"The greatest of all garden parties:" the Great War, Memory and Cultural Myths in Katherine Mansfield's Critical Writing

Janka Kaščáková

Abstract
The attitude of modernists to myths, remembering and their understanding of the role of memory in art were by no means unequivocal. On the one hand, many central works of modernism engage in the critical rewriting of myths and this is also the time when an awareness of the existence of cultural myths in the broader sense emerged; on the other, however, the pursuit of newness, central for the modernist aesthetics, made the relationship to remembering problematic. Katherine Mansfield's critical works serve as a brilliant illustration of these tensions and among the most interesting are her reviews of the contemporary literature dealing with World War I and the cultural myths attached to it. Mansfield uncovers and analyses a whole range of approaches from the mythical presentation of war as "a cleansing fire" to the use of the fashionable topic of war trauma by authors who have not undergone the "change of heart" that Mansfield deemed necessary after the war experience. This paper discusses Katherine Mansfield's critique of post-war literature, identifying her understanding of memory and how it should be used by writers. Her views on how literature should deal with war and reflect post-war reality will be analyzed, as will be how Mansfield approaches common war myths in her critical works.

Keywords
Katherine Mansfield, *The Athenaeum*, World War I, The Great War, myth, memory

In her 1919 review of Romer Wilson's[1] *If All These Young Men*, Katherine Mansfield acknowledges the significance of themes related to World War I in post-war literary production: "[w]e suppose it will be long and long before the novelist, looking about him for a little wood wherewith to light his fire does not turn instinctively to that immense beach strewn with wreckage."[2] In her almost two-year role of reviewer for *The Athenaeum*, Mansfield frequently received novels and other works discussing the various aspects of the war experiences of her contemporaries.[3] The quotation implies that Mansfield views this tendency as natural, and, as the word "instinctive" suggests, also considers it an inevitable part of the recovery process. Reading her reviews, however, it is clear that often the ways the authors approach the topic are not always the ones she commends and appreciates.

From these reviews it soon becomes clear that the artists of the post-war period were engaged in solving two major questions – first, how to approach the topic of

1 Florence Roma Muir Wilson (1891-1921) was an English writer whose literary career was, like Mansfield's, cut short by tuberculosis. Wilson's works include novels, plays, fairy tales and short stories.

2 "A 'Real' Book and an Unreal One," *The Athenaeum,* 14 November 1919. Katherine Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* ed. John Middleton Murry (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1930), 108.

3 Mansfield contributed reviews to *The Athenaeum* from April 1919 till December 1920, when it became too tiring due to her illness. The job had been given to her by the then editor of *The Athenaeum*, her husband J.M. Murry. Mansfield scholars almost unanimously point out that she had not been given many major works to review, not even those she had openly requested. These reviews (together with little snippets in her letters and personal diaries) remain practically the only critical works she had ever written, and due to their shortness and nature do not offer extensive information on her critical opinions as one may encounter with most modernists like Virginia Woolf or T.S. Eliot.

World War I in their works, and the second, even more important, how post-war literature (whether concerning war or not) should reflect changes the war had brought. Although this topic is well-documented and often discussed in relation to many writers, the opinions of Katherine Mansfield and her approach to post-war literature have yet to be assessed in full. The aim of this paper is thus to analyse reviews of books dealing with World War I and to discuss Mansfield's attitude to war literature and her own vision of new post-war era literary tendencies.

The citation in the title of this paper comes from Mansfield's review of World War I veteran W.B. Maxwell's novel *A Man and his Lesson* in which in reaction to Maxwell's heroic rhetoric she refers to the war itself as "the greatest of all garden parties."[4] This sarcasm applies not only to Maxwell's representation of war but seems to aptly echo the ill-judged enthusiasm of the generation of young English men who rushed to war, indeed taking it for a kind of hunting or garden party. The emphasis on heroes – victorious or not – that was such a part of the classical education of middle- and upper-class boys did not prepare them for the mechanized killing fields in which they would often be robbed of their name, face and individuality, a fate which was the opposite of heroic.

