1. Entrevista a VINCENT O'SULLIVAN en el *Stout Research Centre*, Universidad de Victoria en Wellington, Nueva Zelanda, 4 julio 2002.

Vincent O' Sullivan es uno de los escritores de mayor prestigio en el panorama neocelandés actual, habiendo cultivado todos los géneros literarios (novela: Revenants *o* Believers to the Bright Coast*; colecciones de relato corto:* The Snow in Spain: Short Stories *o* Palms and Minarets*; colecciones de poemas:* Bearings *o* From the Indian Funeral*; y obras de teatro:* Jones and Jones *o* Billy*). Aparte de su reconocido prestigio como escritor, admitiendo incluso el influjo de Mansfield en su escritura, O'Sullivan se alza como uno de los grandes expertos en esta escritora. Su producción crítica y labor editorial sobre esta autora es interminable. Podemos destacar su labor editorial, junto a Margaret Scott, de las cartas de Mansfield (cuatro volúmenes publicados por Clarendon Press, Oxford, encontrándose a la espera de publicación la quinta y última entrega), así como de sus poemas (publicados por Oxford University Press en 1988). O'Sullivan destaca, igualmente, por haber producido una edición comparada del relato de Mansfield "Prelude" con su versión original,* The Aloe*, que la autora depuró posteriormente en su publicación del relato en The Hogarth Press (1917). Además, ha recopilado y editado numerosas antologías de literatura neocelandesa, así como selecciones de relatos de Mansfield.*

V: Vincent O'Sullivan
G: Gerardo Rodríguez Salas

G: As a New Zealander, how do you perceive Katherine Mansfield within the canon of New Zealand literature? So you consider her as a real icon or more as an outsider?

V: No, I would consider her as a New Zealand writer, but once I have said that, I often forget about the fact that she is a New Zealander really, because clearly most of her major stories are set in New Zealand. I would also say that the way she writes her stories, the motifs of them are partly determined by her experience as a woman in Europe, looking back on New Zealand. She wrote a review, for example, of a New Zealand novel, *Whole Story of a New Zealand River*, by Jane Mandell, and reviewed it for *The Athenaeum*. Although generally ignored, you get there what she regards as limitations that can be imposed on New Zealand writers. She says there that it is not by describing the geography or using Maori names for trees that you are going to suggest anything about New Zealand. It is by presenting the way people are and their lives. In other words, she is never interested in local colour for its own sake. She comes at the New Zealand stories, it seems to me, as a writer first and a New Zealander as ancillary to that. Primarily, unlike some New Zealand writers about her own time and later, she is not there in order to present a pictorial snap of New Zealand. She is far more interested in other aspects of story-telling.

G: What do you think it is her connection with the short story form? Do you think she chose this genre for a particular reason or simply because it suited her?

V: It just suited her as an extremely congenial form. In her letters at the end of 1921, when she is writing from Switzerland and has been reading Jane Austen, she talks about writing a novel, but she realises it is not her forte at all. She occasionally talked about wanting to write a novel, and she does in that period, but she did not really make much of it. She did not believe in herself in any sense as using a longer fictional form.

G: But would you say that was because she was not able to do it or because she just did not feel herself suited for that form?

V: I think the short story happened to be what she wanted to do, and what she did extremely well. She said that it is possible to say all you have to say in a short campus. So I do not think there was ever a choice in Mansfield between writing a novel or short stories. When she started writing *The Aloe*, for example, she wrote to Murry, "I have fallen into the arms of my first novel". But she quickly realised that it was not going to be long enough to go on as a novel, and cut it back, so that it became a short story, and not a novella.

G: In connection with that, what sort of writer do you think she would have become had she not died so young? Someone similar to Virginia Woolf or a more regional writer?

V: No, I do not think that she would have become more regional. Although it is very interesting that there is a letter she writes in 1922 to a young South African writer, who she had reviewed. This one was desperate to get to London, as Mansfield had done, and she writes this letter really warning her against that and not to be seduced by the "glitter" of the metropolis. Looking back, what happens, she says, is that you go to the centre of the world, as you think, and "rip the glittering top of the fields but there are not sheaves to bind". It is very sad and probably the strongest admission she has said to herself: perhaps it was not the best thing for her as a writer to go to England after all, since what interested her then was what happened in Tinakori Road, in Wellington during her childhood. But you can say that she was very ill when she wrote that statement, near the end of her life; she is depressed, thinking of New Zealand, and so you cannot give it too much weight, but it is interesting that at least there was this other possibility in her mind. So, if she had lived more, I am sure she would have come back for a trip, as she was thinking to do (her father was going to pay for her come-back). And if she had come back, I suppose, you can speculate, this would have stimulated her to do something different, but we just cannot say.

G: Do you think she would have written a novel?

V: I do not think there is any reason to think so. A couple of times after writing her last story, "The Canary" (in Paris in the middle of 1922), she mentions how dissatisfied she is with her own short stories, and she actually describes them once as little singing birds in cages, which is exactly the motif that she uses in "The Canary". So, I think she had gone as far as she could with the form as she was using it then, and yet because she was such a creative person, no doubt she would have gone on to some sort of other writing, but what? I do not know.

G: Would you qualify Katherine Mansfield's style as "delicate and feminine"?

V: It is delicate. I suppose we are all a bit cautious about using words like "feminine" or "masculine". You can talk about her style without having to use those words, because part of the whole image of this is artificially built up by Middleton Murry. According to him, she was a delicate burning flame, but in fact she was a very tough woman. There is a little sketch where she said that she had a very dirty tongue on her and she used to swear like a fish wife. And yet this is never the image you get of her through Murry. We tend to forget things like, for instance, the fact that she smoked marihuana (with Alistor Crowly) when she was a young woman and what a very sharp, sardonic, witty person she was in real life. If we keep these images in mind, the delicate flower image just will not stick. But you have to be careful you do not go the other extreme either. She was enormously sensitive in many ways, but to call that feminine is ludicrous, because you can think of all sorts of male writers who are enormously sensitive. So, I think it is a good idea to keep away from that word. But there is no doubt that, because of her real life experience as a solitary, sick, alone, and travelling woman in strange countries, there is naturally an emphasis on the experience of such women, because she knows that at first hand and can write about it with such perception. It is interesting that she is quite dismissive of feminine writers.

G: Yes, she was and she did not appreciate the women writers of her time. Not at all. I find quite interesting that the women in her writing are normally very traditional and conservative in very frustrated positions, whereas she was very rebellious: she came from New Zealand all the way alone, she had sexual intercourse outside of marriage, etc. She was very rebellious for her time. Why do you think there is this gap between her and her characters?

V: Well, I do not know if there is. You can take Mouse, for example, in "Je Ne Parle Pas Français", where she seems to be rather a retiring, delicate woman, obviously based on Mansfield herself. Mouse is a nickname that she used with Murry, but in that story she gives the temperament of adventure and immorality to the sexually ambiguous Raoul. So, I am not saying that she is writing a portrait of herself in Raoul, but she has a deep understanding. Murry, very astutely, compared that story to Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground". Then he wrote to her and said that was a sudden leap in her writing. This is not a portrait of Mansfield, but she understood what went on in a man like that, plus the fact that her sexual ambiguity made it even more possible for her to do that. Then we have "The Little Governess", where the girl is looking for adventure and runs into that nasty old man. But the situation itself transcends the innocence of the girl. In other words, Mansfield knew a lot about rather difficult, awkward, or aggressive sexual situations with men and, because the women are rather timid in some stories, the situation itself goes beyond the timidity and that is the mind of Mansfield, not just the female character's.

G: So, after all, there is not such a gap.

