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Book Review

Todd Martin (ed.) *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Katherine Mansfield*. 6 B & W illustrations. London, Bloomsbury Academic 2021. HB ISBN 9781350111448, PB ISBN 9781350229808, E-Book ISBN 9781350111462. Year of publication 2021. Pages 552.

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Within networks of British modernist writing, Katherine Mansfield appears to be located on the fringes of literary modernism. She is principally a short story writer whose work does not exhibit explicit modernist narrative strategies such as stream of consciousness or linguistic experimentation, her politics are elusive (she was sceptical of feminism), and her writings, mostly published in magazines and appreciated by a popular readership, do not present the difficulty/complexity usually associated with modernist works. As a New Zealander living and writing in England, Mansfield was seen as not belonging to the traditional Anglo-American understanding of modernism. For example, Michael Levenson does not mention her in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999). However, Mansfield was a member of modernist networks, especially female ones. She was an influential reviewer and despite stylistic differences regarded as a competitor and rival by figures such as Virginia Woolf.

The *Handbook to Katherine Mansfield* attempts to do two separate things. First, it addresses recent trends to reassess Mansfield's current critical position within modernist discourse alongside an evolving understanding of modernism as transnational rather than simply Anglo-American. Second, it attempts to point to new and emergent critical directions for Mansfield studies. It is edited by Todd Martin, the president of the Katherine Mansfield Society, who credits the society in his introduction; the volume can be understood as building on their scholarly work and its journal in establishing appropriate contexts for understanding the writer's importance within transnational modernism, as well as fields such as colonial/postcolonial studies. The Handbook therefore functions both as a taking stock of the relocation of Mansfield from the periphery to the modernist centre and an attempt to map out future studies. The handbook largely achieves the first aim, while other chapters show some useful work to accomplish the second.

The section on *Katherine Mansfield at Work* focuses on Mansfield's development as a modernist writer. Enda Duffy's 'Katherine Mansfield and Modernism' and Jenny McDonnell's 'Katherine Mansfield, the Magazine Writer' discuss her perceptively as an unusual but characteristic modernist writer working in Britain within modernist institutions

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whose work helped to popularise modernist tropes and experimentation. These chapters will prove very useful to readers of Mansfield looking for her relationship to modernism. However, to reflect Mansfield's new position in the modernist centre, the handbook would have benefitted from a longer, more coherent explanation as to what constitutes the modernist centre and its cognate themes and structures. Though I accept such an explanation is problematic nowadays, as many of the old assumptions about what defines modernism are in a flux of reassessment in a way that they weren't say thirty or forty years ago. Sean Latham and Gayle Rodgers in their recent and seminal historiography *Modernism: Evolution of An Idea* (Bloomsbury, 2015) conclude by the end of their lengthy enquiry into what constitutes modernism that any such neat definition is impossible. To some extent it is this same perpetual re-examination of what modernism is and which features and textual and narrative strategies it can/ should include that has arguably made it easier to include Mansfield within modernism in the first place. The definition of modernism has come to be expanded as it has struggled to be more inclusive in all kinds of ways. While contributors to the Handbook are often successful in demonstrating the range and depth of Mansfield's engagement with some of modernism's central ideas, not all the contributors address those specific qualities and characteristics which could make Mansfield a core modernist or, compare her with other female modernists, which suggests that Mansfield may still be an unusual type of modernist figure in some ways and perhaps may even gain something from such marginality.

The volume's second aim, to map out future directions for critical work, is achieved in some chapters more than in others. It is not necessarily the case, after all, that new directions in Mansfield criticism relate to modernism. For example, a useful chapter on Mansfield and ecocriticism by William Kupinse brings a fresh critical perspective on the author but he does not relate his argument to the significance of eco-criticism within modernism writ large (and after all, there is not any real reason he should).

The *Handbook* is divided into six sections and in some cases the approaches of essays are familiar to Mansfield scholars while in other cases they seem quite novel. In Part One, Gerri Kimber's '*Juliet and Maata*', Alex Moffett's "'The Aloe" to "Prelude"' and Jane Stafford's '*The New Zealand Stories*' explore the New Zealand dimension of her work and remind us it is important that we do not lose sight of Mansfield as a New Zealand writer, even as she becomes perceived as a more central modernist figure. Part Two is more biographical and explores Mansfield's significant relationship to some of her British modernist contemporaries. Many of these connections such as Garsington and Bloomsbury, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence have already been written about extensively and these chapters may appeal more to the student. In contrast, Isobel Maddison explores the

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

connection to Mansfield's cousin, the successful popular writer Elizabeth von Arnim, and successfully draws out Mansfield's relation to popular non-modernist writing using this example. This will be of value to those scholars interested in modernism's relation to middle-brow culture.