Like virtually everyone else in Britain at that time, Mansfield too had been affected by the war; she had lost her only beloved brother Leslie in 1915 and mourned several friends that had been lost on the Continent. Moreover, Mansfield was one of the few English[5] women who had experienced the horrors of the Great War directly. During the conflict, she passed through France several times, crossed the French War zone on a famous trip to visit her lover Francis Carco[6] in 1915 (immortalized in her short story "An Indiscreet Journey"), saw the effects of gassing[7] as well as observed the gradual degradation of the places she had known.[8] Already very ill and on her way from the south of France, where she had spent the winter, she was caught in the bombing of Paris in March 1918.

For all these reasons, she might have been even more sensitive to the issues of war as they were depicted in the literature of her contemporaries. In her reviews of books with war themes, she is often ironical, even sarcastic. She uncovers the clichés of pre--war patriotic rhetoric as well as questions the literary techniques the authors employ in the context of the new post-war reality. Although Mansfield herself was a modernist who championed technical innovation, she does not entirely reject the pre-war realist tradition or rather, as will be shown later, she does not consider this the main source of problem. What she is against is emptiness and shallowness in all their representations – whether they are in traditional or modern guise.

One of the key tropes of post-war literature with respect to both content and form is undoubtedly the notion of "memory". Like many other modernists, Mansfield was preoccupied with the importance of memory and its role in the art of writing. The following review of Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel* not only discusses what Mansfield

4 "Dea Ex Machina," *The Athenaeum,* 26 September 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 84.

5 Here English refers to living in England during the war rather than nationality, Mansfield was, after all, a New Zealander.

6 French writer and literary critic Francis Carco (1886-1958) based a character in his 1917 novel *Les Innocents* on Mansfield, and after her death wrote for the French press several highly romanticized accounts of their relationship. See Gerri Kimber, *Katherine Mansfield: The View from France* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 198.

7 Vincent O'Sullivan, "Katherine Mansfield the New Zealand European," in *Katherine Mansfield – In from the Margin*, ed. Roger Robinson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 18.

8 Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds., *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 1: 1903-1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 150, 175.

sees as the work's weakest point, but also provides a concise definition of her understanding of memory:

> There is one who could not live in so tempestuous an environment as her mind – and he is Memory. She has no memory. It is true that Life is sometimes very swift and breathless, but not always. If we are truly alive there are large pauses in which we creep away into our caves of contemplation. And then, it is, in the silence, that Memory mounts his throne and judges all that is in our minds – appointing each his separate place, high or low, rejecting this, selecting that – putting this one to shine in the light and throwing that one into the darkness.
>
> We do not mean to say that those large, round biscuits might not be in the light, or the night in Spring be in the darkness. Only we feel that until these things are judged and given each its appointed place in the whole scheme, they have no meaning in the world of art.[9]

According to Mansfield, memory is in no way a mechanical recording machine of events, feelings and sensations – the more it records, the better it is – but it is a much more sophisticated, highly selective and evaluating device which attributes appropriate places to different memories, and later helps to reconstitute the past event anew, afresh. What is more, the memory of the artist should not be left alone to function unconsciously; the writer has to make deliberate selections and choices, and give the details their "appointed places" in the work of art. Hanson and Gurr call this a Paterian[10] "finer sort of memory" which can "best discover the ideal essence of experience, which is obscured in the confusion of immediate impressions and perceptions."[11] Mansfield knows and acknowledges the value of a detail, but it cannot appear in a story without a purpose – the duty of the artist is to carefully decide the things that will have to go, and those that can stay – but serving an intention, having a place in the story.

