

K. M.

By
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CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB • 1955

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K. M.

ON THE outskirts of Fontainebleau, on a high hill overlooking the surrounding wooded countryside, stands an imposing mansion. In earlier and more auspicious days it had been, at one time, the country home of Mme de Maintenon and, at another, a Carmelite monastery.

In October, 1922, it was the domicile and headquarters of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff and the disciples of his occult doctrines. The establishment was known by this impressive and all-inclusive name: "The Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man." Founded in Moscow about ten years earlier, the Institute had, before finding its final resting place at Fontainebleau, had successive homes in Constantinople, Berlin, and Dresden. To it came exiles from reality, seekers of health for the body and the spirit, seekers of peace—Russians, Poles, Armenians, Englishmen, but never a Frenchman.

Steeped in oriental and Eastern mysticism, George Gurdjieff's ideas are not easily summarized or understood. But, briefly, this was the basic framework which made him a vogue during the twenties for many high-

brows in low spirits: Man has no soul at birth. An immortal soul must be acquired by man during his lifetime or, what is more likely, during a series of lifetimes evidenced by reincarnations. Such an immortal soul must be acquired if man is to regain his original organic harmony. Civilization has destroyed certain of his faculties which were designed to help him in this quest, but those faculties that remain are centered in three groups: the intellectual, the emotional, and the instinctive. Harmony of body and spirit results only when each of these groups balances the others. It is man's task so to balance them.

In this view even physical illness results from an over-development of one nature. Disease may be conquered if only these different natures are harmonized and balanced. The "cures" prescribed and practiced at the Institute accordingly took the form of doing things that one had never done before—to develop a part of one's nature that had been neglected and therefore had contributed to the inharmonious development of one's self, whether it be of the mind or of the body. Thus, in the interest of harmonious development, those seekers of health of body and of mind found themselves required to do such things as these: patting the head while rubbing the stomach; learning the Morse Code within a limited period of time; doing hard labor, such as chopping trees in the middle of the night; and taking part in group dancing and complicated dance exercises to the some five thousand tunes which Gurdjieff himself had composed.

On an October day in 1922, in one of the rooms of this place, halfway around the world from the town in New Zealand where she was born almost exactly thirty-four

years before, sat one who had come here somewhat fearfully but hoping to be cured of the malaise in her spirit and the burning pain in her lung. Her hair was bobbed, with straight bangs, and quite dark, which emphasized the extreme whiteness of her skin. Her eyes were dark, sharp, and intense—eyes which seemed to burn with a desire for limitless impressions and from which one never quite escaped and which one rarely forgot.

There is a knock on her door, and upon being admitted the visitor says graciously but directly, "My name is Olgivanna."

"And I am Katherine, please. That is all, just Katherine."

And then from the visitor the question, "What do you do in life?"

"I am a writer."

"Do you write dramas?"

"No."

The visitor persists: "Do you write tragedies, novels, or romances?"

"No," she replies with some embarrassment; "only short stories, just short stories . . . they are not much. I have not written yet what I would like to write. Some day I will; that is ahead of me."

But it was not ahead of her. She never wrote anything more. Her fame, as an artist, was to rest on what she had already written—"just short stories" she had called them. Less than three months after she spoke these words she was buried in the Protestant cemetery at Avon, Fontainebleau, in a grave which is now marked by a large slab of gray stone on which are cut Hotspur's lines from *King Henry IV*:

But I tell you my lord fool,
out of this nettle, danger, we
pluck this flower, safety.

and her name—"Katherine Mansfield."

Katherine Mansfield is the pen name of Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, who was born October 14, 1888, in Wellington, New Zealand.

Her grandfather, Arthur Beauchamp, was the youngest of five sons of John Beauchamp of Highgate and London, all of whom had emigrated to Australia in the 1850's. The grandfather first settled in Sydney and then for a number of years during the gold rush had prospected with little or no success in and about New South Wales. In fact, his third child, Harold, who was Katherine's father, was born on one of the many gold fields where Arthur futilely but happily sought riches.