Part Three examines Mansfield's work in terms of form and genre. Ailsa Cox attempts to sum up her work as a short story writer and her innovations in that form, such as the emphasis on interiority. This chapter might have gained from further comparisons to other feminist modernist short story writers as this is the way Mansfield is often approached in the classroom. Chris Mourant discusses Mansfield as a modernist critic, Anna Jackson elucidates Mansfield as a letter and diary writer and Erika Baldt reconsiders Mansfield as a poet; all are interesting in their focus on neglected aspects of the author's work and which in turn are aspects shared with many of her modernist peers.

Part Four has some of the most innovative material in the volume, as it explores Mansfield's relationship to modernist musical and visual culture. Like other modernists Mansfield had an interdisciplinary interest in the arts and drew inspiration from both painting and music just as much as Virginia Woolf. Claire Davison considers 'Katherine Mansfield's Musical World', Angela Smith delves into her relationship with post-impressionism, while Faye Harland discusses Mansfield and cinema. These chapters would have gained from making more explicit connections and comparisons to Mansfield's modernist peers and their views; even so, such interdisciplinary interests do much to locate Mansfield's keen interest in and location within modernist culture.

The fifth part of the book is longer and maps out various themes and connections within Mansfield's work. Some chapters present a good view of the current state of scholarship on a topic, such as with Kathleen Jones on New Zealand, Janet M. Wilson on Empire and Christine Darrohn on World War One. Other chapters, including those by Tracy Miao on Mansfield and the East, Gerri Kimber on Mansfield and France, and Galya Diment on Mansfield and Russian Mystics, stand out as chronicling areas where Mansfield scholarship is still evolving. These insightful three chapters suggest there is still research to do and will be of particular benefit to post-graduate researchers looking to fresh approaches to Mansfield's work.

The sixth and final part focuses on critical approaches that push the current horizon of Mansfield studies forwards. Rather than covering subjects like social class, philosophy, or politics, there are innovative chapters from Rishona Zimring on 'Katherine Mansfield and

(Peer Reviewed and Refereed Journal)

Reading', Claire Drewery on 'Katherine Mansfield and Sexuality', and William Kupinse on 'Katherine Mansfield and Ecocriticism'. In this way, this section emphasises the newness of the critical approaches surveyed. Furthermore, Aimee Gasston provides a useful annotated bibliography of selective criticism about Mansfield that will be a boon to those approaching recent Mansfield scholarship and critical debates about her work for the first time.

All the chapters summarise recent research on Mansfield and successfully point the researcher in the right direction by providing useful further reading. A reader might yet have questions about overlooked topics. Why, for instance, is there nothing specifically on Mansfield and philosophy when critics feel Bergson had such a great impact on her (as well as other modernists)? What about Mansfield and social class or Mansfield's place in terms of feminist modernism such as that of her less well-known peers such as May Sinclair or Dorothy Richardson? Perhaps, such issues are inevitable and should not detract from the fact there is much of value here, but different essays will appeal to different kinds of readers. The handbook is erudite and comprehensive and in the main establishes Mansfield as a central figure within transnational modernism. Its two aims are not always complementary which is to be expected and some essays which successfully map new horizons in Mansfield research do not connect her with modernism and *vice versa*. In trying to address Mansfield specialists and students, as well as to convince modernist researchers that she belongs to modernism's core, it is certainly both an ambitious and pertinent guide to the current state of Mansfield studies.

**** **About Reviewer** Dr. Alan Ali Saeed is an Assistant Professor teaching modern English literature at Sulaimani University, Iraqi Kurdistan. He has a BA (Hons) from Sulaimani University (2004), an MA with merit (London University 2009), a PhD on Bergson and British modernist women's writing (Brunel University 2016), as well as a PGCHE (Falmouth 2021) in university pedagogy. He has published on Katherine Mansfield, British modernism, contemporary British fiction and on contemporary Anglophone fiction about Iraqi Kurdistan. See his publications here: <https://sites.google.com/a/univsul.edu.iq/alan-ali-saeed/publications> My email is: alan.asaeed@univsul.edu.iq