What is more, memory is not considered a secondary sensation. As for Proust, the recreated past experience can be fresher and more real than when lived through for the first time. Mansfield expressed this view through one of the characters in her short stories:

> The Past – what is the Past? I might say a star-shaped flake of soot on a leaf of a poor-looking plant, and the bird lying on the quilted lining of my cap, and my father's pestle and my mother's cushion, belong to it. But that is not to say they are any less mine than they were when I looked upon them with my very eyes, and touched them with these fingers. No, they are more, they are a living part of me. Who am I, in fact, as I sit here at this table, but my own past? If I deny that, I am nothing. And if I were to try and divide my life into childhood, youth, early manhood and so on, it would be a kind of affectation; I should know I was doing it just because of the pleasantly important sensation it gives one to rule lines, and to use green ink for childhood, red for the next stage, and purple for the period of adolescence. For, one thing I have learnt, one thing I do believe is, Nothing Happens Suddenly.[12]

9 Mansfield, "Three Women Novelists," in *Novels and Novelists*, 6.

10 The work of English literary and art critic Walter Pater (1839-1894) marks an important shift from Victorian "objectivity" to a more subtle subjective approach to criticism, and as such had profound impact on modernists.

11 Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, *Katherine Mansfield* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 16.

12 Katherine Mansfield, "A Married Man's Story," in *Selected Stories*, ed. Angela Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 332.

The events that we have experienced are not contained in separate boxes that we open whenever we feel like it, but otherwise do not affect us. Memories are woven into the fabric of our personality, and change us as well as our vision of the world. We do not remember everything, as, for example, Richardson's heroine seems to do. Yet the significant details of our past do have the power to help us recall the feelings and impressions of a long gone moment. An author's work then should be to present the reader with such exact details as to enable him or her to connect with the experience of the character without the necessity of extensive detailed descriptions, which can leave the reader cold and detached. Mansfield reviews seem to suggest that many war novels are inauthentic because they fail in this respect. Either their writers had no "writer's" memory or they did not let it affect their works, which remained just what they had been before the war.

This claim can be illustrated in its entirety in arguably the most important review Mansfield ever wrote. In her review of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*, Mansfield sums up all her objections to post-war literature and presents her belief that people – and especially artists – do not understand or remember enough of what the Great War meant to Europe and its civilization. It was a constant disappointment for her to see that many writers did not transmit the new reality in their works.

> To us who linger down at the harbour, as it were, watching the new ships being built, the old ones returning, and the many putting out to sea, comes the strange sight of Night and Day sailing into port serene and resolute on a deliberate wind. The strangeness lies in her aloofness, her air of quiet perfection, her lack of any sign that she has made a perilous voyage – the absence of any scars. There she lies among the strange shipping – a tribute to civilisation for our admiration and wonder.
>
> […] We had thought that this world was vanished for ever, that it was impossible to find on the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening. Yet, here is Night and Day fresh, new, and exquisite, a novel in the tradition of the English novel. In the midst of our admiration it makes us feel old and chill.[13]

Using the extended metaphor, so typical for her criticism, Mansfield names what she sees as the greatest imperfection of the work: the "absence of scars", "the air of quiet perfection", in fact the lack of memory. Woolf is writing as if there had been no war, as if the world was still the same as before it; her writing is traditional and that is why false. Mansfield's private judgment of this work in her letter to Murry is much less mild:

> I don't like it, Boge. My private opinion is that it is a lie in the soul. The war has never been: that is what the message is. I don't want (G. forbid) mobilization and the violation of Belgium, but the novel can't just leave the war out. There must have been a change of heart. It is really fearful to see the "settling down" of human beings. I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same – that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new moulds for our thoughts and feelings. Is it exaggeration? What has been stands, but Jane Austen could not write Northanger Abbey – or if she did, I'd have none of her.[14]

13 "A Ship Comes into the Harbour," *The Athenaeum*, 21 November 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 112-113.

14 Letter to J.M. Murry, 10 November 1919. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds., *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 3: 1919-1920* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

This letter brings us further explanations - in her understanding the memory of the war does not necessarily translate into an explicit depiction of war atrocities in literature; she simply believes that the complete obliteration of values, the annihilation of the individual in favour of impersonal mass killing, and the massive abuse of human knowledge for war purposes must be reflected in the new styles of writing, as older forms (e.g. Jane Austen) were no longer suitable for a world which has ceased to exist.

