

explorations



Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

“2 hours priceless talk”¹ – on the Friendship between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf

Mirosława Kubasiewicz (Uniwersytet Zielonogórski)

DOI: 10.25167/EXP13.18.6.4

Abstract. In spite of all the differences between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, their biographers and critics underline a strong affinity between the two writers. What brought Mansfield and Woolf together was their passion for writing, their desire to become professional writers and to find a new voice that could genuinely express their female experience. Having a partner to discuss and share ideas on new ways of writing was of immense importance to each of them and had direct creative consequences for their work. In the light of existing evidence it comes as a surprise that opinions of Woolf and Mansfield as bitter rivals, and of Woolf as Mansfield’s enemy, still persist. The aim of this essay, then, is to present their relationship, with all its vicissitudes, as a story of a professional friendship, drawing on the findings of the Woolf and Mansfield criticism and on my own reading of their letters and works.

Key words: Mansfield, Woolf, friendship, affinity, competition, jealousy

1. INTRODUCTION

In an article occasioned by the exhibition “Virginia Woolf: Art, Life and Vision” at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2014, Emily Midorikawa and Emma Claire Sweeney (2014) observe that many women writers’ friendships have been “distorted” or “written out of history [...] as if popular perceptions of ambitious women can’t allow for them to be friends as well as competitors.” This lack of public appreciation of women’s friendships does not surprise in the light of the dominating discourse on friendship which has its roots, and gained its momentum, in antiquity; it was then that the idea of friendship preoccupied the minds of the greatest thinkers – from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch. Since then, however, as Preston King

¹ The quote comes from Virginia Woolf’s *Diary*, volume 2 (1978, 45).

observes, no modern philosopher – apart from Bacon, Montaigne, and Nietzsche – has had “anything to say about or in praise of the subject” (2000, 13). For the ancient philosophers friendship was a political idea and as such could develop only between free male citizens, that is those who had power, which by definition excluded women, helots, slaves, to name only a few subjugated groups (10). Women did develop and cherish their friendships, but in private, since their relationships were not expected to go beyond domestic, family, or romantic interests. In spite of the fact that “by the nineteenth century, women had themselves entered into the discussion [on female friendship] as novelists, essayists and, indeed, in political campaigns for women’s rights” (Caine 2009, xii), the limiting perception of women’s friendship has survived until recent times; a reader will be hard put to find volumes of letters documenting an intellectual exchange between women writers, while bookshops and libraries abound in those authored by male friends.

Midorikawa and Sweeney underline that rivalry is more readily recognized than friendship as a relation between women professionals, and this, they observe, has also been the fate of the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, perceived more as competitors than friends, with Virginia Woolf “widely remembered as the bitter foe of the author Katherine Mansfield” (2014). Such a view of their relationship, and of Woolf’s attitude to Mansfield, however, results from a rather superficial and selective reading of her diaries. A revealing example of such a reading is the entry written after Mansfield’s death, fragments of which have been repeatedly quoted in essays and articles; here are two most frequently cited excerpts: “At that one feels – what? A shock of relief? – a rival the less? Then confusion at feeling so little – then, gradually, blankness & disappointment; then a depression which I could not rouse myself from all that day. When I began to write, it seemed to me there was no point in writing. Katherine wont read it. Katherine’s my rival no longer” (Woolf 1978, 226). Yet, twelve days later she adds: “Go on writing of course: but into emptiness. There’s no competitor. I’m cock – lonely cock whose crowing nothing breaks – of my walk. For our friendship had so much writing in it” (228).

Woolf’s words underline competition as an important element in her relationship with Mansfield, but one that also functioned as a motivating factor that constantly reinforced their development as writers. Most importantly, this entry points to an artistic and professional understanding between the two women, which laid the foundation for their friendship. Woolf is relieved that a rival is gone, but it is for a short moment only; what she also immediately realizes is that in losing a rival, she has lost the only reader who could really understand her work. And, in spite of all the misunderstandings, jealousies, and all kinds of differences that led to long gaps in their contacts and to their final parting, Woolf realizes that the friendship survived: “Yet I still feel, somehow that friendship persists” (227).