V: No, I do not think there is. Look at "A Married Man's Story". When she deals with really retiring, limited female sensibilities like "The Daughters of the Late Colonel", there is such a knowingness beyond them as well as a great sympathy.

G: Yes, and after all she was very rebellious at some points, but she was also very conservative later on: she married Murry and became more stereotypical.

V: However, Virginia Woolf and all the Bloomsbury people regarded her as a bit wild and an extremist, and, as Woolf says in her journal, "Mansfield has gone every sort of hogs since she was sixteen", and this is because Mansfield used to exaggerate stories when she told Woolf about her wild youth. She would make things up. D. H. Lawrence very astutely said about her that she expected the privileges of a banker's daughter (of the middle classes) and wanted to be a rebel at the same time. Also the fact that she went off to the Gurdjeff Institute struck her friends as mad: Murry did not like it, Ida Baker just simply did not understand it, and it was quite an extraordinary thing to decide when she was really dying, and then going off to this person was perceived by most as mad. That was a really strong and rebellious thing to do in view of the perceptions of the time.

I remember talking to her brother-in-law, Middleton Murry's younger brother Richard, and he said (a long time ago, in the 1980s), not long before he died, that he always thought of Mansfield when he saw the punk girls in the road, because she used to dress in a quite startling way. D.H. Lawrence takes this up in *Women in Love*. Mansfield virtually invented colour stockings and so she would dye her stockings orange or red and people would turn around looking at her in the street, because they had never seen anyone dressed like that, the same as people turn around and look at punk girls with the hair spiked up. In that sense, with all the delicacy created around her figure by Murry, we tend to forget that she was very tough-minded and that she was fairly tough in terms of experience as well.

G: Would you find a difference between her modernism and the canonical male modernism of, for example, James Joyce?

V: I suppose in the sense that she does tend to emphasise female characters. Apart from Raoul Duquette and one or two others, it is women characters who have either the most interesting or the most open and illuminating experiences. Think of the male figures in her stories: patriarchal figures like the father in the New Zealand stories are often quite weak characters. In the stories that are about relationships between men and women, the men are likely to be the weaker, although she has people like "The Little Governess", the frail flower sort of thing. In general, as soon as there is a relationship going on in a Mansfield story, it is the man who will be the weaker one, or tends to be.

Also, she was not very much interested in theorising anything, and in this sense very seldom you get something in Mansfield that will really tell you much about what she thought about the short story. Sometimes in her criticism, for example, she gives us a very clever description and it sounds like a description of her own stories: closely observed, detailed, the sense of glimpsing the shimmer and glitter of life. But, of course, this will not do; you need more than this in a story, and I am sure she was aware of that. She does not even say a theoretical statement like: "I think the short story should do this or that", but her reservations about other stories can give you some indications of what ideally she was after.

G: What about the role of autobiography in her fiction? Is there any intention in using autobiography or is just the material she could resort to?

V: Yes, she obviously drew on what she knew: the solidity of life in New Zealand (childhood) or the drifting difficulties of a simple woman in Europe, and then some of the stories about what it was like to be an ill or isolated woman in a place. She is clearly drawing on the world she knows. But that is not the same as saying the stories are autobiographical. Does she see herself as Kezia in the stories? I do not think it is meant to be a self-portrait. Often she is very ironical about aspects. When she speaks about sick women, for example, it can often be a sharp and almost cruel portrait of the way these women behave, or when a woman is on the point of deceiving a man. She is quite aware of the unattractiveness of certain female behaviour, and never tries to disguise that. But again, that is not autobiographical. She is just trying to create her thoroughly convincing, rounded characters. But she is certainly not saying, "yes, this is Mansfield's picture".

G: What about the role of the child in her fiction? Why do you think it is so predominant?

V: She had a very astute understanding of fiction. She is not the only great writer to show such tendency for children. Think of Faulkner, and even Patrick White was interested in Mansfield, I think, because of her children depictions. She is totally unsentimental about children. She does not condescend to them in any way in a story, and she observes the adult world very convincingly from the point of view of children [...].

G: But at the same time, by using this figure of the child quite often, sometimes she has been accused by critics of being immature and childish.

V: I do not feel that. If you are talking about "Prelude" or "At the Bay", you can say that the views of children and their representation are vivid, but to say that in any way they are child*ish* stories is too far-fetched. She can also use children in a much minor way that Henry James uses Maisy in *What Maisy Knew*: the innocence of children or their unknowingness or even their ignorance can become a very useful mirror for reflecting. It is not distorting adult behaviour, but it is a particular kind of adult distortion that adults themselves are not aware of. For example, there is the sexual relationship between Linda and Stanley in "Prelude" and Linda's rejection of the whole idea of sex and pregnancy in various ways. None of that is seen by the children or centred by the eyes of a child. That is just narrative that is going on entirely on the non-child level. So, if you think of "Prelude" or "At the Bay", you think these are stories about children, but there is a lot in those stories where the childish perspective or even the childish presence is quite absent. This is a part of the depth of the stories.

G: If you had to select one achievement of Mansfield, what would that be?

V: If I had to pick five stories, the first would be "The Wind Blows" (1915). It is the first time she actually writes with an utter originality, and that is something you cannot imagine coming from anywhere except Mansfield. Then, "An Indiscreet Journey", which is interesting that she did not publish in her lifetime, and it is a very sophisticated and clever story about the war. "Prelude" and "At the Bay", and "A Married Man's Story".

G: What would be the major quality of this author?

V: The originality in Mansfield is the perspective, the point of view she has which enables her to indulge that gift she had for catching things on the spur of the moment, those vivid glimpses, which are an impressionist or post-impressionist tool. You find that sense of fleetingness of things combined with a very steady gaze that goes beyond that which you get in the fullness of characters. We have the sense of a mind not ruminating on itself, but a mind being aware of depicting and being interested in this shimmer of the peacock's tail. But at the same time, because it is aware of that, it is a much broader sensibility that you are getting.

G: And if you had to choose a flaw in her writing?

V: At times, this is an aspect that Leonard Woolf did not like in her (but he did not like Murry and said he was responsible for the bad things in Mansfield's writing) is her sentimentality. I do not know, but it is unfair to blame Murry for that, because poor Murry is blamed for everything (risas). But sometimes there is a sentimentality there. Sometimes she would write stories to achieve a quick effect, as she did with some of her last stories for the magazine *The Sphere*, like "Mr. and Mrs. Dove" or "Six Pence", which are not very good stories. But she was writing against the clock. She knew they were not very good, but she was writing them to get the money to pay for the medical treatment in Paris, and so it is such a pity that her last stories are really her second-rate stories, but she was not writing that with the freedom she needed; she had an exact span she had to write to. She knew the sort of story that they would like and that she knew she could use tricks which are not tricks in her best stories but they are when she is almost writing a parody of herself, almost as if someone were trying to write a Mansfield story and they got all her tricks, and this is what it would look like. But they are not good stories, and they are clever, but you can *see* their cleverness, whereas in the great ones, like "At the Bay", of course they are clever, but that is the last word you would ever use about them. They are so much more than clever. It would be as pointless as to say about a good Picasso: "That is a clever painting". Of course it is clever. It is not worth saying it. So, those are the two things: when you feel that she is in second gear and, at times, her sentimentality, which is not really her nature at all.