> I can't imagine how after the war these [writers] can pick up the old threads as though it had never been. Speaking to you I'd say we have died and live again. How can that be the same life? It doesn't mean that life is less precious or that 'the common things of light and day' are gone. They are not gone, they are intensified, they are illumined. Now we know ourselves for what we are. In a way it's a tragic knowledge: it's as though, even while we live again, we face death. But through life: that's the point. We see death in life as we see death in a flower that is fresh unfolded. Our hymn is to the flower's beauty: we would make that beauty immortal because we know. […] But of course, you don't imagine I mean by this knowledge let-us-eat-and-drinkism. No, I mean "deserts of vast eternity." But […] I couldn't tell anybody bang out about those deserts. They are my secret. I might write about a boy eating strawberries or a woman combing her hair on a windy morning, and that is the only way I can ever mention them. But they must be there. Nothing less will do.[15]

Using Andrew Marvell's image of "deserts of vast eternity" she comes very close to the notion of wasteland – she, herself, is not able to express the horrors openly, talk about them explicitly, but believes in the change of style, the "new moulds for our thoughts and feelings," which can still express the joy of life, but with an awareness that death is present in everything, that it makes life even more valuable. Her image of a boy eating strawberries is a very powerful one – what else can better express at the same time the freshness of youth, the joy of existence and the proximity of death and destruction than strawberries. Their season is so short that it is impossible to store them; they are very quickly subject to decay. Their colour is bright red, just like the blood of millions of young men spilled on the battlefields of Europe. And although they were as young and fresh as those strawberries, their bodies are rotting and dead and it is absolutely impossible to do anything about it.

However, even if a writer is not a symbolist and wishes to talk about war concretely, the imperative is that the writing must reflect the past somehow. As has been mentioned previously, the memory of something so powerful and disturbing should leave an imprint on the writer's mind and consequently affect the writing. With respect to the question of how strong and direct the experience was; it is interesting to note that of the great number of the novels with war themes that Mansfield was reviewing, many were written by women and in the majority of cases, these were women that did not directly experience the war in ways other than by losing a loved one. One would then expect the novels written by those who did experience war and those who did not to differ significantly, yet that is usually not the case, as can be seen in following reviews.

The first of the novels written by women is the 1919 review of Mrs. Victor Rickard's[16] *The House of Courage*, a part of the very first article Mansfield wrote for the *Athenaeum*. The saturation of the market with this kind of books is immediately made known, as Mansfield states that the theme of the novel "is not new; nor is there, in her treatment of it, a variation with which we have not become familiar during the past four

15 Letter to J.M. Murry, 16 November 1919. *Letters 3*, 97-98.

16 Jessie Louisa Rickard (1876-1963) was a prolific Irish novelist.

years."[17] The characters are "men, well bred, well dressed, and 'thorough sportsmen' – the women, equally well bred and dressed and the cheeriest of souls" in "an upper-middle class atmosphere".[18] Yet what obviously bothers Mansfield the most is that even if "'the sheer horror of it all' threatens to engulf them", they come out of the experience practically unchanged; the atmosphere is only "more sober",[19] as if the war was comparable with any other literary conflict serving to separate lovers only to bring them back together again.

According to Mansfield, *Desire and Delight* by F.E. Penny[20] contains similar flaws. In spite of its very misleading title, this book is in fact about a model woman, one who marries an officer and while waiting for him to return from the war works as a hospital nurse. When he does return, he is no longer happy and charming, but gloomy and sulking. "What can have happened to him? Could a year at Gallipoli spent among the dead and dying account for it?"[21] asks Mansfield sarcastically. The couple separate, yet after a period of time during which the husband is cured by "an open-air treatment in Scotland",[22] they finally get together again.

The heroine is sardonically characterized as "the best type of English womanhood."[23] As Mansfield has it "women like Rosemary, once they have secured their [husband], will send him off to the wars without a murmur, hear of his being wounded with a thrill of pride, and confide in their best friends 'even if Maurice died I suppose I should just have to carry on'."[24] And Mansfield enquires of her imaginary audience: "Why not? Surely love is stronger than war-shock? Surely, faced by a fine blooming young woman, a man should be able to forget everything else?"[25] As her queries indicate, she does not believe the situation of the novel can be resolved so simply.