In this essay I will bring together the findings of the Woolf and Mansfield criticism, as well as my own readings of their letters and works, in order to present the relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf as a story of a professional friendship – uneasy and ambivalent, yet of immense importance to both of them. Evidence for this can be found not only in their letters and Woolf’s diaries but also in the formal and thematic correspondences between their works. I will also address the reasons behind the collapse of this friendship, as well as the particular importance of this relationship to Virginia Woolf, who continued to write about Mansfield long after the latter’s death.

2. DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

The probability of a friendship between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf was not very high. They came from different social worlds, which, as Quentin Bell underlines, was a factor of far greater importance than we could imagine today (2004, 329). Woolf was a daughter of Leslie Stephen, an influential English intellectual, who counted among his friends some of the greatest men of his times – Thomas Hardy, Henry James, or Alfred Tennyson. He was a biographer and a historian, a founding editor of *Dictionary of National Biography*, an editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* (edited before him by W. M. Thackeray, the father of Stephen’s first wife). Woolf’s mother, Julia, née Jackson, came from an upper-class family of artistic talents and interests – she was a niece to Julia Margaret Cameron, photographer, in whose house she could meet the most prominent artists, writers and politicians of the time. Although Julia devoted herself to the care of her husband, children, and others in need, she found time to read, to write stories for her children, as well as an essay-manual on tending the sick, in which she used her own nursing experience. Woolf, then, grew up immersed in an intellectual and artistic traditions, with access to her father’s immense library. Andrew McNeillie, the editor of Woolf’s essays, draws attention to the impressive range of her reading which includes the novels of Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Trollope, Hawthorne, Washington Irving, and Henry James, as well as Mandel Creighton’s *Queen Elizabeth*, Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, *Life of Sterling* and *Reminiscences*, Sir James Stephen’s *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, or Macaulay’s history of England (2010, 7-8). She also studied Greek and Latin and was able to read in these languages. Although Woolf often expressed regret at not having a formal education, her knowledge and skills surpassed those of many of her contemporaries who had. After the death of Leslie Stephen in 1904, Virginia, her sister Vanessa, and their brothers Adrian and Thoby moved to Bloomsbury, where their house soon became a centre of intellectual life, attracting bright young university colleagues of Thoby and Adrian, initiating what later became known as the Bloomsbury Group.

Mansfield’s origins are radically different. Her father, Harold Beauchamp, was a third generation immigrant to New Zealand, the first, in his family, to make a considerable career, which was crowned with the position of the Chairman of Directors of the Bank of New Zealand. Although the Beauchamps² received in their house all the important artists who came from the Old World to perform in Wellington, it was a very pale reflection of the social life at Hyde Park Gate 22 in London. Mansfield was a ‘self-made’ intellectual in a family of little education and a non-intellectual approach to life, and often felt ashamed of her humble origins. What her family of pioneering ancestry equipped her with, however, was a desire to fight for herself and energy to do so. Although uneducated themselves, her parents considered education important and sent Kathleen and her elder sisters to Queens College in London, a progressive, liberal high school for women, whose aim was to teach students to think for themselves and make independent choices. There Mansfield discovered a number of English and European authors, among them Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, Paul Verlaine, Henrik Ibsen, Leo Tolstoy, Elizabeth Robins, George Bernard Shaw, Gabriele D’Annunzio, Maurice Maeterlinck and Oscar Wilde

² Mansfield’s family name was Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp; Katherine Mansfield was her pen-name.

(Alpers 1982, 32-35). London cultural life stole her heart and after her return to New Zealand she did not give her parents any choice but to let her go back to England in 1908, to try and shape her future there on her own. In London Kathleen associated herself with the radical weekly *The New Age* and a few years later with the avant-garde *Rhythm*, developing a close working, and intimate, relationship with its editor, and her future husband, John Middleton Murry.

