their attraction to each other, it also produced mutual dislike, repulsion and rejection. Although Mansfield yearned for Woolf's apparent centredness and security, and her accepted position among the London cultural elite, the exclusion she suffered for being a Pacific woman writer lead her to simultaneously reject the class and cultural power relations which Woolf's social and cultural position embodied. Despite Mansfield's attempts to use the 'colonial liminar' persona to disrupt the establishment, Woolf was part of that establishment which viewed her only as a colonial liminar and oppressed her accordingly. Mansfield's resentment of Woolf's privileged position among the metropolitan elite, and particularly her involvement with the Bloomsbury group, is revealed in her descriptions of Woolf as an intellectual snob in letters to Murry in the course of

reviewing Woolf's *Night and Day* in November 1919. She wrote to Murry 'I am reviewing Virginia to send tomorrow; its devilish hard. Talk about intellectual snobbery — her book reeks of it (but I cant say so) (O'Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 91); and later 'I feel I must stand up for my SEX. V.W. does it very well. Aint she a snob? But she does it very well in her intellectual snobbish way' (O'Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 118). Mansfield's correspondence with Murry over her review of *Night and Day* culminates in the following letter:

If you read that book you would realise how I feel ... its aristocratic (?) ignoring of all that is outside its own little circle & its wonder, surprise, incredulity that other people have heard of William Shakespeare.... Virginia's cry that she is the flower, the fair flower of the age — that Shakespeare & his peers died that she might be saved that she is the result of God knows how many hours in a library — is becoming a mania with her. Intellectual snobbery. (O'Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 122)

This letter begins as a professional critique of the novel but quickly changes to express Mansfield's personal offence at the treatment she receives from the intelligentsia and establishment, here embodied in Woolf. The language Mansfield uses to describe *Night and Day* suggests that she views both Woolf and the novel as embodying the attitudes of the London elite which she finds so offensive, particularly their assumption of cultural superiority and their self-satisfaction despite what she sees as their ignorance of different places and people.

Mansfield's rejection of Woolf as representative of the cultural and artistic elite, and the imperial prejudice which their attitudes reflected, was also the subject of her correspondence with Ottoline Morrell: 'Did you enjoy Virginia I wonder? She was coming to see me today, but I have not the puff or the brain.... He (Roger) thinks that Virginia is going to reap the world. That, I don't doubt, put on my impatience. After a very long time I nearly pinned on my chest, "I too, write a little"' (O'Sullivan & Scott vol 2, 333). Mansfield also suggests that she ultimately prefers the freedom afforded her as an 'unplaced colonial' to the social and artistic acceptance of her contemporaries, which was so important to Woolf:

I had also a most urgent letter from Virginia reminding me that Id sworn to go to Asheham tomorrow. My God, it is true ... all I want to do is to sit in a dark, warm, dusky room and write.... To Hell with the Blooms Berries. Dont you think one really must run away as soon as possible and as far as possible.

(O'Sullivan & Scott vol 1, 325)

As discussed earlier, Woolf found Mansfield's capacity for escape, her unconventional lifestyle and her varied cultural experience curious and attractive because with these differences she was in other respects so similar to herself. However, Woolf's respectability and orthodox values lead her to repel Mansfield for these same qualities. Just as Mansfield both admired and rejected Woolf's position in the imperial centre, Woolf was both attracted to and repelled by her perception of Mansfield as a colonial liminar. Woolf revealed her imperial and class prejudice towards Mansfield in a diary entry in 1917:

We could both wish that ones first impression of K.M. was not that she stinks like a — well civet cat that had taken to street walking. In truth, I'm a little shocked by her commonness at first sight; lines so hard & cheap. However, when this diminishes, she is so intelligent & inscrutable that she repays friendship.... A munition worker called Leslie Moor came to fetch her — another of these females on the border land of propriety, & naturally inhabiting the underworld — rather vivacious, sallow skinned, without any attachment to one place rather than another. (Bell vol 1, 58)