Speaking about sentimentality, sometimes in her letters there is sentimentality, but then there are times when she is sick on the other side of Europe, there is a war going on between, and she is worried about her health. Anybody would be overemotional at times. But even there, it strikes me working on the letters that even in the most emotional letters (eg. during her time in Menton), there are still some intellectual corners where she is writing to manipulate Murry's responses and feelings, and always you feel that in that relationship she is the one who is deciding the terms. So, she would encourage him to be frank about going to a party and kissing a woman there, and in the minute he is frank, she then turns and accuses him of all sorts of things. The point is that she was simply emotionally much more adroit and much shrewder than he was. She can be cruel at times because, after all, the person who is writing to is going to live a lot longer and is healthy, while she is isolated and sick. That is another aspect of Mansfield that is very important: the effect of her health on her writing. (Busca un libro). She did draw a parallel between the war and her health, the same as many other

writers like Eliot did, seeing the war not just as that but as a disease of civilisation. Mansfield then metaphorically took the sense of disease of the war into herself, as we can infer from the way she would talk about her lungs as a battlefield. In that sense, when she went to Fontanebleau, she did not talk about curing her body or her consumption; it was as if it was a spiritual corruption that she had to deal with. In my article in the volume *In From the Margins*, edited by Roger Robinson, I talk about the effect of the war on her.

(Suena el viento. Risas)

V: It's just the wind. You are in Wellington. It is very appropriate to talk about Mansfield with the wind outside.

G: Yes, "The Wind Blows" (hago referencia a una historia de Mansfield con este título).

G: Finally, Frank O'Connor states that all her stories can be reduced to "Prelude" and "At the Bay". What do you think?

V: That is a brilliant essay of his. He really does not like her, and yet he cannot help admiring those two stories. But I can see how you could argue that. By choosing those two stories, yes, you could say that you can see the best of Mansfield there. But you would need to add one or two others, like "Je Ne Parle Pas Français" to show that her scope was wider than these two would suggest.

2. Entrevista a LYDIA WEVERS en el *Stout Research Centre*, Universidad de Victoria en Wellington, Nueva Zelanda, 3 julio 2002.

Lydia Wevers es otra reconocida crítica en el estudio de Katherine Mansfield. Su campo de investigación es el relato corto neocelandés, centrándose fundamentalmente en escritoras neocelandesas. El título de su tesis doctoral, leída en la Universidad de Wellington en 1990, es The History of the Short Story in New Zealand: a History of the Short Story in New Zealand Particularly Looking at Shifts in the Dominant Types of Short Fiction and Concentrating in the Short Story as a Location of Cultural Identity. *Ha contribuido en la edición de antologías de literatura neocelandesa, como* Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women *(Auckland: OUP, 1988),* Goodbye to Romance: Stories by Australian and New Zealand Women 1930s-1980s *(Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1989) o* New Zealand Short Stories *(Auckland: OUP, 1984). Entre su producción crítica sobre Mansfield, destacamos los artículos que incluimos en nuestro apartado bibliográfico.*

L: Lydia Wevers
G: Gerardo Rodríguez Salas

G: How do you perceive Katherine Mansfield within the literary canon of New Zealand? Do you think she is an icon here or would you consider her more European?

L: Well, that is always the question of Katherine Mansfield. She is certainly an icon in New Zealand, and there would not be a school-time child in New Zealand who has not read a Katherine Mansfield story at some time during the education. She is regarded as an important national figure in our history. But whether she is really a New Zealand writer is something that is worth being argued about. In one of my essays I argue that, although she is a seminal figure of European modernism and in all kinds of formal ways you have to locate her writing within a European set of conventions, some of the distinctive features of it seem to me to be what you would now call postcolonial, or at that time was colonial. Many of her stories are about people who are in a state of dislocation; they are travelling. Many of them are actually displayed on a journey, so they are in the war, in a hotel, in a boat, in a train, etc. and an awful lot of them are about individuals who are experiencing some shift on their lives. Now, this is the colonial condition.

Her New Zealand stories, which are generally regarded as the major works, “Prelude”, “At the Bay”, and so on, are also about the condition of being colonial. There is a lot of anxiety in the undercurrents of those stories about what is the individual’s position in the world, what is the role of this dislocation expressed between generations, etc. [...]. There is a general sense of open mobility of colonial lives, together with an expression of the ambitions that colonial settlers had, everything sifted through Katherine Mansfield’s writing position: from Europe she looks back and makes that a much more ambivalent set of ambitions than it might have been had not she gone. Thus, I think the answer to that question

has always to be a mixed one. She is certainly a national icon. Where exactly she stands in the canon of New Zealand literature is a more difficult and interesting question.

G: And, in your opinion, if you had to choose between considering her more modernist/ European or colonial…

L: I don't think that is a helpful choice. I would not even set the choice that way. I would always say that both those things are central to her art. The fact that she is a colonial *and* the fact that she is one of the first great modernists, those two aspects are so connected you cannot speak of one without the other.

G: [...] Would you trace any postmodernist values in Mansfield's writing or would you just consider her as a modernist?

L: I would consider her modernist. I don't think she is a postmodernist. I wouldn't say that there are some postcolonial elements in her writing. You cannot say that she is a postcolonial because she was writing in the heyday of colonialism. But modernism gave her a perspective on the colonial which we now recognise partly at a postcolonial perspective. I think she is classically modernist in the sense that in her stories the focus on subjectivity is the organising principle of meaning in the world, and the medium through which meaning is intimately achieved, even if it is gone again, is classically modernist and not postmodernist, where the kind of breakdown of meaning systems that is characteristic of postmodernist fiction seems to me to escape the epiphany that a modernist character has and which Katherine Mansfield covers in her writing. There also exists a difference between these two movements in that in modernism there is an assumption about the value of subjectivity; it is a valuable thing so intensely scrutinised that the process of being conscious on the world seems to be, to contain, to have a value inherent in it. If you take what I consider it is a classically postmodern novel, Richard Ford's *Independence Day*, that novel is also deeply about subjectivity, but you never get any sense that the subjectivity is able to process the world and to label it, even fleetingly brings comfort to the person whose subjectivity is questioned.

G: Do you think then that she achieves any sense of subjectivity in her work?

L: Yes, I do.

G: Because in my opinion very often in the existential moments what the characters realise is mainly that everything is artificial and constructed. And I think that one of the points of her fiction is just to prove this artificiality of subjectivity, the roles established by society. She never proves that there is a "real" subject. They try to search for some unity in the end beyond the chaos, and I consider that she did not achieve it; just the opposite, she was very ambivalent.

L: Well, what she demonstrates is what modernism does, which is that what is real is what passes through your consciousness. That is the only form of the real that anyone can have, and that is also why it is a disturbing fiction. That is the anxiety of modernism. There is no

outside order. But in her stories that consciousness is realised with such a lot of texture and power that infects you and does give you a perception of subjectivity as the medium through which reality is established. You can structure this concept of subjectivity as one of those words that the more you push it, the less that means. Everything is constructed, all language is constructed, all texts are constructed, but in her stories the level of attention paid to the way in which consciousness works and what that apprehends amounts to materialisation of subjectivity. It does not mean that the world is confirmed as being the thing that the subjectivity perceives, but the perception is what reality is.

G: And that opposed to a postmodernist approach?

L: In postmodernism there is an absence or erasure of the value that is given to subjectivity in modernism. In modernism subjectivity is a valuable thing, consciousness is a valuable thing, and this is not the case with postmodernism.

G: What about the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and the selection of the short story form? Is there any reason for that choice?

L: I have written about that in my thesis [...]. I think there is a reason for it, and again I would say that that reason is both colonial and modernist. The short story lends itself to the kind of exploration that modernism is engaged with, because it is possible to sustain a very intense representation of subjectivity in short fiction in a way that is much more difficult in the novel. Thus, the experimentation that modernism typically produces is quite well-served by the short fiction form and that suited Mansfield. Once you have a longer narrative, you inevitably imply something about social and world orders that you can leave out in short fiction. I think it is impossible to write a modernist novel and not bolster up the scenes of a world that exists outside somebody's subjectivity as, for example, it happens in *To the Lighthouse*. But in short fiction it is much easier to leave out that out of the frame.