The difference between the two young aspiring writers seemed considerable – Woolf represented an intellectual tradition of the English upper-middle class; when they met, she was the author of a number of reviews and essays published in the respectable *Times Literary Supplement*, and one novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), slowly developing her own style of writing, while Mansfield was a colonial with avant-garde ideas for literature, an author of one volume of short stories *In a German Pension* (1911) and a number of experimental stories published in the ‘little magazines,’ the *New Age* and *Rhythm*. The meeting, then, was not only an encounter between two women writers but also a kind of confrontation between the intellectual, more traditional and rather conceited Bloomsbury and the world of ‘little magazines’ that Woolf tended to look down on, and which she herself labeled at one time as an “underworld” (1977, 159).

3. INEVITABLE MEETING

Their worlds were separate but by no means isolated and so Woolf and Mansfield met at the beginning of 1917. Mansfield wanted to get to know the author of *The Voyage Out*, the novel which resonated with her own thoughts and questions, while Woolf was curious to see the author of the stories which impressed her Bloomsbury friend, Lytton Strachey,³ and also because, as she explained to him, “Katherine Mansfield has dogged my steps for three years” (1976, 107). Their first impressions of each other were rather ambivalent – each recognized in the other an interesting talker with “a passion for writing” (Mansfield 1984, 313), but they also saw how much they differed from each other. Mansfield saw a woman comfortable in her marriage with a husband who took care of her, secure financially, while she herself was permanently short of money, living in cheap rented flats with Murry, whom she could not marry as she was not able to get a divorce from her first husband, George Bowden. And Woolf saw a self-confident, energetic young woman with a passion for life, who was not afraid to cross borders, and an ambitious young author with considerable writing experience who confidently verbalized ideas concerning literature which echoed Woolf’s own. Thus, their first encounter was marked by a sense of insecurity as well as a degree of jealousy on both sides, which were to taint their relationship till its end. Nevertheless, their friendship started to develop as they discovered that there was “a common certain understanding” between them, “a queer sense of being ‘like’” (Woolf 1978, 45).

³ In a letter to Woolf, Strachey described Mansfield as an author of “some rather – in fact distinctly – bright storyettes,” “very amusing and sufficiently mysterious,” with “a sharp and slightly vulgarly-fanciful intellect” (Alpers, 209-10).

It was inevitable that the meeting of Woolf and Mansfield should take place since they were the only serious women writers in England at that time⁴ - both strongly dissatisfied with realist prose and the phallogentric conventions dominating in literature, both searching for a totally new form of expression that would be able to convey woman's perceptions and experiences, and both “obsessed with the self-creation of themselves as *women* writers” (Moran 1996, 10). As Louise Bernikow observes, to meet another woman who is serious about writing, who wants to be a professional writer in a society in which this is hardly acceptable as an occupation for a woman means “to feel less alone, less subject to the accusation from without or the self-doubt from within” (1980, 136). And so Mansfield writes: “How rare it is to find someone with the same passion for writing that you have” (1984, 313), and Woolf notes in her diary: “I find with Katherine what I don't find with the other clever women a sense of ease and interest, which is I suppose, due to her caring so genuinely if so differently from the way I care, about our precious art” (1997, 258). It is not, however, only the unique mutual understanding which Woolf and Mansfield appreciate, but also the sense of security and interest in what the other has to say that is so different from their relationships with professional men. Here is Woolf's note on the superiority of her discussions with Mansfield over those with men:

The male atmosphere is disconcerting to me. Do they distrust one? despise one? & if so why do they sit on the whole length of one's visit? The truth is that when Murry says the orthodox masculine thing about Eliot for example, belittling my solicitude to know what he said of me, I don't knuckle under; I think what an abrupt precipice cleaves asunder the male intelligence, & how they pride themselves upon a point of view which much resembles stupidity. I find it much easier to talk to Katherine; she gives & resists as I expect her to; we cover more ground in much less time.” (1977, 265)

Together they feel secure, there is no need to dominate and conquer the other, which they often observe as the main aim of male discussions and find intimidating. Their talks aim at reaching a common goal, not proving their superiority.