Mansfield's comments on the previously mentioned Romer Wilson's *If All These Young Men* are interestingly juxtaposed with a rather unexpected apparition among World War I works – a fantasy novel, Stella Benson's[26] *Living Alone.* The title of Mansfield's article is "A 'Real' Book and an Unreal One", the inverted commas immediately indicating what Mansfield thought of Wilson's novel. Once again, the book is about "the effect the war has upon the minds and hearts of a number of highly modern young persons living in England during the terribly critical months of 1918."[27] This sentence is not from the novel - it is Mansfield's, skilfully ironizing and mimicking upper-middle class parlour talk. Yet unlike the previous novels, this one is not so conventional in its form, having no plot. Moreover, the main character, Josephine Miller "at a word from here, a wave from there, and a glance at the scenery, gathers the scattered emotions of the moment into her bosom and pours them forth in song."[28]

17 "Three Women Novelists," *The Athenaeum,* 4 April, 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 5.

18 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 5.

19 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 5.

20 Fanny Emily Farr Penny (1847-1939) was English novelist who usually set her works in exotic locales.

21 "Sensitiveness," *The Athenaeum,* 3 October 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 86.

22 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 87.

23 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 88.

24 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 88.

25 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 88.

26 Stella Benson (1892-1933) – English writer, traveller and feminist.

27 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 108.

28 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 108-9.

Interestingly, the discussion of this novel may recall Mansfield's own often plotless short stories, many of which featured a set of spoiled, upper-class young people enjoying fancy dinners and idle talk in spite of awful events happening in the outside world. The difference is that Mansfield's work is criticising this kind of lifestyle while Wilson's novel obviously accepts it unquestioningly. The formal innovations of Wilson's novel do not correspond with its pedestrian content, and the whole work seems to have been created with the literary marketplace in mind.

The contrast with Benson's work of fantasy enables Mansfield to emphasize how within the imaginary world of the novel Benson's heroine is more genuine and even her allusions to war more pertinent: "[t]he heroine of Miss Stella Benson's novel is as subject to flights as Josephine, but she has her justification. She is a witch."[29] She has a broomstick called Harold and the book features "a frightful encounter which Harold has with a German broomstick." Another character of the book is "Peony, a London girl who is drawing her weekly money as a soldier's wife – unmarried."[30] Mansfield's assessment of this novel is enthusiastic and her praise of the author rather unique: in her opinion "it is full of most exquisite feeling and tenderness,"[31] and although Benson sometimes, symbolically speaking, "picks the flowers which are at hand just because they are so easy to gather, but which are no flowers at all, and forgets to throw them away"[32] Mansfield nevertheless concludes that she is a born writer with rare qualities.

The last novel written by a woman writer is Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Cousin Philip.* Unsurprisingly, the plot is again an old one. "An ardent 'modern' aged nineteen" is placed under the guardianship of "a still youthful, courteous English gentleman",[33] a situation which she extremely resents and so chooses to rebel and be friends with a man involved in a divorce case. Yet, since this is a post-war novel, the unoriginal story about winning a husband is complicated by the main character's involvement in the war and her inappropriate behaviour.

> She is, we are given most clearly to understand, the kind of girl that the war has produced and – what is to be done with her, in fine, now that the canteens are closed and there are no more wounded soldiers to fetch from the railway stations? Here is this dazzling, imperious creature […]
>
> talking slang with the ardour of a small boy after his term at school, snubbing her elders, laying down the law, having as many 'boys' as she pleases, and demanding that she shall be told why a bad man is bad.[34]

In spite of everything, the novel does end with a marriage, a result which is offered as a traditional remedy even to "modern" world girls. As Mansfield understands the point of the novel: "[o]nce they find the right man to look after them and are kept busy and out of mischief furnishing the little nest, modern women will be as safe as their grandmothers once they find the right partners." Yet Mansfield cannot help suggesting that this kind of conclusion will not do anymore. "But suppose, we find ourselves asking as we lay the book aside, there should not be enough partners to go round? In the world

29 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 111.

30 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 111.

31 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 111.

32 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 112.

33 "A Post-War and a Victorian Novel," *The Athenaeum,* 19 December 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 131.

