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Katherine Mansfield

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Katherine Mansfield:1888 - 1923

A Biography

Katherine Mansfield, nee Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, was born on 14th October, 1888 at 11 (now 25) Tinakori Road, Thorndon, Wellington. The house of her birth had newly been built for her parents, Annie and Harold Beauchamp. Harold Beauchamp was a clerk (later a partner) in the importing firm of Bannatyne and Co. Eventually he became chairman of the Bank of New Zealand and was knighted for his services to the business community.

Mansfield lived here with her parents, her three surviving sisters, Vera, Charlotte (Chaddie) and Jeanne, and her grandmother and her two teenage aunts until 1893, when the family left " ...that dark little cubby hole..." as she remembered her birthplace, to live in the country at Chesney Wold, in what is now the Wellington suburb of Karori. This is when her beloved only brother, Leslie, was born and where the happiest years of her childhood were spent. The move and subsequent events are described in the story *Prelude*. This new home and the local primary school are the settings for her most universally read story *The Doll's House*.

The family returned to town in 1898. They lived in a grander house at 75 Tinakori Road which was to become was the setting of the story *The Garden Party*. Mansfield attended Wellington Girls' College and then the recently opened Miss Swainson's private school in Fitzherbert Terrace. In 1903 the three oldest girls were taken to England where they attended Queen's College, London to finish their education.

Here Mansfield continued with her cello playing and, as at her Wellington schools, contributed to the literary life of the college. She decided on the professional name "Katherine Mansfield" and began *Juliet*, a novel that was never finished. During this time she made visits to Europe and met fellow pupil, the South African, Ida Baker, who was to become a life-long friend.

The three Beauchamp girls returned to Wellington in 1906, to an even larger home, at 75 Tinakori Road. The family now also owned a holiday cottage at Day's Bay where Katherine spent a good deal of her time writing and which was later to become part of the setting for the story, *At the Bay*.

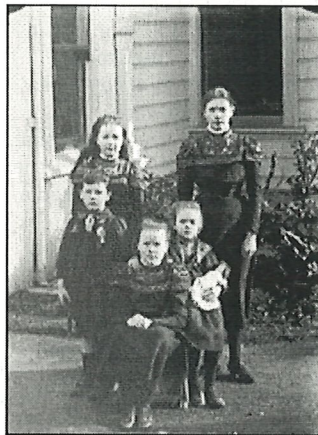
Mansfield found life in Wellington boring, complained that people in New Zealand "...do not know their alphabet" and expressed a wish to return to Europe to be a writer. After she had published some vignettes in the Melbourne magazine the *Native Companion*, her father assented. Before she left, however, she went on a camping trip to the Central North Island, an experience she was to draw on for her stories, *Millie* and *The Woman at the Store*.

Leaving New Zealand

With her father's financial support of one hundred pounds a year (increased several times over the years when she needed medical care), Mansfield returned to England. She was never to see the land of her birth again.

During her first year in London, she embarked on various relationships

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Katherine Mansfield as a girl, with her brother and sisters.

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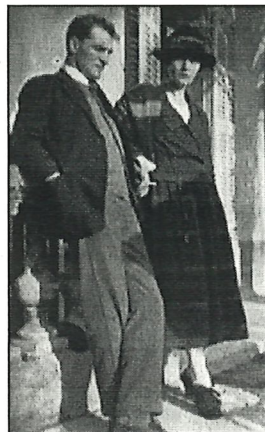
"I ought to make a good author. I certainly have the ambition and the ideas, but have I the power to carry it through. Yes" Notebook 1907

"...the longer I live, the more I return to New Zealand. A young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to remember it. But New Zealand is in my very bones."

and published very little - only one poem and one story. Pregnant to Garnet Trowell, the son of her childhood music teacher in New Zealand, she married George Bowden, a singing teacher considerably older than herself, whom she left almost immediately. Her mother responded to the news of this marriage by going to London and taking Mansfield for "treatment" to Bad Worishofen in Bavaria before returning to Wellington for the society wedding of her eldest daughter. Mansfield miscarried and was not to have any other children. This unhappy period of her life in Bad Worishofen produced the satirical, *In a German Pension*, stories that were published in the literary magazine, *New Age*, between 1910 and 1912. Despite the popularity of these stories, Mansfield expressed her dissatisfaction with them and refused to allow them to be republished.