A perfect understanding between Mansfield and Woolf was possible because they were ‘like’ in many respects – both were fascinated with Russian fiction, with Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Tolstoy; in order to get to know their works better, each undertook translation projects together with Samuel Kotlianski. In her *Translation as Collaboration. Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and S. S. Kotlianski* (2014) Claire Davison compares Mansfield's and Woolf's notes to the Russian texts which each of them was translating with Kotlianski and discovers that both paid attention to similar moments - “the marginal, emotional spaces ...minor characters and fleeting details...,” which reveals “not so much what Mansfield and Woolf were reading, but their speculations as they read” (83). These notes, in other words, show that what was

⁴ They were independent thinkers able to express their views in public. Leonard Woolf remembers Woolf and Mansfield as “the only distinguished women” he had ever met at Garsington, that is women who took part in discussions on equal par with the male intellectuals who gathered there – Bertrand Russell, Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Aldous Huxley among others (1964, 202-3).

important for each of them was what was different, marginalized and hidden under apparently conventional narration, and what they recognized, perhaps, as their own sense of alienation.⁵

4. MUTUAL INSPIRATION

Although the relationship between Mansfield and Woolf was both intense and uneasy, it was also mutually inspiring. Its inspirational character can be observed from its very beginning in 1917, a year which proved professionally crucial for both Mansfield and Woolf. It was then that Woolf asked if Mansfield would like to have a story published by the Woolfs' newly established Hogarth Press. *The Aloe*, a short novel Mansfield wrote after her brother's death in 1915,⁶ was too long for their press, so she decided to re-work it and give it a new form – more condense and more direct. Contrary to Woolf, who recorded all their meetings and talks in her diaries, Mansfield did not mention them in hers; nevertheless, it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that their discussions were important for her too. Antony Alpers, Mansfield's first biographer, argues that it is possible to find echoes of their conversations in Mansfield's letters written to her friends after her meetings with Woolf, particularly to Dorothy Brett, a painter; for instance, in a letter to Brett from October 11th 1917, two days after she had dined with the Woolfs (so at the time when she is working on *Prelude*, a re-working of *The Aloe*), Mansfield explains her writing technique of 'merging' into things, becoming them: "There follows the moment when you are more duck, more apple or more Natasha than any of these objects could ever possibly be, and so you create them anew" (qtd. in Alpers 1982, 255). Talks with Virginia undoubtedly helped Mansfield to verbalize her own writing technique, which she used successfully in the *Prelude* (1918), the story which marks her coming of age as a modernist writer. Woolf's request for a story, then, acted as a catalyst for Mansfield's formulation and application of her writing method.

Alpers argues that in the same year Mansfield played a similar, if not a greater role in helping Woolf to find her own literary voice (1982, 251-2). He explains that in 1917 Woolf was the author of one novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), and was working on another, *Night and Day* (1919), both traditional in form, although she had already started to experiment with narrative techniques in the story *Mark on the Wall* (1917); the turning point in her literary development was to come with the story *Kew Gardens* (1919) (247). Alpers's view of Mansfield's influential role in Woolf's writing of *Kew Gardens* (the first version of this story, written in August 1917, was entitled *Flower Bed*; it was published as *Kew Gardens* two years later), was based on his observation of "the strange correlation between a letter from Mansfield to Ottoline Morrell, and Woolf's 'Kew Gardens'" (Smith 1999, 136). In *Katherine Mansfield & Virginia Woolf. A Public of Two* (1999), Smith, following Alpers's suggestion, reconstructs the chronology of events leading to the creation of *Kew Gardens*; she explains that on Wednesday, August 15,

⁵ Another fascination which they shared was the cinema, whose montage techniques they both adopted in their fiction, and Post-Impressionist painting which gave them a sense of creative freedom. On Woolf's and Mansfield's interest in Post-Impressionism and in the cinema, see chapters 6 and 7 respectively in Smith (1999).

⁶ Leslie Beauchamp, Mansfield's brother, died in an accident when instructing his soldiers on how to use a hand grenade.