What I say in the thesis is that the short story is the favourite form of earlier colonial literatures, especially favoured by literary nationalism. Almost all the literary colonial nationalisms began with short fiction, and that is an expression of not having a long narrative. If you look at Sargeson, Katherine Mansfield, there is an awful lot of names you can bring into the story, and you can see that they all chose short fiction because of the space of the colony, or the story of the colony in relation to the narrative of Europe.

G: Some critics consider that she lacked stamina, and that is why she could not write novels, because she tried several times but never managed to write a novel.

L: That is nonsense. The form suited her for a whole of reasons; it suited what she was trying to do. I do not like moral judgements being made about writers. She wrote what she wrote.

G: Would you qualify Katherine Mansfield's style as "delicate" and "feminine"?

L: *No* (tono sarcástico. Risas). I also dislike the impulse people feel with gender writers. She is quite a tough writer, in the sense that she would look at difficult subjects and not try to smooth them away. She is completely unsentimental. She is a little bit sentimental in her journal, but in her stories she is not sentimental at all. She does not go for emotion for the sake of it. She does not go for decoration or ornament. It is unhelpful to see certain forms of writing as being produced by gender, because it is always possible to find examples that counteract the discussion that you are trying to have. So I would resist describing anyone in that way. Her writing is very delicate, and that delicacy is full of nuances at times. It is a highly nuanced writing, and you have to be very alert as a reader to pick up all the nuances. That is why she is quite hard to write about.

G: Why is there such a big separation between the characters Mansfield writes about and herself? Most of the characters are normally frustrated women, women who are stuck in very traditional roles, whereas she was very revolutionary for her time, doing a lot of things women were not allowed to do at that moment. Why do you think there is such a big difference?

L: I do not think there is actually, because she was revolutionary but she suffered for it: her family rejected her, her mother cut her out of her world, she was in a very difficult marriage. Actually, she was very, very ambivalent about her role because the letters show that Middleton Murry resisted to go and live with her and have a traditional marriage; that is one of the things she thought she would have liked. So, she both wanted that and did not live it.

G: But that was mainly in the end, because at the first stage of her life she was more revolutionary. She had several affairs, she went away from home being a woman at that moment, etc.

L: She was extremely brave and courageous. One of the things I find amazing is that her parents actually let her go back to England when she was so young on her own. No-one has really explained what happened, why did they make that decision: they were very highly conservative people, and they let her do that. She writes about people caught in very difficult emotional situations. It is very clear that this is how she perceives herself, caught in these terrible swings that emotionally you see in the letters to Murry and to Ida/LM. Also, she was clearly bisexual, and expressed that. But that was not so unusual for the time. There were other examples of bisexual women in the 20s world. The kind of time that she was in London was a very liberal time socially, so she is not the only person who was like that.

I think there is a lot of emotional aridity around the women in her stories, who are caught in situations like that, finding it very difficult, frustrating or unsatisfying. That is clearly how she found her own life. She was terribly, terribly lonely, and it seems very clear that Middleton Murry (it is easy to condemn Middleton Murry, and who knows what really went on) did not offer her the kind of emotional support she needed. He kept on going back to London, leaving her dying in a cold pension in the south of France with spitting blood. Who does that? Thus, although she was revolutionary or liberated, I think she also would have liked, and there are a lot of places you can see evidence for this, to have led an easier life emotionally, and her characters show that kind of frustration.

G: Some critics think that she was complicit with patriarchy because the women she portrays are very traditional. What do you think?

L: I think that her stories are written from within patriarchy. If we go back to the New Zealand stories, although the father is seen as a slightly bumbling figure, rather comical, there is no sense that he is not necessary. He *is* necessary. In her journal, at a certain point of crisis, when she is feeling extremely alone and miserable and unhappy, she comforts herself by thinking about her father's office. All through her writing there is a longing for a rescuer, and I think that rescuer is a father figure to her. And although that figure may be an unsatisfactory figure or someone you cannot certainly admire, there is still that longing for that nurturing and protective relationship expressed all through her work. So, I would say yes, she writes from within the patriarchal.

G: Would you agree that she is in an in-between position? because on the one hand she writes from within patriarchy, but on the other she is quite critical, because she is all the time questioning gender roles. Of course, she cannot overcome that force, because she is inside that culture at the beginning of the twentieth century.

L: Yes, she is critical of it, and yes, she sees it as repressive, *but* it is always there, it is always there. So, she is critiquing it but she never gets rid of it. Can you get rid of it? That is perhaps the big, unresolved question of feminism. Is it possible to get rid of patriarchy? Quite probably not [...]. This is very much the case with Mansfield, that however much she criticises patriarchal models, her model for society and her location of subjectivity is inside a patriarchal structure.

G: What is the role of autobiography in her fiction? Do you think she had any intention in using autobiographical details or she just wrote about what she knew?

L: She needed to work through her autobiography. There are a lot of things in her family that she needed to come into terms with by writing, which is what people do: they process their life story and they write that into fiction. The role of autobiography in her work was intensely strong. It has also been hugely anthologised by the reading public; her return to being a major literary figure was partly promotion by Murry's publication of her letters and journal. What he capitalised was the suffering of the lonely but gifted artist: how frail this woman was, a strong spirit within a frail body. All that is the autobiography, which is a different thing from the way she used it, but which has become part of the way she has been mythologised. For her own work, she could not live in New Zealand because of the kind of society it was, but on the other hand she experienced great pain about being separated from it, and so the autobiographical in her fiction involves how she is working through that pain.

G: Do you think she was constructing herself in any particular way with those autobiographical elements?

L: Well, certainly her sisters have always said this. The family has always argued that the portrait of the mother, for example, is quite wrong. Everyone perceives the family differently, and her mother did cut her out of her world, and was clearly a beautiful and

powerfully attractive person who withheld and that seems clear from all kinds of stories about her. But the family is the family as she perceived it psychologically and emotionally, not as it was.

G: What is the role of the child in her fiction? Why do you think she resorts so often to this figure?

L: That is actually not uncommon in colonial writing either. The role of the child is quite common in New Zealand, the child's point of view, and it is common in Australia, in South Africa, etc. There is a quite strong history of the child point of view in fiction. Again, I would interpret this as a postcolonial motif (as a postcolonial critic and a colonial motif), as an expression of the position of the writer in relation to what is being observed. Positioning yourself as a child in the narrative is a quite powerful place to be because you can convey information that you the narrator do not understand because you are a child, and that appears to be more transparent and truthful. So, it is a way of critiquing something but not making it appear so, and I think that this is a deeply colonial energy [...].

G: What kind of writer do you think she would have turned into had she not died so young, someone close to Virginia Woolf or to New Zealand writers and thus more regional, by coming back to New Zealand.

L: *No!* I do not think she would have come back. I do not think she would have come back. I do not think she would have come back… If she had lived, she probably would have kept on trying to write a novel. It is really an impossible question to ask, because part of the quality of her work is that it is intensely short, an intense production. And part of that is a function of her tuberculosis, of the way this illness operates by intensifying feelings and sensations. In that sense, everything becomes more highly coloured, more intense and her writing shows this luminous quality, but you cannot keep that up for a long time. There is thus a question about whether it would have been produced at all without the tuberculosis to drive it. But also, if she recovered from this illness, she would not have been able to keep writing in that way, because it is such a short production span. No-one can live in that kind of intensity for very long.

G: But in that sense, if she had written a novel afterwards, she might have changed completely.