In the 1860's the family settled in the first of their thirteen homes in New Zealand. There it was that Harold grew up, became interested in the importing business, and early demonstrated a business ability that had neither touched nor troubled his father or grandfather. While a clerk in one of the large importing houses, he married the sister of one of his fellow-clerks. Little is known of the antecedents of Annie Burnell Dyer, Katherine's mother, save that her family had come to New Zealand at about the same time as the Beauchamps.

Katherine's father was soon an important merchant and public figure in Wellington. It was said of him that he laughed often but never at himself. He had an appreciation of, and a deep affection for, the material things which he was able to buy in increasing amounts during

his lifetime. When he was knighted and became Sir Harold Beauchamp, he adopted a personal cable address for his letterhead. One of Katherine's biographers aptly remarked that it might well have come directly from the studbook. It was "Beausire."

The daughter, as she left childhood, did not think her father's thoughts. The years were to widen, not close, the separation between them.

Her mother, although of a very different temperament, was likewise in many ways a stranger to her children, as she was a stranger to New Zealand, in spite of the lifetime she spent there. She always referred to it as "out here," and England, where she had never lived, was "home." A mother by reluctance, she never learned to love what she had really never wanted. She was the Linda Burnell in "At the Bay," where the daughter, in one of her finest stories, poignantly described her as one who was "broken, made weak, her courage gone, through child-bearing. And what made it doubly hard to bear was, she did not even love her children. It was useless pretending. No, it was as though a cold breath had chilled her through and through on each of those awful journeys; she had no warmth left to give them."

And so the third daughter who was remembered by her teachers as a "surly sort of a girl" became "rebellious and lonely."

When she was fifteen, she and her two sisters were taken to London to attend Queen's College, which had been founded over a half-century before by Charles Kingsley as a bold experiment in higher education for women. Her first serious attempts at writing were made during her London schooling. She wrote several short

pieces for the college magazine, of which she later was editor. But, perhaps more important, she began at this time a practice that she was to follow most of her life—that of jotting into notebooks daily her thoughts and observations. Completely candid and, in many cases, intimate, they reveal a person of acute and accurate perception who tells what she thinks, feels, or sees in a minimum of bright, living words.

It was during these years at Queen's College that she met and began her constant and consuming lifetime friendship with the ever present "L. M." of the *Journal* and the *Letters*. "L. M." was Ida Constance Baker, who had been detailed to show the sisters about the college on arrival. A shy, sensitive person, somewhat ill adjusted, Ida soon found an anchor for her anxieties in this fellow-student from New Zealand to whom she clung devotedly for a lifetime.

The return to New Zealand at the end of her schooling was against Katherine's wishes. But return she did, for the dreams of eighteen were as yet no match for the driving common sense of the future chairman of the Bank of New Zealand.

Time, however, or perhaps Katherine's obstinacy and sheer disagreeableness, worsted the chairman. In July, 1908, she sailed for London with her father's agreement to give her an allowance of a hundred pounds a year but without his blessing.

She had begun the quest which was to end less than fifteen years later, before she had found what she thought she sought. Perhaps this was inevitable. One is reminded of some words that Horace wrote to a friend abroad: "They change their sky, not their soul, who run across

the sea. What you seek is here—is at Ulubrac—if an even soul does not fail you.”

The story of these fifteen years is not a pleasant one. It is essentially a story of personal frustration, of a consuming restlessness and a futile struggle against ill-health.

Eight months after reaching London, she suddenly married a singing teacher who was eleven years older than she. The marriage lasted one day. It had been preceded by a somewhat unconventional “engagement” which apparently could not survive marriage. This is the marriage about which little has been known until recently. A new biography discloses that this first husband, long unnamed, was one George Bowden. He has this to say of the marriage: “In an episode not without its dignity and good fellowship, I do not care to be thought the villain in the piece. . . . Our capital error was in carrying it to the illogical conclusion of marriage.”