1917, in a letter to Ottoline Morrel,⁷ Woolf mentions Mansfield’s letter in which the latter describes the garden at Garsington;⁸ on the same day Mansfield writes to Ottoline about her flower garden and wonders who might write about it; she also suggests the structure of a possible story – different pairs of people in conversation passing by the flower bed, the flowers which “come in,” their scent, their shape so exquisite that it tempts the people to stop and look at them:

Your glimpse of the garden – all flying green and gold made me wonder again *who* is going to write about that flower garden. It might be so wonderful – do you see *how* I mean? There would be people walking in the garden – several pairs of people – their conversations their slow pacing – their glances as they pass one another – the pauses as the flowers ‘come in’ as it were – as a bright dazzle, an exquisite haunting scent, a shape so formal and fine, so much a ‘flower of the mind’ that he who looks at it really is tempted for one bewildering moment to stoop & touch and make sure. The ‘pairs’ of people must be very different and there must be a slight touch of enchantment – some of them seeming extraordinarily ‘odd’ and separate from the flowers, but others quite related and at ease. A kind of, musically speaking, conversation set to flowers.” (Mansfield qtd. in Smith 1999, 136)

The weekend of the 18 and 19 of August, Mansfield spends at Asheham with the Woolfs, and on Tuesday, the 21 of August, in a thank you letter written to Virginia she underlines that they have “the same job,” which suggests they must have been discussing writing during Mansfield’s visit; she also expresses her praise for the story Woolf must have shown her at Asheham: “Yes, your *Flower Bed* is very good there’s a still, quivering changing light over it all and a sense of those couples dissolving in the bright air which fascinates me” (Mansfield qtd. in Smith 1999, 137). Smith’s reconstruction provides evidence for the opinion that it may have been Mansfield, who inspired Woolf to try her hand at making a garden the subject of a story; but, more importantly, it shows how important literary experimentation was for both of them, and how important their discussions were for the development of their writing methods.

⁷ Lady Ottoline Morrell was an aristocratic patroness and friend to the artists and intellectuals of her time; she offered them help and shelter at her home in Garsington; among those who visited the Morrells there were Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington, Roger Fry or Siegfried Sassoon.

⁸ Mansfield’s letter has not survived, the only evidence of its existence is Woolf’s reference to it in her letter to Ottoline: “Katherine Mansfield describes your garden, the rose leaves drying in the sun, the pool, the long conversations between people wandering up and down in the moonlight. It calls out her romantic side; which I think rather a relief after the actresses, A.B.C.’s and paint pots” (Woolf 1976, 174). It is possible that Mansfield’s suggestion for a story came at the time when Woolf was ready for such an experiment. Angela Smith points to the fact that two weeks before Mansfield’s visit at Asheham in August 1917, Woolf recommenced her diary as a means of recovering her mental stability. Interestingly, she recorded in it her observations of the countryside in which she was walking and of the natural life scenes in her garden (1999, 137). The story, then, might have been a natural outcome of this preparation stage; it was the other, however, who spelled out its idea and its structure, hence, probably, the sense of defensive superiority on the part of Woolf, which can be detected in her letter.

In *Kew Gardens*⁹ Woolf juxtaposes the microcosm of the flower bed with the world of the people walking, and sometimes stopping by it: “Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapor, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and color dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere” (2003, 89). Some couples in the story are “extraordinarily ‘odd’,” others “quite related and at ease.” The story, obviously, is totally Woolf’s creation, her “radical experiment in prose, a transition from the form of the two early novels to the mobile method of *Jacob’s Room*” (Smith 1999, 140), but it is difficult not to wonder at its similarity to the idea for a story which Mansfield drew in her letter to Ottoline Morrell (and in the other to Woolf) and not to agree with Alpers’s view that “Katherine Mansfield in some way helped Virginia Woolf to break out of the mould in which she had been working hitherto” (1982, 251-2).¹⁰