L: Yes, she might. Because her mood is very dependent on the genre she chose.

G: One critic, Frank O'Connor, says that all her stories can be reduced to "Prelude" and "At the Bay". What do you think? Do you think she is so limited?

L: No, I do not think so. Her great stories are "Prelude" and "At the Bay", but I love, for instance, *In a German Pension*, which is a wonderful social comedy, and one of the things is that you do not get so much of "At the Bay" and "Prelude" that is comic; there is a terrible eye [...]. As someone who has written a lot about Mansfield and who has spent a lot of time

reading her, I find quite striking that I do not get tired of her. I can re-read her and re-read her and always seems to come off the page into life, which is not true of every writer.

G: Probably it is also because of the subtlety with which she writes; every time you read her, you get something new because of the nuances, which are so prominent in her writing. If you had to choose her best achievement as a writer, what would that be?

L: Her greater achievement was that she stopped the short story having to be driven by plot, and I think that more than any other modernist writer, she did that. You did not have to have a plot; you suddenly dropped into the situation, which is all you need to have. I cannot think of any other writer who did that as well as she did. The plot-driven short story is a very longing convention. It does not really work well: it is too mechanical, too overburden, you always have to end with a punch, and she just completely got out of that model. I think that was her greatest achievement. She gave the reader a completely different way of writing fiction.

G: And her main flaw?

L: I do not like it when in her journal and letters she does her sort of baby talk to Murry. I hate that. She does not do it in her stories, interestingly, but in her private writings. But I do not like that sentimental, whimsical, miniaturised voice that she puts on. But what it probably shows is how very interested she was in her relationship. She had to miniaturise that and oversentimentalise to make it seem that it was sustaining. So, it is interesting that she wrote like that, but I do not like it.

G: Probably the fact that when she wrote her journal she did not really mean it for the public could be a clue to that kind of sentimental writing. One of the reasons is her handwriting, which is so difficult and which she could not probably herself understand at times. One thing is the fiction, which is what she wanted to give her public, and another the private production, which was meant for herself and Murry. So, that talk was more personal.

L: You see it a bit in the "Pearl Button" story. There is a hint of it sometimes, but mostly she manages to keep that out. Or "The Tiredness of Rosabel". It happens sometimes when she stops being so nuanced.

G: Do you find any influence of Mansfield on any contemporary New Zealand writer?

L: The person who reminds me most of her is Elizabeth Knox. I do not like the idea of influence, because I think it is too difficult to say, but if you speak of "who reminds me of Katherine Mansfield?", then I would consider a number of New Zealand writers and their attention to the scene. But the one who really reminds me is Elizabeth Knox and her novellas about her childhood, which are collected under the name of *The High Jump*, but they are set in a different suburb where she spent her childhood, moving around very often. There are intense examinations of the relations between children, and that is one of the aspects that Mansfield elaborated prominently; she showed something about the way children interact with each other and that kind of sexual politics. Elizabeth Knox has turned

that into the sexual politics of childhood, but Mansfield preceded her in that: the struggle for ascendancy in children, the way in which the sibling hierarchy is so unmovable, the older child is always the oldest child.

G: What about the relationship with her brother? After he died, she changed and idealised him.

L: I think that his arrival in England meant a lot to her, and that was hugely intensified by his death. Her mother came very briefly when she married and took her to Bavaria, spent a week with her, said goodbye, and then gone. But the brother comes to stay and they spend all night talking about New Zealand. The past came rushing in, so that when he died what she felt she had to do was to make that life of his more permanent; she had to bring that life back again because he was gone. All the emotion associated with the discovery of New Zealand at that time is because he brought her part of her family experience. It established the idea of where she came from and who she was that then became crucial to what she was trying to do. Probably, if he had not come and had not died at that time, New Zealand may not have become her subject until much later, because what she was writing was city fiction.

3. Entrevista a GILLIAN BODDY-GREER en el *Stout Research Centre*, Universidad de Victoria en Wellington, Nueva Zelanda, 11 julio 2002.

Gillian Boddy-Greer es otra destacada crítica en el estudio de Mansfield. Su tesis doctoral, leída en 1996, tiene como título The Annotated Notebooks of Katherine Mansfield, 1895-July 1908, with Commentary. *Entre su producción crítica, destaca su libro* Katherine Mansfield, the Woman and the Writer *(Ringwood: Penguin, 1988), su contribución como editora en el volumen de ensayos críticos sobre Mansfield,* The Fine Instrument *(Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), junto con Paulette Michel, Ian Godon y Michel Dupuis, y su edición e introducción a cuatro relatos de Mansfield ("A Birthday", "The Wind Blows", "Prelude" y "A Doll's House") en el libro* Katherine Mansfield: A "Do You Remember" Life: 4 Stories *(Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996).*

GI: Gillian Boddy-Greer
GE: Gerardo Rodríguez Salas

GE: How do you perceive Katherine Mansfield within the literary canon of New Zealand? Do you think she is a real icon or is there any suspicion about her figure because she spent most of her life in Europe?

GI: It is a controversial situation. People like Vincent (O'Sullivan) and I would place her as a European New Zealander. She could not have written as she did had she not lived in New Zealand for as long as she did; she could not have written as she did had she not left New Zealand and lived in Europe. You get a lot of cynical comments about the Mansfield industry. In my view, that is partly because a Mansfield myth developed, and people become fascinated by this rather tragic figure, dying a long way from home, rather than perhaps looking at the writing, at a brilliant sense of humour, at the extraordinary courage, at the at times quite cynical wit. And so people like my mother could not understand why I wanted to work on Mansfield. And Frank Sargeson is supposed to have said that there are only two tragedies in New Zealand literature: one of them, of course, was Mansfield, and the other was himself. There is a suggestion that New Zealand short story writing went into two different directions: one, the very laconic male narrator of Sargeson; the other, the plotless, impressionistic story of writers like Mansfield. So, the opinion is mixed, and in fact her significance has often been underrated in New Zealand as well as the extent to which her work was founded in New Zealand, how she uses New Zealand English as opposed to standard English, and how her experience informed her writing and her life. All of this has been underestimated. She spent half a life in New Zealand, and that is significant.

GE: And why did you say that your mother could not understand?

GI: She thought Mansfield was a terrible woman. There was a whole generation who looked at her as the black sheep of the family, who exposed them for autobiographical fiction, and felt that she had revealed far too much. My mother said to me, "write a book by all means",

but not on her. And there are some very critical reviews about Mansfield in the Turnbull Library in the 1930s (my mother was married in 1936) because her journal would have been published for the first time. We New Zealanders have been a very puritanical, conservative society. We are much more liberal now, but at that time people felt when her journal came out that it was far too personal.

GE: What do you think is the relationship between her and the short story genre? Do you think that she consciously chose it?

GI: Yes, absolutely. By the time she left New Zealand at nineteen, she knew the kind of short story she wanted to write. In my thesis there are some very interesting notes from de Maupassant, in which she uses the analogy of the body, the skeleton and the framework, and whether it is important to tell the external or the internal. Furthermore, she read *A Book of Tea* by a Japanese writer, which talks about the tea ceremony, but out of that she extracts the idea of the moment of impression, of symbolism, of the fleeting moment, and she read this as early as December 1906. Also the poetry of figures like Balzac or nineteenth-century decadents like Wilde or Pater. She talks even at nineteen about wanting to be a literary impressionist that I think is remarkable. So she was deliberately choosing the short story, although later she wanted to write a novel. Several times she tried to, and there was that argument about could she actually sustain something like that? Was the novella (12-section of “At the Bay” or “Prelude”) really her genre? Could she ever have written a novel? We will never know the answer. Of course, she could have, but whether it would have been as good as the short story, who knows? She was very clear, then, about the vignettes, about writers like Wilde and the other decadents, and it is remarkable how many notes still are in her notebooks from them. She uses the imagery of the river: how the ideas are like the water that tumbles along. She uses the image of golden lights from a square window and that is almost what she was trying to do with the short story: just to show the reader that impression as you walk past that kind of light, and then no more. And then in Paris by 1914 she looks at the Seine and says this is how I want my writing to be, full of light and shadow of voices. What she is not looking for is the continuity of plot [...].