34 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 133.

of 'Cousin Phillip' such questions are not asked, much less answered."[35] Mansfield puts aside the question of formal innovation and points out the obvious discrepancies in Mrs. Ward's claims and conclusions. Even if the author choses to write a realist novel and recycles a conventional plot, Mansfield insists that the conclusions cannot be the same as before the war and that the war and its effects cannot just be disregarded in fiction when in reality such questions are urgent and acute.

The approach of male writers seems to be not very different from women. The first such novel is W.B. Maxwell's *A Man and his Lesson*, which shows that not only women were choosing well-trodden paths. The title character is a man who disgraces himself and his family by falling in love with a married woman and finds his only consolation is the war, which comes in handy for him at the right moment. "Hurrah for August 1914! He is saved. Off he goes to be honourably killed. Off he goes to the greatest of all garden parties – and this time there is no doubt of his enjoying himself."[36] Maxwell, a World War I veteran himself, does depict the atrocities of the war, yet his response is stereotypically British, male and patriotic. The dark side of the war is nothing compared to the lessons it teaches. "Where else shall a man learn the value of brotherly love, the wisdom and friendliness of the generals at the Base, the beauty of Mr. Lloyd George's phrase 'the War to end war,' the solid worth and charm of a London restaurant, a London club, a London theatre?"[37]

Mansfield indicates that Jerome Klapka Jerome's *All Roads Lead to Calvary is* equally superficial and unoriginal. She even compares the novel to freshly baked buns with no more than the usual ingredients that one carries home "in case [one] should wake up in the night and feel – not hungry, exactly – but 'just a little empty.'"[38] The main character is a female journalist who falls in love with a married man and leaves him to become a nurse in the war. In the course of her stay on the Continent she disguises herself as a man to see what trench life is like. Upon her return, she meets another lover and the book ends with a dialogue that Mansfield relates verbatim entirely without comment:

> "Perhaps you are right," she admitted. "Perhaps that is why He made us male and female: to teach us to love."
>
> A robin broke into a song of triumph. He had seen the sad-faced ghosts steal silently away.[39]

The last of all reviews concerning the war novels is that of Gilbert Frankau's *Peter Jackson*, a work which seems the peak of this insincerity and lack of depth, one which represents all of the old cultural myths and clichés of war and British upper-class manhood. Mansfield employs a whole range of words (apparently from the novel itself) to make the reader understand her point. The war is "the Great Hunting", London the "Heart of Empire" and the pre-war period is referred to as "the stale old days before 1914."[40] She also quotes Frankau's characterization of Germans as "Beasts in gray, murder, rape and

35 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 134.

36 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 84.

37 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 84.

38 "The Stale and the Fresh," *The Athenaeum,* 16 January 1920. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 148.

39 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 149.

40 "Orchestra and Solo," *The Athenaeum,* 20 February 1920. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 162.

plunder in their swinish eyes."[41] The upper-classes, according to Frankau, had the moral duty to go and defend the country "from which they draw their riches and their education" and whoever did not was "surely anathema marantha, the moral leper, the pariah among his kind…"[42]

Mansfield denounces the novel as "nothing but a roaring hymn in praise of killing, for killing is the Job of Jobs."[43] It does, she admits, show atrocities, the men dying in the thousands, going mad, being blown to bits, yet the message is that "they died a man's death"[44] and that Frankau expects everybody to be proud of them. The main hero survives the war shell-shocked and is diagnosed with neurasthenia, yet it takes him only a short while to recover and what is more, his marriage becomes even happier than it was before.

Looking at her positive reviews of books with war themes may show what irritated Mansfield so much about what she obviously thought were bad books. There are two examples of this kind and interestingly, neither of them is a novel. One is a collection of stories, the other a diary of a war nurse.