Similarities in the works of Mansfield and Woolf are the outcome of their discussions as well as their sensibilities and experience. Both “made the fragility of feeling, of happiness and life itself, into their subject; both felt a degree of antagonism for the male world of action (and for male sexuality); both turned to their childhoods and their dead to nourish their imagination” (Tomalin 1988, 201). Mansfield’s literary transformation was accelerated by the death of her brother in 1915 – it was then that she turned to her homeland and her childhood for inspiration. “The Wind Blows,” which Woolf liked very much, had been written a few days after Leslie died. It was also with her brother in mind that Woolf wrote *Jacob’s Room*.¹¹ Many critics have noticed also a number of formal similarities in the prose of Mansfield and Woolf, for instance, Patricia Moran sees them in their “choice and use of images, the shape of the sentences, the rhythmic cadences, even the way each evokes the natural world” (1996, 9). The examples she provides include the opening of Mansfield’s “At the Bay” (1921) – “Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white seamount...there was nothing to mark which was beach and where was the sea,” which is echoed in the opening of Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931) – “The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky... .” The same rhythmic pattern and sentence structure are used in the sentences – “The sun was not yet risen” and “The sun had not yet risen;” and in both the spaces merge – the sea and the land in Mansfield’s text and the sea and the sky in Woolf’s (ibid.). Saralyn Daly notices another correspondence between the works of Mansfield and Woolf - when the sun has risen, in Mansfield’s story a herd of sheep appears, and Woolf compares the waves to “turbaned warriors, [...] who [...], advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep.” Mansfield’s fantasy of the sea having covered the earth and its houses during the night in “At the Bay” is also echoed in *The Waves*: “Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water ...”

⁹ In 1917, when the letters were exchanged, Woolf had not yet been to Garsington and could not know Ottoline’s garden which Mansfield describes; that is why she writes about Kew Gardens which she knew well (see: Alpers 1982, 250; Smith 1991, 136).

¹⁰ Woolf’s biographer, Hermione Lee, is less certain about Mansfield’s role in bringing *Kew Gardens* to life; she suggests that it may just as well have been Woolf, who showed Mansfield her draft of the story which inspired Katherine to think of a garden piece of her own which she described in a letter to Ottoline. Whatever the case, she concludes, “the overlap suggests how close they felt they could be” (Lee 1997, 389).

¹¹ See: Lee 1996, 392.

and also at the end of the day: “As if there were waves of darkness in the air, darkness moved on, covering houses, hills, trees, as waves of water wash around the sides of some sunken ship” (1965, 117). Another correspondence of ‘watery’ images, I believe, exists between Mrs. Ramsey’s (*To the Lighthouse*) epiphanic moment, when she experiences the unity of the world, conveyed with the help of a simile which compares the room and the people in it to a stream with: “its ripples and the reeds in it and the minnows balancing themselves, and the sudden silent trout [...] lit up hanging, trembling” (Woolf 1994, 360) and a letter which Mansfield wrote after one of her first visits to the Woolfs’, in which she remembered “a feeling that outside the window floated a deep dark stream full of a silent rushing of little eels with pointed ears going to Norway & coming back...” (1984, 313).

One image which cannot go unnoticed as it provides a link between the works of Mansfield and Woolf is that of the fly. In Woolf’s “The New Dress” (1927) Mabel Waring feels so self-conscious, inferior and unhappy in her new dress that she compares herself to a fly that has fallen into a saucer of milk, which, as Daly points out, “seems to make a deliberate reference to Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Fly’” (Daly 1965, 116). The fly’s pedigree is noble since it was used as a symbol in *King Lear*;¹² Mansfield, an avid reader of Shakespeare, might have borrowed the image from his play to represent herself suffering from and helpless in the face of life’s or god’s injustice. She wrote in her diary: “Oh, the times when she had walked upside down on the ceiling, run up the glittering panes, floated on a lake of light, flashed through a shining beam! And God looked upon the fly fallen into the jug of milk and saw that it was good. And the smallest Cherubims & Seraphims of all who delight in misfortune [...] shrilled ‘How is the fly fallen fallen’” (2016, 235).