Meeting John Middleton Murry

Having returned to London, Mansfield met John Middleton Murry, the Oxford scholar and editor of *Rhythm*, in 1911. They became lovers and were later to marry in 1918. Mansfield became a co-editor of *Rhythm*, later the short lived *Blue Review*, in which more of her works were published. She and Murry lived in various houses in England and briefly in Paris. The *Blue Review* folded; Murry was declared a bankrupt and they returned to London where Murry worked on the *New Statesman*.



Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry

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By the outbreak of the First World War, Murry and Mansfield had been estranged for a short time. Mansfield returned to France in 1915 to visit her friend, the journalist, Francis Carco, in the war zone. On her return to London she spent time with her brother, Leslie, who was in England to train as an officer. Their recollections of their Wellington childhood inspired some of her Wellington stories.

Tragically Leslie Beauchamp was killed in October, 1915. Grief at his death, her own ill health and the desire to write prompted a return to France. Mansfield eventually settled at the "Villa Pauline" at Bandol, where she began to write *The Aloe*. She and Murry returned to England to live next door to Frieda and DH Lawrence at Zennor in Cornwall in a short lived experiment in "the brotherhood of man". They moved from there to Mylor and continued to meet the Bloomsbury group at Garsington under the patronage of Lady Ottoline Morrell. It was here that Mansfield was introduced to artists and writers of the time such as Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw, the Huxleys and Dora Carrington. In 1916 Lytton Strachey arranged for her to meet Virginia Woolf who had *Prelude*, a reworking of *The Aloe*, published on the Woolfs' new Hoggarth Press in 1917.

Failing health forced Mansfield to Bandol again where she wrote *Je ne parle pas français*, and began *Bliss*. It was the publication of *Bliss and Other Stories* by Constable in 1920 that was to consolidate her reputation as a writer. In April 1918 Mansfield and Ida Baker returned to London. Mansfield married Murry in May and, after a brief time in Looe in Cornwall, they moved to their own house in Hampstead, London, referred to as "The Elephant". However, by October Mansfield had been diagnosed with tuberculosis, and advised to enter a sanatorium. She could no longer spend winters in London.

In 1919 Murry was appointed editor of *The Atheneum* and Mansfield began reviewing novels for it. However, by the autumn she was so ill that she decided to go to Ospedaletti in Italy. She was accompanied by Ida Baker and visited there by her father, recently widowed, who was accompanied by his cousin, Miss Connie Beauchamp. From there Mansfield moved to Menton and, after a brief stay in London, returned as Miss Beauchamp's tenant in the "The Villa Isola Bella". Here she wrote eight stories including *Miss Brill* and *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, the latter of which she pronounced to be "...the only story that satisfies me to any extent".

Having offended her father's cousin by not becoming a Roman Catholic, Mansfield and Ida Baker moved to Switzerland, first to Sierre and then to the "Chalet des Sapins" at Montana-sur-Sierre. Here in 1921 and 1922, Mansfield, nostalgically recollecting the country of her birth that

she had despised as a teenager, wrote some of her last and best loved stories: *At the Bay*, *The Garden Party* and *The Doll's House*. These stories vividly evoke the colonial Victorian world of her New Zealand childhood.

Mansfield left Montana for Paris in 1922, seeking, unsuccessfully, new treatment for her tuberculosis. In March she wrote to her father: " ...the longer I live, the more I return to New Zealand. A young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to remember it. But New Zealand is in my very bones".

Fontainebleau

During this time in Paris she wrote *The Fly* and her last story, *The Canary*. She then left for London where she heard about Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Avon near Fontainebleau which she entered on October 16, 1922, seeking both a physical cure and spiritual enlightenment that would aid her recovery.

While she found a certain peace there, and seemed happy when Murry visited her on 9th January, 1923, she died of a haemorrhage that evening and is buried at the nearby cemetery at Avon. The epitaph on her grave is one of her favourite quotations from Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part I* which she had chosen for the title page of *Bliss and Other Stories*: "...but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle danger, we pluck the flower, safety".

Mansfield's letters, journals, notebooks, dramatic sketches and some of her poems and short stories were published posthumously. These works have been received with acclaim equal to that bestowed on her earlier work. The short stories, now translated into many languages, continue to have universal appeal.

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