Katherine may have felt she had sufficiently warned him of what might happen. She had early written him that they would meet at the “casual roadside campfire” rather than share the life of “the open road” together. Since Mr. Bowden appears to have been a rather literal person and since they had never been in the country together, he just did not understand what she was saying. Hence the denouement came, as he said quite frankly, as a “complete surprise, not to say, shock” to him. It was an impetuous step which she should never have taken and from which she at least retreated quickly.

The news of the marriage and the immediate separation brought Katherine’s mother to London for the next to the last meeting they were to have. The basic relationship, or lack of it, between the mother and daughter is

reflected in that meeting. Having traveled twelve thousand miles to see her daughter under such circumstances, her first comment was directed to the daughter's hat, which, she said, made her look like an old woman and which she promptly gave to the chambermaid at the hotel. She was not so successful, however, in disposing of the broken marriage. After two weeks the mother returned to New Zealand, and Katherine never returned to her husband.

During this time she had been writing short stories but had not been successful in getting them published. In 1910 she submitted a series of stories to the *New Age*, a weekly which had been started by the Fabian Society. The magazine was edited by A. R. Orage and numbered among its contributors Shaw, Chesterton, Wells, and Arnold Bennett. Orage was known as a helpful critic to young writers, and his magazine was the liveliest London weekly of its time. He welcomed promising new writers who would write for nothing provided only that the "ginger was hot in the mouth." The stories which Katherine submitted to the *New Age* and which Orage published with enthusiasm were a series of satirical sketches written by her in the Bavarian Alps following her separation from Bowden. They were subsequently collected and published as her first volume of stories under the title *In a German Pension*.

She received little or nothing from the stories published in *New Age* to supplement the annual hundred-pound allowance which her father punctually deposited to her credit in a London bank. He had reluctantly made a bargain, and he kept it, but always within the limits of his original undertaking. It was not until years later,

when the daughter's literary fame had added some respectability to the venture, that he increased the allowance—some fourteen shillings a week. The publishing house which brought out her first collection of stories went bankrupt, and the only royalty she ever received was a small advance of fifteen pounds.

She was not a frugal manager of even her limited means, and the number of her moves from place to place during these years was many—sometimes with Ida, sometimes without her, depending on their combined economic situation and the tenor of their companionship at the time.

It was during this period that she first met John Middleton Murry, a young Oxford undergraduate who was more interested in writing and writers than in finishing school. He had recently become co-editor of an illustrated quarterly of art and literature called *Rhythm*. Katherine had submitted a story to the new quarterly, and a meeting followed.

Murry was from quite a different background than Katherine. His family was poor. He was at Oxford on a scholarship. And yet they had much and found much in common. He too was voluntarily alienated from his family, being unwilling or unable easily to bridge the intellectual gulf that was increasingly separating them. He had ambition but no money and no home except one in which he felt stifled. Katherine had two pounds a week and a flat. They joined forces. He became her lodger at 69 Clovelly Mansions, and she became the co-editor of *Rhythm*.

This was in April, 1912. The next ten years were to be theirs. They were not married, however, until 1918,

when Bowden saw fit to dissolve formally a marriage which had actually ended when it began. These ten years began idyllically and ended, as did so much that Katherine touched, in indifference and disillusionment—years of seeking and never quite finding, of hoping but never quite achieving, years of happiness and whatever is its opposite. Yet with it all, or perhaps because of it, these were the years during which Katherine Mansfield wrote some of the finest short stories of our time.

These were also the years which saw the beginning, the blooming, and the dying of their friendship with that other famous couple in modern English literature—Frieda and D. H. Lawrence. It was, in fact, in the same April that Katherine had finally persuaded Murry to become her lodger that Frieda Lawrence, then the wife of an English professor, decided that Lawrence had been right in telling her, after a few meetings, that she was quite unaware of her husband—an unawareness which soon permitted her to leave him and her three children and to join Lawrence.

Lawrence met Katherine through a story which he had submitted to *Rhythm*. The couples met for the first time in June, 1913, when Lawrence and Frieda came to England. In *Not I, But the Wind*, Frieda wrote of their friendship with the Murrys: "I think theirs was the only spontaneous and jolly friendship we had." But it was not always to be so, at least as far as Katherine was concerned. She finally rebelled against Lawrence's dominance—a dominance which was responsible for six movings of the Mansfield-Murry ménage. Murry was a disciple of Lawrence, an abject admirer; Katherine was never a follower of the prophet and increasingly showed her irritation.