Reviewing *Old Junk*, Mansfield metaphorically characterized author and war correspondent H.M. Tomlinson as one of the "citizens of the sea,"[45] the kind of people "absorbed by the immediate life of the land, yet are they never other than foreigners; their glance, however keen and discerning, still is a wondering glance; and what they discover is not the familiarity of things, but their strangeness."[46] This makes him calm, discerning and detached – not from life, but from objects gazed upon. Mansfield seems to value these qualities very much, claiming that Tomlinson "is alive; real things stir him profoundly. He has no need to exaggerate or heighten his effects. One is content to believe that what he tells you happened to him and it was the important thing; it was the spiritual truth which was revealed."[47]

"Portrait of a Little Lady", the review of Scottish-born former suffragette Sara MacNaughtan's *My War Experiences in Two Continents*, is an extraordinary piece of work. Although this article precedes most of the abovementioned reviews, it foreshadows the major issues Mansfield elaborates on in later essays. Again we have a war nurse, yet she is not a glamorous young woman craving adventure or desiring to be important, but an elderly lady who has had a comfortable life and simply believes it is her duty to contribute to the war effort. And although MacNaughtan is old-fashioned, proud of being English and zealous to sacrifice herself for the suffering, the diarist is neither dismissed nor ridiculed. Mansfield sees MacNaughtan's account as honest and fastidious; it is "a revelation of her inner self which would perhaps never have been revealed in times less terrible and strange."[48]

MacNaughtan is courageous but not pompous or falsely patriotic, nor does she hide herself behind clichés. She openly acknowledges that the horror she sees is wrong and without justification and talks about soldiers as men "far too young" who too often

41 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 162.

42 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 163.

43 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 164.

44 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 164.

45 "A Citizen of the Sea," *The Athenaeum,* 18 April 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 11.

46 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 11.

47 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 12.

48 "Portrait of a Little Lady," *The Athenaeum,* 25 April 1919. Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 14.

"bite the mud in their frenzy of pain; and they call for their mothers and no one comes." And, as if answering the war propaganda, she says: "*This* is war."[49]

The ending of the diary, which again Mansfield quotes in full, might have been the inspiration for her later sarcastic reference to war as "the greatest of all garden parties."

> I should like to have left the party – quitted the feast of life – when all was gay and amusing. I should have been sorry to come away, but it would have been far better than being left till all the lights are out. I could have said truly to the Giver of the feast, 'Thanks for an excellent time.' But now so many of the guests have left, and the fires are going out, and I am tired.[50]

Mansfield objects to the centuries-old cultural myth propagated by Western literary traditions that heroes are born brave and without fear. But now in her opinion "our silver heroes and heroines glitter no longer. Gone is that shining band of knights and ladies." True heroes are not lead by a burning star if it is not "other than their own spirit, bright and solitary in the incomprehensible darkness of their being. For common men there is a star that beckons, these chosen ones live by a light, yet they are not led."[51]

Contrasting the reviews of these two works which Mansfield found remarkable with books she did not like reveal that the main objection she had against the latter may be expressed by one word – inauthenticity. In spite of the fact that the war was such a traumatic experience for all and many of the authors even experienced it personally, they did not attempt to convey their experience and make their work unique. Instead they chose to repeat the old safe patterns in the hope that they would work as they had in previous eras. They were acting as if the Great War was just another conflict, and that once it was over it simply had to be dealt with and processed as centuries-old literary traditions dictated.

Yet, according to Mansfield there is an equally negative alternative to traditional forms and patterns, an equally empty "modern"[52] approach that she deplores, not only in the war-related reviews. This approach includes authors who realized what the fashion of the time in the arts was and simply adopted techniques acclaimed by intellectuals. They did not write to convey some experience, rather to sell their novels and find their place on the literary market.

As for Mansfield, her preoccupation with war and its impact permeates her own artistic writing, even though in line with her beliefs expressed above (concerning her inability to talk about "the deserts" openly), very few short stories feature any references to it at all. This is also the case with "The Garden Party"[53], a story which does not directly refer to the war, yet, as Christine Darrohn has illustrated, is profoundly affected by:

> the conflicting demands of the postwar period: specifically, the painful task of mourning and recovery and the ways in which this task complicates the project of critiquing a society that is founded on the structures of exclusion, hierarchy, and dominance that foster wars.[54]

49 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 14 (emphasis added).

50 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 15.

51 Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists,* 16.