Woolf's final words — 'without any attachment to one place rather than another' — demonstrate that imperial prejudice strongly influenced her view of Mansfield. Firstly, Woolf's opinion that Mansfield was unattached to place is mistaken and reveals a lack of understanding of colonial subjectivity: much of Mansfield's writing, particularly *Prelude* which Woolf was at that time publishing, draws on her New Zealand childhood to explore the nature of selfhood and national and gender identity. Secondly, Woolf's comment reveals the extent to which she relies on attachment to place as a means of understanding personal identity: the fact that she perceives Mansfield as unattached to place suggests that she is unable to understand her personality. While on the one hand Woolf found Mansfield's cultural difference and her rejection of social convention deeply attractive, here her description of Mansfield as a 'civet cat' with 'her commonness' and her 'lines so hard & cheap' reveals her simultaneous rejection of these qualities.

Woolf's concern with the link between place and identity is also reflected in her repeated use of the phrase 'the underworld' in relation to Mansfield and her acquaintances. By describing Mansfield as 'on the border land of propriety, & naturally inhabiting the underworld' Woolf detaches herself from Mansfield, who is in turn cast as 'other': in Woolf's view, if Mansfield does inhabit or belong to a place, it is not the same place as her. Woolf also frequently used the word 'inscrutable' to describe Mansfield, reflecting the European perception of empire as mysterious, dark and unknowable (Williams 22): 'The inscrutable woman remains inscrutable I'm glad to say; no apologies, or sense of apologies due.... Perhaps it is I who live in the suburbs & think it necessary to answer letters; that would be a proper retort to my jest of the underworld' (Bell vol 1, 257). Woolf's apparent need to attach individuals to place as a means of understanding them, and her inability to do this with respect to Mansfield, results in an attack which reflects imperial anxiety at the threat of the colonial 'other'.

The personal writings of Mansfield and Woolf therefore reveal that their relationship was characterised by simultaneous and mutual attraction and repulsion: Mansfield was attracted to Woolf's apparently comfortable position within British cultural life, yet at the same time she rejected the cultural power relations which placed her there; Woolf was attracted to the comparative freedom and variety of life experience which her New Zealand background had given Mansfield, but was at the same time repulsed by her as a result of what she perceived to be her imperial prejudices. In this way, the Mansfield/Woolf relationship can be interpreted as a microcosm of the broader relationship between

the imperial centre and the colonial periphery which was similarly characterised by mutual attraction and repulsion during the modernist period. Modernism involved an exchange between imperial centre and periphery as metropolitan and colonial artists looked to each other for solutions to their artistic and cultural problems. The ideas, images and artists of empire found a presence in metropolitan circles for the quality of difference which they offered the modernist artistic project: simultaneously, the ideas and artists of empire needed to be 'othered' to diffuse the threat which colonial liminars such as Mansfield posed to the established order. Writers such as Mansfield were treated by the metropolitan centre in much the same way as colonial culture — accepted for what could be useful, tolerated on European terms, and repelled and devalued by the high modernist elite: 'Where colonized and Creole artists were included in metropolitan culture, they were rarely accepted as full participants in that culture.... Colonial artists did not enjoy the same status as their British, French, or American counterparts' (Boehmer 139).

Considering the relationship in this way offers new insights into both writers and their work. Mansfield understood her disruptive power as a colonial liminar: her letters and journals are littered with passages that demonstrate her strong rejection of artistic imperial prejudice. Her success in disrupting the established social and artistic order is clear from the responses she elicited from Woolf and her other contemporaries. However, it is interesting to note that Mansfield does not find her metropolitan contemporaries as threatening as they seem to find her. Throughout *A Public of Two*, Angela Smith draws on Julia Kristeva's analysis of the foreigner in *Strangers to Ourselves* to analyse Mansfield and Woolf's mutually liminal positions. Kristeva writes that 'the foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting against our unconscious — that "improper" facet of our impossible "own and proper"' (Kristeva 191). While Kristeva uses the word 'foreigner' as a metaphor for difference of many kinds, within the Mansfield/Woolf relationship it operates in relation to their difference in terms of empire and its cultural and class implications. Smith writes that 'while both Woolf and Mansfield were literally foreign to each other, in terms of nationality and upbringing, they were also familiar; in recognizing the affinity between themselves they were also recognizing the foreigner within, and acknowledging a kind of doubling' (Smith 29). As discussed earlier, many of Woolf's statements acknowledge this familiarity; for example, 'once more as keenly as ever I feel a common certain understanding between us — a queer sense of being "like"' (Bell vol 2, 45). However, many of Woolf's other statements about Mansfield — particularly her description of her as a 'civet cat', her placing of her within an 'underworld', and her view of her as 'inscrutable' — indicate that Woolf did not welcome this recognition of familiarity with Mansfield. Her extreme responses to perceiving the familiar within Mansfield suggest that she is terrified by the underlying