Lawrence, in turn, was annoyed at her independence of his thoughts and ideas. In a brutal letter, which she could never quite forgive, Lawrence had written her: "I loathe you. You revolt me, stewing in your consumption."

Although Lawrence was pre-eminently unfair in this angry and unjustified condemnation, it is clear that the burning in her lung dominated her personal life during its last seven years. From 1915 on she drove herself from place to place in England, France, and back to England, seeking different climates, different doctors, and different cures.

On many of her trips to the south of France, Murry accompanied her; on some she went alone, such as her tragic visit in early 1918 during the war. Murry and she had gone to Bandol in the south of France in 1915 shortly after her brother's death at the front. It was there at the Villa Pauline that she spent some of the happiest moments of her life and where she did some of her most creative writing. In later less creative years, she was constantly seeking to recapture what she called "my Pauline writing self." So it was that, when she again fell ill in late 1917, she adopted quickly the ill-advised suggestion that she return to Bandol. This time she went alone, but she went with a childlike confidence that she had only to return to the Villa Pauline to recover her health and mend her fading spirits. But it was the last year of the war, and traveling conditions were almost impossible. She arrived in Bandol much sicker than when she had left England and found the villa, of course, completely changed by the war. She wrote, but it was not her "Pauline writing self." She was writing, as she said in

her *Journal*, out of "an extremely deep sense of hopelessness, of everything doomed to disaster, almost wilfully, stupidly." She was finally able to return to England, but with her health permanently shattered. "There is no greater suffering," says Dante, "than the memory of a happy time in the midst of misery."

One of the few truly happy periods of her life had been her first visit to the Villa Pauline. Under extremely trying conditions she had sought to recapture that happiness and had failed. That she should have realized that she would fail did not make the resulting erosion of her spirit any less real. This was, in a true sense, the pattern of her life. Except for New Zealand, from which she fought to escape, she had no deep roots in her personal life and never acquired any. She is known to have had over twenty-one homes—perhaps addresses is better—in her first five years after reaching England. She and Murry made no less than twelve moves in their first two years together, at least half of which were to have been "permanent." While admittedly some were made because of financial pressure, many were made from sheer restlessness and aimless questing—from a London flat to a country cottage, because she could not work in the city—and then after a few months back to London—then from London to Paris, while she tried separating from Murry and living with Francis Carco, exchanging London's grayness for Paris' brightness, Murry's oppressive intellectuality for Carco's "warm, sensational life."

Murry describes the subtle change that preceded one of their moves—this from a lovely country cottage at Runc-ton: "A strange feeling of precariousness now began to invade us while we lived in that beautiful house, with

its sun-dappled rooms, its walled garden, and its medlar trees, as though it were a kind of stage scenery that might be removed in a twinkling of an eye."

Upon her return from Bandol in the spring of 1918—a journey on which Ida accompanied her, having gone to France to bring her home—Katherine and Murry were married. It was almost six years since Murry had moved into that second sitting-room at 69 Clovelly Mansions. On this occasion she did not dress in black, as she had for her first marriage, but it brought no inward joy. Shortly afterward she was writing to Murry: "Our marriage—you cannot imagine what that was to have meant to me. It's fantastic—I suppose. It was to have shone—apart from all else in my life. And it really was only part of the nightmare, after all."

It was in the summer of 1918, shortly after her marriage, that "Bliss," one of the best of her stories, was accepted for publication by the *English Review*. Although *Prelude*, the story she had written on her first visit to the Villa Pauline, had been earlier published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, it had had a very small sale and had been completely ignored by the critics. The appearance of "Bliss" in the *English Review* was, accordingly, her first effective introduction to a wider reading public.