52 Mansfield uses the term "modern" almost exclusively in a negative way, indicating false or fake modernity – not a genuine attempt at innovation, rather the smart and calculating copying of those who invented something first. Thus the comment is not made about the canonical writers that are now referred to as Modernists but about those who imitated them to gain some social or intellectual advantage.

53 Christine Darrohn, "'Blown to Bits!' Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party' and the Great War," *Modern Fiction Studies* 44, no. 3 (fall 1998): 513-39.

54 Darrohn, "Blown to Bits!" 515.

While Darrohn does not acknowledge the similarity between the title and Mansfield's reference to war as "the greatest of all garden parties", Darrohn connects her reading of the story with the legacy of the war and the class system shake-up caused by the event. As she claims, the Great War fuelled both a "desire for and anxiety about a projected classless community."[55] Laura, the middle-class teenage heroine observes a dead lower-class man, a carter, but this is not a repulsive experience; surprisingly, she admires his peacefulness and beauty:

> There lay a young man, fast asleep – sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful.[56]

Darrohn believes that the figure of the dead man is "comforting […]. Here is not the violent, fragmenting damage one learns of in a telegram and then must imagine. There is a still moment of a sustained gaze in which the male corpse is viewed in its wholeness, peace, and beauty. Yet much more is invested in this figure that so clearly represents an attempt to revisit and revise the dead of the Great War."[57]

There is a similar dead man, this time openly connected to the Great War, in "The Fly", a story whose protagonist is a man who lost his son in the trenches and prefers to imagine him "lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever."[58] Yet surprisingly, the context of the story clearly suggests that, unlike in "The Garden Party" where Laura's aesthetic perception of the young dead man is "as it should be"[59], here it is not all right and that the boss is fooling himself by doing that. The explanation of this apparent paradox is also a comment on the fundamental differences between the war works Mansfield rejected as false and those she praised, and can be helpful in summing up and concluding this paper. Mansfield clearly saw the difference between revising, rewriting, giving face and dignity to those who lost it in the dehumanizing conditions of the trench war on the one hand, and pretending that the loss, the disintegration of both the body and mind never happened on the other. While the first attitude is an act of processing the facts and recovering from the trauma which makes one move on, the other is a mere illusion of a person, unable to face facts and preferring lies. As a consequence of this denial, he can never move on and recover; he remains locked in the circle and is prone to make the same mistakes again. Thus, Mansfield's macabre reference to the Great War as the "greatest of all garden parties" is not only a cruel irony on the pre-war enthusiasm of the young men eager to experience adventure and distinguish themselves, but it also refers to those who, even after both the enthusiasm and the young men died a cruel death, insisted on preserving their illusions and old ways in a futile attempt to restore something that was gone beyond recall.

55 Darrohn, "Blown to Bits!" 532.

56 Mansfield, "The Garden Party," in *Selected Stories,* 349.

57 Darrohn, "Blown to Bits!", 520.

58 Mansfield, "The Fly," in *Selected Stories,* 359.

59 Mansfield, *Selected Stories,* 349.

Bibliography

Darrohn, Christine, "'Blown to Bits!' Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party' and the Great War." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44, no. 3 (fall 1998): 513-39.
Hanson, Clare and Andrew Gurr. *Katherine Mansfield.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.
Kimber, Gerri. *Katherine Mansfield: The View from France.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.
Mansfield, Katherine. *Novels and Novelists.* Edited by John Middleton Murry. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1930.
Mansfield, Katherine. *Selected Stories*. Edited by Angela Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
O'Sullivan Vincent, and Margaret Scott, eds. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 1: 1903-1917*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
O'Sullivan Vincent, and Margaret Scott, eds. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield, Volume 3: 1919-1920.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
O'Sullivan, Vincent. "Katherine Mansfield the New Zealand European." In *Katherine Mansfield – In from the Margin*, edited by Roger Robinson, 9-24. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.

Janka Kaščáková is assistant professor at the Department of English language and literature at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovakia. She received her Ph.D. in English literature from Comenius University in Bratislava in 2007. Her research interests include 19th and 20th century English literature, especially the works of Katherine Mansfield and J.R.R. Tolkien.