GE: Do you think there is any connection between the use of the short story and the marginal aspects of her work?

GI: I guess the short story has never been considered, certainly not in New Zealand, and yet we produce an extraordinary number of short stories. It has never been considered to have quite the same status as the novel. I think Mansfield chose it because there was a connection between her own marginalisation within society and the marginalisation of the genre. She was drawn to it intuitively, from the time she was very young.

GE: Would you qualify her style as “delicate and feminine”?

GI: We have focused far too often on the so-called big New Zealand short stories, and we have not looked enough at, for example, her early *German Pension* stories, which are cynical, funny, and witty. The ending lines of “Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding”, for example, are incredibly powerful. We can see feminism; for her her writing was the way

to get those arguments across. And in those last lines, when "She lay down on the bed and put her arm across her face like a child who expected to be hurt as Herr Brechenmancher lurched in", that's the end of the story. If you look at "Six Years After", the whole issue of the woman's role in terms of economics of money; people like Ada Moss, who are excluded from society because they are not married or they do not have property in their own right. So, delicate? Yes, capable of being extraordinarily delicate. The detail of life, the touch of colour, the fineness of the brush strike, so to speak. Feminine? Yes, sometimes. Look at the interest in clothes. That is a direct result from living in Wellington and having the daily activities reported on in tremendous detail by the press. Think of "The Garden-Party" and the colour of the hat. It is the hat that changes Laura's mind, that makes her think that she would not stop fuzzing about the garden-party. So, we find all these details and feminine aspects, but there is much more besides.

GE: What is that? Her writing is very subtle…

GI: It *is* subtle. At times it is not so subtle. At times, she is capable of overwriting, lacking subtlety. Take a story like "Je Ne Parle Pas Français". I would not describe that as particularly delicate or feminine. "Man Without a Temperament", for example, is a good example of the other side of Mansfield that is often ignored. Sometimes her male narrators are extremely convincing…

GE: Do you think there is a big separation between Katherine Mansfield and her female characters? She was very revolutionary for her time, but very often in her stories we find frustrated women, women who are very conventional.

GI: According to theory, the author is dead, and the two should be seen separately. But she has showed time after time again that life and art are indivisible, particularly in her case. What she creates are composite characters. A character like Mrs. Stubbs, in "At the Bay", for example, has the name of the woman who lived down the road in Tinakori Road [...]. Beryl takes after Mansfield as an adolescent. So it is often hard to know where the fiction starts and the autobiography ends. But she had an extraordinary acute ear. Her dialogue is exceptional, and she was able to think herself into the mind and the speech patterns of men as well as women. She looked around her [...], at the women of her generation. Think of the letter she wrote to Middleton Murry in 1913, when she says, "how I hate this woman who washes the dishes and empties the tea leaves", but somebody has to do those things. She did rebel against her father's expectation of women, she rebelled against her mother's expectations, she can rebel in many ways against conventional expectations. But on the other hand, she knew that she had to conform to a certain extent, because, if not, she was not going to be accepted and probably not published. I have always loved the story of her being put off the bus for arguing about the suffragettes. She was very avant-garde, and she did break the rules. Even in my generation it is not easy to get a divorce and live on your own. And here she was living miles away from home doing that in England.

Yes, I think there is a real mix in her of autobiography and fiction, but in the end it is ultimately fiction, but often the texts parallel each other. If you read the notebooks, you can

see a personal experience, and then the draft of the story coming out of it, and the redraft and then the final story.

GE: And in that sense, speaking about autobiography, do you think there was any kind of intention in the use of autobiographical details or was it just the material she had to write about?

GI: It was the material she had. She talks about that vividly. For me, visiting for example Switzerland, where she wrote the great New Zealand stories, and standing on the chalet's veranda, looking across Mount Blanc and across the valley, was a real reminder to me of the way in which she peopled her internal landscape and you could not have got a sight that was more different than that compared with the landscape of Karori and little colonial New Zealand. But it was so vivid in her head and the memories were so real. Hers was an extraordinarily acute memory. At times, as she says, "my sciatica makes a note of it, so I remember putting it in a story one day". If you go through the notebooks carefully, and that is what I did, to compare various versions of stories with the ultimate one, you see the ideas evolved, you see the ideas being dropped out, and you see the autobiographical trigger, and how she builds her whole fiction around that. She was usually affected by what she read, as well. It could be something quite small that triggered a story...

GE: But do you think that by using autobiographical material she wanted to construct a personality of her own in front of her audience?

GI: She constructed many personalities, which is clearly observed in the many different names that she used to write under in her lifetime [...]. She did deliberately construct herself. Her first husband said that every time he met her was like meeting a new personality. And every friend who talks about her seems to describe a different person: Katerina, Kathleen, or Kezia, etc. Critics saying that her stories are full of gossiping school girls asking various questions about life, I think of Frank O'Connor, have not read carefully enough. They have not looked at characters like "The Man Without a Temperament", where the man is the centre of the story.

GE: Is there any feminism in Katherine Mansfield?

GI: I would certainly say there is. Ok, it is not radical feminism or theoretical feminism in the sense we have come to understand that. Her way to attack was through her writing. If you look at Ada Moss or Miss Brill, there is a very strong denunciation of a society that regards those older women as of absolutely no value. If you look at Beryl or Linda in "At the Bay" or "Prelude", here are women who are trapped by the role. Yes, her feminism is subtle; she does not come out to say to us "this is wrong", but it is very clear, and nonetheless effective. And she shows us, of course, that men are equally trapped by the roles that society demands. For example, Jonathan Trout in "Prelude" and "At the Bay". Or in the early German stories, you have the damsel, the woman on her own with predatory men approaching her, alone and vulnerable [...]. "Marriage á la Mode" is interesting because the sympathy is with the male character. You can also compare the draft "Late Spring" with the final version, "This Flower", where there is clearly a woman who has been diagnosed with

an unplanned pregnancy and is going to have an abortion. The two meanings of the story collude against the character, very different from the draft, and there is Mansfield's denunciation of the world in which women are victims, without power, something which she knew very well. I had never liked Mansfield. I could not stand her when I was a young married woman, and I picked up a passage, because I had to teach her, and then I realised that I felt very identified with her and that made me go on doing more work on her. You find very strong women characters in her stories, and some very tragic ones.

GE: Would you find any postmodernist values in her work?

GI: Oh, yes. I think so. The whole idea of impressions and glimpses, of open conclusions without resolution, and the attack on characters like Stanley Burnell, that is all part of a postmodernist approach and its fragmentation.

GE: For modernists the most important thing was to demonstrate that behind all chaos there is a unity of subjectivity. But Mansfield did not really prove that with her writing, just the opposite.

GI: For instance, at the end of "At the Bay", she firmly believed that you have to accept the paradoxes of life: the beautiful woman outside the path who has ugly teeth, the snail under the leaf, the spot on the child's lung. Those dichotomies have to be accepted and in the end it is that acceptance that is highly valuable. There is a postmodernist element there, but she struggled with that. "The Fly" has to be analysed as one of her last commentaries and there is no sense in the end of that that there is any kind of purpose, in spite of what she struggled to believe.