However, she first gained recognition as a literary critic, not as a writer herself. It was only after a series of criticisms had appeared under the initials "K. M." in the *Athenaeum*, of which Murry had become editor in early 1919, that publishers began to seek a collection of her short stories. The *Athenaeum* was having a rebirth as a literary journal with a list of new contributors that included such names as George Santayana, T. S. Eliot,

Bertrand Russell, and Virginia Woolf. Murry's assistant was a young man by the name of Aldous Huxley.

Katherine's weekly reviews, subsequently collected and published in a volume called *Novels and Novelists*, attracted considerable attention for their brilliance and style. Although fair, she was not afraid to bite. In reviewing a novel by Jerome K. Jerome, she wrote:

"All Roads Lead to Calvary" is another novel. It is not more; it is one of that enormous pile of novels. . . . "Are they fresh? Yes, baked today, Madame." But they are just the same as those that were baked yesterday and the day before—and the day before that. So much flour, a sprinkle of currants, a smear of sugar on the top. Melancholy, melancholy thought of all those people steadily munching, asking for another, and carrying perhaps a third one home with them in case they should wake up in the night and feel—not hungry exactly, but "just a little empty."

She concluded her review of Jack London's *Martin Eden* with this: "A little Shakespeare makes one's nose too fine for such a rank smeller as Jack London."

In the fall of 1919 she left England again—this time for Italy—in a continuing search for a cure for her tuberculosis, which was approaching an advanced stage. Except for a few summer visits to England she remained abroad at various places in Italy, southern France, and Switzerland for the remaining years of her life.

Ida went with her to Italy and was with her almost continually while she was on the Continent. Murry joined her occasionally. These were years of considerable stress and strain in her personal life, marked by intervals of bitterness and overwhelming depression. And yet it was a period in which, as an artist, she reached her lit-

erary maturity—a time of creativity comparable to that earlier period at the Villa Pauline.

A collection of her stories was published by Constable in 1920 under the title *Bliss and Other Stories*. Except for the ill-fated volume published in 1911, *In a German Pension*, it was the first published collection of her work and contained the best that she had written up to that time. Although the volume received generally favorable reviews, it was apparent that the critics were somewhat at a loss to appraise or identify the rather singular quality of her writing. As one critic said:

Miss Mansfield's stories are like life reflected in a round mirror. Everything is exquisitely bright, exquisitely distinct and just a little queer,—excitingly queer; we can see round corners and into alcoves that are usually hidden from sight.

She was, however, her own severest critic. Writing to Murry, she said: "A great part of my Constable book is *trivial*. It's not good enough. You see it's too late to beat about the bush any longer. They are cutting down the cherry trees; the orchard is sold—that is really the atmosphere I want."

Some time after *Bliss* was published, she wrote a letter to Orage which she said had been on the tip of her pen for many months. "I want to tell you," she wrote, "how sensible I am of your wonderful unfailing kindness to me in the 'old days.' And to thank you for all you let me learn from you. I am still—more shame to me—very low down in the school."

In these last two years of her life she did her finest work—work which, after her death, was to place her among the great short-story writers of our time. "Miss

Brill," "The Young Girl," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "The Stranger," "At the Bay," and "The Garden Party"—all belong to these years, a time of alternating hope and despair, of peace and turmoil, of a sense of achievement and frustration.

She wrote in her *Journal*: "The only occasion when I ever felt at leisure was while I was writing *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*." And yet a few days after completing that story she was writing in that same *Journal*: "There is no limit to human suffering. When one thinks: 'Now I have touched the bottom of the sea—now I can go no deeper,' one goes deeper. And so it is forever. . . ."

At about this time Katherine was introduced for the first time to Gurdjieff's doctrines of psychic control over physical disabilities through a book sent her by Orage, who was one of the Russian's disciples in England. At the time she was being treated in Paris by a Russian doctor who was using a new method of treating advanced cases through X-rays directed at the spleen. Her hopes for recovery were cruelly heightened by the doctor's promise of a complete cure. When the treatment failed, she sought out Orage in England and joined the cult. Disagreeing completely about the merits of Gurdjieff's teachings, she and Murry separated. Of this period of separation he later wrote: "We sometimes spoke of the matter which most deeply concerned us, but now our love spoke across a vast." In early October, 1922, she and Ida left England for the last time. Orage met her in Paris and took her to Fontainebleau, where she was admitted to the Institute a few days after her thirty-fourth birthday.