similarity between herself and who she saw as a ‘polluting, taboo’ colonial liminar. Mansfield, however, is much more comfortable with seeing herself reflected in Woolf. Her experience of complex, multiple subjectivity, tied as it is to her understanding of self and place, means that she is much more open to perceiving Woolf as the foreigner and identifying her within her personality. Mansfield’s experience as a ‘colonial’ has given her multiple cultural and class experiences and her perception of both similarity and difference in Woolf is neutralised within her already complex conception of subjectivity and selfhood.

Mansfield’s success in her self-construction as a disruptive ‘colonial liminar’ is reflected in Woolf’s own comments on the relationship after Mansfield’s death:

if she’d lived, she’d have written on, & people would have seen that I was the more gifted — that wd. only have become more & more apparent. Indeed, so I suppose it would. I think of her in this way off & on — that strange ghost, with the eyes far apart, & the drawn mouth, dragging herself across the room ... K. and I had our relationship; & never again shall I have one like it. (Bell vol 3, 317)

Woolf was haunted by Mansfield, in the same way that the modernist project was haunted by its colonial past and present: her letters and diary entries after Mansfield’s death repeatedly imagine her as a ghost. Woolf’s words — ‘people would have seen that I was the more gifted — that wd. only have become more & more apparent. Indeed, so I suppose it would’ — indicate her need to reassure herself of her artistic superiority. This need indicates a disruption of the establishment: it reveals that her relationship with Mansfield has produced doubt, uncertainty and insecurity of the kind felt by metropolitan modernists as a result of ‘colonial’ presence. Through the relationship, Woolf has been forced to acknowledge the validity of colonial culture and art. This acknowledgment has, at least temporarily, destabilised her position at the imperial centre, and her faith in her own artistic and national heritage. Mansfield the ‘colonial liminar’ has succeeded in threatening and destabilising the established artistic and cultural order embodied in Woolf.

Woolf’s attitude to Mansfield, which parallels the broader imperial power relations during the modernist period, demonstrates the extent to which she was both a product and producer of modernist ideology. Her relationship with Mansfield, and the quality of difference attached to her as a ‘colonial’, was a necessary inspiration for Woolf in the development of her fiction. Woolf herself acknowledged the depth of her need for their relationship shortly after Mansfield’s death in 1923:

one feels — what? A shock of relief? — a rival the less? ... When I began to write, it seemed to me there was no point in writing. Katherine wont read it. Katherine’s my rival no longer. More generously I felt, But though I can do this better than she could, where is she, who could do what I can’t! ... Still there are things about writing I think of & want to tell Katherine.... And I was jealous of her writing — the only writing I have ever been jealous of ... I have the feeling that I shall think of her at intervals all through life. Probably we had something in common which I shall never find in anyone else. (Bell vol 3, 225–28)

Woolf's comments quoted earlier that 'people would have seen that I was the more gifted' did, of course, become a reality. Her writing, her involvement with the Bloomsbury Group, and her publishing, worked to position her at the centre of literary debate, and ultimately the modernist canon. Mansfield's position within modernist literary history is somewhat less secure. Critical reception of Mansfield's fiction, and its positioning within twentieth-century literary histories, has been adversely influenced by her relationship with Woolf. Clearly, Virginia Woolf was and remains a powerful influence in the modernist movement, the canon, and also its feminist revisions. Mansfield's perceived appendage to such a central figure has meant that both the relationship, and her work, have been considered in discussions of Woolf's writing, thus ensuring that Mansfield has not been completely excluded from critical attention. However, Mansfield is frequently side-lined to Woolf, and only rarely considered independently as a modernist.³ Furthermore, the perception that Mansfield is linked to Woolf, and has therefore already been critically evaluated, has resulted in her marginalisation within feminist and postcolonial revisions of the modernist literary canon.⁴