GE: So this sounds more postmodernist than modernist…

GI: I think she moves along the continuum, and not always chronologically, not always in relation to her life. Sometimes she would move right back again and then move forward.

GE: What about the figure of the child in her fiction? Why is it so predominant?

GI: Firstly, people talk about her writing stories about idyllic childhood. Now, my view is that they are not. They are stories about childhood lives that are criss-crossed by the shadows of an adult world that affects them hugely. Her childhood is not a time of innocence. It is much more writing about the loss of that innocence. When you live a long way from home, you inevitably look back and she looked back to her childhood. Also, since she could not have children, she confessed that she wrote about them to create them that way. She had always been attracted to stories about children. As a very young writer, she was obsessed with fairy tales. But again, we do not actually look at the full range of her writing. People tend to focus almost always on children, whereas in fact I still think some of her most powerful writings are about adults. And even in the stories where there *are* children, like the ones of the Burnell cycle, for me the interest, apart from Kezia and the sense of her trembling on the brink of adulthood, is in the adults: Stanley, Linda, the grandmother and Beryl [...].

GE: Sometimes this predominance of children in her fiction has made many think that she was immature and her writing was not valuable because it was infantile.

GI: That is annoying, because it is as if these stories about childhood do not count. Symmons wrote about the house where he grew up as a child (a very short kind of reminiscence), and it had a major impact on her. It was a subject that interested her, and not surprisingly because she was interested in psychological processes.

GE: I find that her children are not that infantile, just the opposite. They are confronted with adulthood and sometimes they look very mature. Look at Kezia, for example…

GI: As Dylan Thomas says, "after the first death there is no other". And you find that awareness of death in life that is there….

GE: Yes, from the very beginning, even in the early stories. Death was always present in children.

GI: Even in her own family, she would have confronted that early.

GE: What kind of writer do you think she would have become had not she died so young? Someone similar to Virginia Woolf or closer to New Zealanders by coming back to New Zealand and becoming more regionalist?

GI: She said about Virginia Woolf that they were after "the same thing", and obviously she did see extraordinary parallels in the endeavours to write plotless, impressionistic short stories. She would have clearly written a novel, had tried to write one. She was the harshest judge of her own writing. At some point, none of her stories satisfied her, the exception being "The Daughters of the Late Colonel". I think she would probably have gone on to try to write a novel. When you look at her last stories like "The Canary" or "The Fly", they are different: harsher and sadder, the same as "A Married Man's Story", which she also wrote near the end of her life and is much harsher and more sombre. And people have never placed this story as a New Zealand one. There are just a few references in it, so maybe the New Zealand landscape might have become less prominent in her subsequent production, but it would have always been there. The words would have always been different. She would have always used English differently. She viewed European society from the side of the other, and that otherness comes through. But she wrote to her father and said she would love to come back. Maybe she would have come back, who knows?

GE: Would she have become a regional writer?

GI: She was always attracted to people who like her came from the colonies, as Francis Carco, Beatrice Hastings, who were in a sense outsiders. I do not think she would have ever lost that. So, a regional writer in the sense that she was not entirely eurocentric, yes, but not to the extent of returning to New Zealand.

GE: What about the political or social aspects of her writing?

GI: Certainly there is social comment. Again, I come back to women and children and their economic vulnerability and place in society. People talk about class in relation to “The Garden-Party”, “A Doll’s House”, and some of the European stories. You can see the intellectual ladies of the Bloomsbury group in “Bliss” or the way in which paternalism has ruled the “Daughters of the Late Colonel” all their lives, so that they are unable as human beings to be independent. So, there is massive social comment. Some critics would say that the big issues are about war and that only these are literature, while writings about women in a drawing-room are not. I believe the person is political. You could not be a twenty-first century feminist without thinking that. And so that is the way in which she is political.

GE: But also, all those big issues are implied in the stories.

GI: Her feeling about the war, for example, was very clear. Not only had she lost a brother, but she lost a generation of men. She knew what it was to be poor and hungry, and when she writes about those, she writes from a place of knowledge.

GE: Frank O’Connor says that all her stories can be reduced to “Prelude” and “At the Bay”. What do you think?

GI: Nonsense! (risas). It is a very simplistic view. Ok, the volume of her work is not great if we put it alongside Dickens. What are we talking about, eighty-eight complete short stories or one hundred and twenty if you look at some of the drafts? No… Also, she was trying to do something different, to do better; she was never satisfied. Of course, any writer is going to have central themes. We do as people; we are driven by certain passions and beliefs and it is those that we keep coming back to that become our touchstone. They were for her. Think of “An Indiscrete Journey”; it is a brilliant story: different in its setting, in its theme, quite risky in terms of subject matter… No (risas).

GE: If you had to choose her best achievement as a writer, what would that be?

GI: For me, if I could choose only one short story to take with me to a desert island, I would choose “At the Bay”.

GE: But the main achievement in her writing?

GI: Her language. Think of the set of Hamlet that is made up of quotations. I would say the same about Mansfield. She chooses not only the length but the sound of every sentence. In my first book I relied on her for most of the texts, because she said it so well. What was my point in my trying to say it less well? So, the neatness and the exactness at times is extraordinary. It is the ability in the end to convey the flashes of the moment, the colour, the sound, the light, so that I can see in my mind what she is writing about. For me as a woman, it is about the secret life that is revealed, the secrets of human motivation, human behaviour, what it is that drives us to behave as we do in different ways. She was not afraid to look at areas that were quite controversial for a time, so that you get the issues about, for example, the collusion between women and at times the physical attraction between them, and men. She shows women and their relationships and closeness as almost a sense of collusion, of

you and me against the world, and men as less evolved, less articulate, less able to communicate. For me that reflected what I saw in life, and that was part of my attraction, that I could identify with it.

GE: Do you think that men are less articulate?

GI: Well, I think they are catching up (risas). Swiping generalisations all round, certainly growing up in New Zealand that was what I saw and understood. I love the humour as well, and that is too often underestimated; she was very witty, very funny, at times very nasty, as was Woolf.

GE: If you had to choose a flaw of her writing, what would that be?

GI: She was uneven. Clearly some stories do not work well, and as a young writer in her Oscar Wilde face, she is given to a horrendous purple prose. If you read "The Education of Audrey", which you have to remember that it is by a nineteen-year-old, when the heroine turns to the hero at the end in that terrible purple passage [...]. But she is still doing some useful things in that story, which is fascinating because it is the only one where New Zealand and Europe actually exist side by side within the short span of the story: the bohemian, romantic atmosphere of Europe against the wind-blown, wind-swept seascape of Wellington. So, it is a fascinating story but it is very badly written. She was her own harshest critic, so I do not need to say what her flaws were, she being so well aware of them.

Also clearly at times she wrote some stories too fast, because she was earning a living as a writer. Thus, the ambition that she was trying to choose the right word in the right order did not always happen. Some of her plays are also bad, and some of her poetry. I do not think she was a great poet, although there are a few lines of poetry that really work. She should have stayed away from poetry, but on the other hand that led her to write some of her very successful vignettes, which are really prose poems. She was very clever in exploring that genre.

I love her notebooks and her letters as much as I admire her writing. And I think there is writing in those that is equal to her fiction. In fact, if you say to me "find the best sentence", that is probably where I would look first.

GE: What about theatre? She was very attracted by that genre.

GI: And she could have done much more. A lot of her theatrical pieces are pretty inept, but with that wonderful ear for dialogue, if she had really sat down and tried to write a real play, she could have succeeded. And you can see that sometimes, when she just jots down dialogue. However, it was hard to write a play, especially in those days; she did not like plots, but a series of impressions, and in those days, if you wrote a play, you needed curtains between the scenes, but she did not want curtains between the acts or scenes. She would have struggled with the sustained drama.