Katherine Mansfield's achievement as an artist has to a

considerable degree been buried under her own legend. It has been easy to forget her artistry and to remember only her personal life. In a real sense, Murry has contributed to this result by publishing, apparently against her wishes, her letters, which disclose the most intimate details of her personal life.

He has defended his action on two fronts. First, he has stated that she cannot be understood or appreciated as an artist except against the background of her personal life and that therefore he was justified in revealing her most intimate thoughts. However, since he eliminated from the first edition of her *Letters* much of this material, one cannot help wondering whether its inclusion in the more recent collection may not have been equally influenced by the financial success of the first venture. As an editor and publisher for a lifetime, he could hardly be expected to be either unaware of, or immune from, such considerations.

Second, he has said that, since she herself destroyed her diaries covering one period of her life, he had "little doubt that what has survived is almost wholly that which, for some reason or other, she wished to survive." As executor of her will, he should have had some doubts. Her will, which she made in August, 1922, less than five months before her death, contained the following: "All manuscripts, notebooks papers letters I leave to John M. Murry likewise I should like him to publish as little as possible and tear up and burn as much as possible he will understand that I desire to leave as few traces of my camping ground as possible."

Whether rightfully or wrongfully published, her letters do present the whole person. In them she was completely candid and unrestrained, revealing her suffering,

her fears as well as her dreams. Many of them have much of the quality of her best stories. Perhaps on balance Murry was justified in publishing them against her wishes. One wishes that he might have been somewhat more candid, and there is always the regret that he gives the appearance of being much more diligent in identifying her with her legend than in revealing her true greatness—her artistry.

Chekhov is reported as once saying: "When one has written a story, I believe one ought to strike out both the beginning and the end. That is where we novelists are most inclined to lie."

Katherine Mansfield was one who heeded well that admonition. An admirer of Chekhov, her writing bears in this and in other respects unmistakable evidences of his influence. Many of her stories begin with what someone has described as "curtain-rise" sentences, where much has happened before the story begins. The conventional beginning has been eliminated. Thus one of her best stories begins abruptly: "And then, after six years, she saw him again." In these nine words the reader is told what has preceded the story. A relationship between a man and woman has been broken off. It had apparently been intimate and close, because "she" remembers the exact period of time that has elapsed. The opening sentence of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is quite similar: "The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives."

Likewise many of her stories stop so abruptly that one instinctively turns the page to find the end. And then one realizes that she has said what she meant to say, has created the mood she intended to create, and that anything

further would be quite unnecessary. In "Bliss," one of her most famous stories, Bertha Young, married and thirty, begins an afternoon of her life with an unusually warm sense of security. She has invited friends in for a dinner party. They arrive, and a pleasant evening is spent together. The story ends as the guests are leaving and at the point where Bertha, looking across the room at her husband bidding goodbye to one of the women guests, suddenly knows what she has never even suspected—that her husband has been unfaithful to her. The story ends with that discovery. She points no moral, she suggests no motives, and she makes no guesses as to the future. With rare sensitivity, she has been content to bare a moment of experience in the life of one person—a moment which is genuine, which is real, and which is filled with true emotion.

"Bliss" is one of the finest examples of a type of story at which she excelled—the presentation of the significant within a fragmentary happening. She was one who believed that it is not the dramatic or the sensational or the apparently important events that give life its significance and its deepest joys and griefs. Actually at such times little may be happening. All that may be revealed is a pattern, and, for her, truth was to be found not in the pattern but in what, to others, might appear to be merely a casual incident or the chill or warmth of a sudden mood. Hers was the insight which recognizes that anguish and grief can be bitter, even though not on a dramatic scale. Her genius as an artist was in her ability to make that clear to others. That is the power of such stories as "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" and "The Stranger," where nothing apparently happens to the

characters but where at the end of the story the reader nevertheless knows, as he knows his own name, what the essential quality of their lives is as well as their deepest fears and frustrations. She is, accordingly, not interested in events as events, nor does she tell a story by narrating a sequence of events. Her best stories are those which reveal a person or a group of persons reacting to a particular moment or to a particular situation.