Several years after Mansfield's death, Woolf reviewed the relationship in a letter to her close friend, Vita Sackville-West:

We did not ever coalesce; but I was fascinated, and she respectful, only I thought her cheap, and she thought me priggish; and yet we were both compelled to meet simply in order to talk about writing ... she had a quality I adored, and needed; I think her sharpness and reality — her having knocked about with prostitutes and so on, whereas I had always been so respectable — was the thing I wanted then. (Spalding 127–28)

This quote clearly articulates the imperial intricacies of the Mansfield/Woolf relationship. Mansfield was attracted to what she perceived as Woolf's stable and certain position within British culture but was simultaneously repulsed by the hierarchies of class and culture which placed her there. Woolf was fascinated by Mansfield's difference from herself but at the same time her opinions of Mansfield were clearly influenced by her class and imperial prejudices. Viewing the Mansfield/Woolf relationship as symbolic of the broader tensions of empire during the modernist period allows us to consider Mansfield's disruptive power as a colonial liminar, and the uses to which she put this power in her relationship with her contemporaries and through her writing.

NOTES

¹ This letter is dated 13 February 1921, and was written to Mansfield while she was living in Menton. It is the latter of what are believed to be the only two surviving letters from Woolf to Mansfield. Mansfield does not comment on receiving Woolf's letter in either her correspondence or her journal, and Woolf's letter to Dorothy Brett following her death suggests that Mansfield did not reply. This letter has not yet been published in print, but a scanned version has been made available on the internet by Smith College Libraries at: <http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/rarebook/exhibitions/penandpress/case6c.htm>

- ² Angela Smith's *A Public of Two: Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* is the most extensive consideration of the relationship. Others include Ann McLaughlin, 'An Uneasy Sisterhood: Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield'; *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. Jane Marcus; Evelyn Haller, 'Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield: or, the Case of the Déclassé Wild Child'; Antony Alpers, 'Katherine and Virginia, 1917-1923'; and Andrew Bennett, 'Hating Katherine Mansfield'.
- ³ The only full-length study of Mansfield and modernism is Sydney Janet Kaplan *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*. Lee Garver 'The Political Katherine Mansfield' also notes a tendency to exclude Mansfield from considerations of modernism and to appendage her to Woolf, and seeks to explore Mansfield's political engagement with early modernism.
- ⁴ The link between Mansfield and Woolf has resulted in a general assumption that Mansfield has been adequately treated as a modernist and therefore does not need to be considered within revisions of the modernist canon. For example, the first lines of Gillian Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers *Writing for Their Lives* read 'Ask just about anyone interested in English literature, or women, or both, which women were writing in England just after the turn of the century and you're bound to hear 'Virginia Woolf'. You may sometimes hear added 'Oh, and there was Katherine Mansfield'" (Hanscombe and Smyers 1). Remarkably, this is the extent of Mansfield's consideration in a text which purports to discuss women writers who were expatriate, poor and bohemian. Other examples include Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism Volume 1*, in which Mansfield is discussed only in relation to Woolf, and Joseph M Flora, *The English Short Story*, provides only an unflattering comparison with Woolf. With regard to postcolonial revisions of the canon, Mansfield was totally excluded, for example, from Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram *Women's Writing in Exile*; and considerations of Mansfield within histories of New Zealand literature also seem to have trouble reconciling her colonial heritage with her modernism: Vincent O'Sullivan writes in *Finding the Pattern, Solving the Problem* that Mansfield 'starts as a colonial and concludes as a Modernist' as though the two are mutually exclusive. Mansfield's consideration within postcolonial revisions of the modernist canon has increased in recent years with Howard Booth and Nigel Rigby, *Modernism and Empire*; and Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, 'Fashioned Intimacies: Maoriland and Colonial Modernity'.

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