GE: Do you find any contemporary New Zealand writer who reminds you of Katherine Mansfield?

GI: That question is hugely difficult; we are so prolific. A number of them do clearly acknowledge that they have been influenced by her. I would say, even if she denied it, that Janet Prane is much influenced by her. I think some of our poets are, and our short story writers. Mansfield herself was. She talks about literary influence, and how we are all influenced to a large extent. And the influence on New Zealand writers is probably more pervasive [...]. But we continue to be obsessed by childhood, distance, our sense of isolation and alienation, and a world view that is different. We continue to write short stories and we still wait for the great New Zealand novel, which most people would say has not yet been written. I am not so sure we need one. I think the great short story is fine.

4. Entrevista a MARGARET SCOTT en su residencia de "Diamond Harbour", Christchurch, Nueva Zelanda, 15 julio 2002.

La importancia de Margaret Scott en el campo de estudios sobre Mansfield es más por su labor como transcriptora de su material autobiográfico que por su contribución académica. La mayor parte del mérito de que, en la actualidad, tengamos acceso a las cartas y los cuadernos de Mansfield se lo debemos a ella. La escritura de esta autora era prácticamente ininteligible y, gracias a la labor conjunta de Scott y O'Sullivan, podemos leer este material. Así, junto a O'Sullivan, Scott coeditó los cuatro volúmenes de cartas mencionados anteriormente, y, en solitario, editó y publicó los cuadernos de Mansfield, Katherine Mansfield Notebooks *(Canterbury, Nueva Zelanda: Lincoln University Press, 1997), con numerosas historias y fragmentos hasta entonces desconocidos. Recibió el premio "The Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship", por el que se le otorgaba una beca para visitar la residencia de Mansfield durante la estancia de ésta en Menton, Francia, y ha publicado recientemente su libro* Recollecting Mansfield *(Auckland: Godwit, 2001), donde explica, de forma autobiográfica, su experiencia con la autora y sus conversaciones con Ida Baker. Se trata, por tanto, de una figura de vital importancia para aproximarse a Mansfield, puesto que, después de haber dedicado numerosos años a la transcripción de sus cartas y diario, la conoce sobradamente.*

M: Margaret Scott
G: Gerardo Rodríguez Salas

G: How do you perceive Katherine Mansfield within the literary canon of New Zealand? Do you consider she is a national icon here, or is she perceived more as an outsider?

M: She is perceived as a national icon. There is no doubt about that. She was the first New Zealand writer to make a name for herself outside the country, and that is very important to New Zealanders, because we tend to feel small and isolated, far away and unnoticed, and if one of us goes overseas and makes a splash, we are delighted. So, she has definitely become an icon.

G: What do you think is the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and the short story form? She tried to write a novel several times, but she never managed to complete it. Do you think there was a particular choice of that genre in this author?

M: Stories are what came naturally to her. As a school girl she wrote little vignettes and jottings and gradually developed the skill to write stories. She thought that the next step would be novels, and if she had lived long enough, she might have done that. But I think it is doubtful, because the little picture she paints in a story is what she was good at. She changed the whole world view of what a story is and how it could be written.

G: What kind of writer do you think she would have become had she lived longer? Someone close to Virginia Woolf or a more regional writer by coming back to New Zealand?

M: Well, of course it is impossible to know. I could imagine that, if she had not been ill, she would have come back to New Zealand herself, and that might have made her decide that she had finished with that material and did not want to use it any more, or it might have made her decide that this is the richest vein in her experience and should keep on using it. In her short life she developed so rapidly and changed so much in her work that I am sure she would have continued to do so but, in which direction?, I do not know.

G: In connection with the novel, you said that she would have probably ended up writing one.

M: No, I do not say probably. It seems unlikely to me that she would have. I think novels were not just her cup of tea.

G: Yes, but sometimes you can depict a small picture within the span of a novel. For instance, Virginia Woolf did it. So, probably she could have done that too.

M: Yes, maybe. And she did review so many novels that it is clear that she had done a great deal of thinking about what a good novel is. And so, I suppose she might have tried later.

G: Would you qualify Mansfield's style as "delicate and feminine"?

M: Yes, in some respects, and in others she was anything but. She was "delicate and feminine" and also partially masculine. Middleton Murry concentrated on the first part of the dichotomy, but Vincent O'Sullivan has written about how she was bold, hard, and resilient. And that is true, too. In other words, she was a very complex person. But although she had a masculine side, she was not sexually ambivalent. There is no proof of that. Wellington critics believe that she was bisexual.

G: What about her early affairs with women?

M: Well, everybody has those. I was mad on a girl at school. But I am not bisexual. One of the people she was very keen on when she was at school was E. K. Bendall. She was ten years older, and she was a person who expressed herself physically by embracing people, something which Mansfield was terribly deprived of from her own mother. It was a mother relationship that she was responding to in that case.

G: Do you think there is any separation between the female characters that she creates in her fiction and her own position as a woman?

M: It is pretty clear that when she creates them, she is inside them; she can see what they are feeling and seeing, which suggests that she has been there herself. However, at some point she made a decision to break away, and that is a time difference: once she was in that position that later she was not.

G: What do you think is the role of autobiography in her fiction? This is a key issue. Every time in Mansfield studies you find critics speaking about the autobiographical material in her fiction. Was it just that she was drawing on what she had experienced, or did she use it as a strategy to create an image of herself?

M: I think it was not that at the beginning, when she was young and wrote "Juliet", for example. That was simply an account of what had happened to her. The novels that she tried to write were perceived by her as autobiography. The Maata story (in her notebooks) is a different part of her life, but it is still her life, when she came back to London after having gone from school. But as she developed and grew older, she learned how to transmute that material and so, in the great stories like "At the Bay" and "Prelude", although she draws from her own memory, they are not meant to be pictures of her or her life. They are created anew into themselves. It is just an immaturity thing. Naturally she had a sense of being pretty unusual, rather special, and amazingly interesting, and she wanted other people to know how interesting she was, and how many boyfriends she had had. But she did learn quite soon after that. You cannot call her good writing autobiographical, although she does draw on memories of her childhood.

G: What is the role of the child in her fiction? Why is it so predominant?

M: She found children very charming. She thought she was interesting as a child, and she observed a whole lot of things that nobody realised that she was observing.

G: But at the same time, by using these children so often in the fiction, she is sometimes thought to be immature and childish.

M: Well, that is nonsense. Of course, a good writer can be allowed to write about children without being accused of being immature.

G: Probably it is the connection between this immaturity of children and that feminine side we referred to before. They connect this delicacy of the stories with the immaturity associated with children.

M: A good writer can choose to write about anything in the world. Many writers can write about criminals without being thought to be criminal.

G: What is her best achievement as a writer?

M: The best achievement is her letters really, because they are freer than her stories and not as crafted, more spontaneous and more complex because they are witty, sad, happy, funny, perceptive, angry, disappointed, desperate. Everything that you would expect to find in a good novel is in her letters.

G: So, in a way you could consider them as a piece of fiction.

M: Well, not in the sense that they are not true. Before, I said that she wanted to write a novel and never did. In a way, these letters are almost like a good novel. They contain a great deal of artistry.

G: The letters in themselves could make a novel written in the epistolary genre.

M: But if anybody else wrote it, it would not be nearly as fascinating.

G: What is her best value or quality as a writer?

M: Precision, choosing the precise word. She is brilliant at that. I recently re-read "The Doll's House" and it is amazingly precise in every word. I would add her sensitivity to unusual situations and her humour.