Prelude, which she wrote in a wave of nostalgia for her childhood in New Zealand, is typical. It tells the story of those few days in the life of a New Zealand family—actually her own—when they moved from their old home in the city to a new one in the country. Except for this rather ordinary situation, there is no plot of any kind. And yet, through a rare choice of ordinary incidents quite common to such a situation, but here deftly described and carefully arranged, she has revealed the feelings of each member of the family and their interrelated feelings as they face the adjustment of a new home and a changed life. The result is a vivid, real picture of a quite ordinary family and of a quite ordinary place.

In "At the Bay" she describes one day in the life of this same family some years later. And, when the day ends, the story stops.

The simplicity of her stories is deceiving. While the finished product appears simple, it represented for her a painful process of selection, rejection, and condensation. She was a perfectionist and suffered the tortures of all such. One is reminded of Joseph Conrad, sitting looking at three sentences, crossed out, as his eight hours of work!

The succinctness of her style and the sparseness of her

words are reflected in the recent anthology of great modern short stories published in the "Modern Library" by Random House. Her story "Miss Brill" is one of the twelve stories in that volume. The other eleven stories, by Galsworthy, Maugham, Steinbeck, Conrad, and others, fill 464 of the 470 pages in the volume. "Miss Brill" occupies the remaining six pages. This is what she said about the writing of those six pages:

It's a queer thing how craft comes into writing. I mean down to details. For example in *Miss Brill*, I chose not only the length of every sentence, but even the sound of every sentence. I chose the rise and fall of every paragraph to fit her, and to fit her on that day at that very moment. After I had written it, I read it aloud—numbers of times just as one would play over a musical composition, trying to get it nearer and nearer to the expression of Miss Brill, until it fitted her.

Her only test was perfection. "When a story really comes off," she said, "there mustn't be one single word out of place or one word that could be taken out."

The diligence with which she worked throughout her life to develop and perfect her style began to escape her in the last year of her life as the burdens of her physical illness became heavier. She found it increasingly difficult to write under the same discipline that she had always set for herself. As a result, there are fifteen stories which she considered unfinished and which are so identified in the one-volume collection of her eighty-eight stories.

The difficulties under which she worked at the last also produced in her a quite unjustified loss of faith in her art as a whole. It seems quite clear from her letters during this period that she went to Fontainebleau not only for her health but also in the hope that she could recapture

or improve her craftsmanship under the routines there practiced.

Her view of the purpose of literature as a whole was as demanding as her concern for her technique. "The greatest literature of all," she wrote, "has not merely an aesthetic object . . . but in addition, a creative object; that of subjecting its readers to a real and at the same time illuminating experience. Major literature, in short, is an initiation into truth."

As she surveyed the literary scene of the early twenties, she was not entirely happy with what she saw or with the prospects. In one of her last talks with Orage he reports her saying: "Most writers are merely passive; in fact, they aim only at representing life, as they say, with the consequence that their readers for the most part become even more passive, even more spectatorial, and thus we have a world of Peeping Toms with fewer and fewer Lady Godivas to ride by."

With a person whose life was as dramatic, whose character was as complex, and whose literary achievements were as unique as Katharine Mansfield's, there is an excusable temptation to sum up, to explain, to characterize, to theorize, to catalogue—and perhaps even to moralize. But always there are the words of admonition that she understood—"strike out . . . the end. That is where we . . . are most inclined to lie."

"Do you write tragedies, novels, or romances?"

"No; only short stories, just short stories."

THIS PAPER WAS WRITTEN FOR THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB AND READ BEFORE THE CLUB ON MONDAY EVENING, THE TWENTY-FIRST OF MARCH, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE. THIS EDITION OF FOUR HUNDRED COPIES WAS PRINTED BY THE CLUB FOR ITS MEMBERS IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE.

[[PRINTED
IN U.S.A.]]