Woolf’s use of the image of the fly falling into a saucer of milk may suggest that she had not only read Mansfield’s story in which the fly falls into an ink-pot, but that she remembered Mansfield talk about the fly as a symbol. In any case, it is a nod to Mansfield, a gesture of appreciation and recognition of her inspirational role in Woolf’s creative life.¹³

The professional dialogue between Mansfield and Woolf found reflection not only in the thematic and formal correspondences between their works, but also in the form which Mansfield gave her letters or her reviews of Woolf’s works. Sydney Janet Kaplan notices that when the story *Kew Gardens* was published in 1919, Mansfield wrote a review full of praise which, interestingly, “repeats, in its own structure, the movements of Woolf’s story” (1991, 150); for instance, Kaplan explains, the review ends with a description of the end of the story, and “Mansfield’s discovery of Woolf’s epiphanic moment [which] takes the reader as well through the double experience of Woolf’s epiphany and

¹² The origins of the image of the fly in Mansfield’s work are discussed by Jeffrey Meyers in his *Katherine Mansfield: A Darker View*; one source is William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, in which Gloucester says on the god’s cruelty to mortal men: “As flies to the wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport” (IV, i); and the other, William Blake’s “The Fly”: “For I dance, / And drink, and sing, / Till some blind hand / Shall brush my wing” (Meyers 1978, 234).

¹³ Critics continue to compare the works of both writers and find affinities between them; for instance, Janet Wilson in her 2017 article “Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and the Nature Goddess Tradition,” analyzes their “use of the medieval and Renaissance traditions of nature personified ... and examines the vestiges in their work of this philosophical view of nature, adapted to their modernist preoccupations” (17).

Mansfield's own in trying to recreate it" (1991, 150-151). This strategy reinforced the praise and also illustrates the form their professional dialogue took. Another example which Kaplan analyses is a letter which Mansfield wrote to congratulate Woolf on her essay "Modern Novels;" in the letter she did not discuss the arguments presented in the essay, but gave it a form that perfectly reflected Woolf's prescriptions. The critic explains that in the letter Mansfield touches upon a number of apparently unconnected topics – her illness, love and intimacy, birth of a kitten, the flowering of a daffodil, maternity and writing, which she presents as "part of a creative continuum, in which writing subsumes the attractions, limitations, and prohibitions of all others." In other words, in her letter Mansfield "examine[s] for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day;" and so "consequently, the whole letter, and not just the section referring directly to 'Modern Novels,' is a response to Woolf's essay" (156-157). According to Kathryn Simpson (2015, 53), in Woolf's essay Mansfield recognized her own views on literature, some of which she expressed in articles written together with J.M. Murry for *Rhythm* in 1912, thus, Mansfield's letter can be seen as both a creative response to Woolf's essay and a tribute to her work.

The non-personal professional conversation in the form of reviews and essays between Mansfield and Woolf was sometimes quite difficult and painful. The review which played a crucial role in their dialogue was that of Woolf's *Night and Day*, assigned to Mansfield in 1919 by Murry, then an editor of the *Athenaeum*.¹⁴ Mansfield did not like the novel as she believed it was a step back in Woolf's development as a writer, a betrayal of their ideas concerning literature. Mansfield did not know that Woolf's second novel was intended to be a kind of exercise which would bring her back to bigger narrative forms without causing another mental breakdown.¹⁵ Woolf hoped Mansfield would not review her novel, aware of Katherine's expectations of fiction, and of herself as an author whose work had already taken a new direction with "The Mark on the Wall" and *Kew Gardens*. Mansfield was reluctant to do the review as the novel disappointed her (it is worth remembering that she loved Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*), which she expressed a number of times in her letters to Murry before she started writing it. Katherine's opinion hurt Virginia immensely: "K.M. wrote a review which irritated me – I thought I saw spite in it. A decorous elderly dullard she describes me; Jane Austen up-to-date. Leonard supposes that she let her wish for my failure have its way with her pen" (Woolf 1978, 314). What Mansfield accused Woolf of was ignoring the changes that had taken place in the world: "My private opinion is that it is a lie in the soul. The war has never been, that is what its message is" (Mansfield qtd. in Alpers 258). Although the review hurt Woolf's pride, Mansfield could not be accused of spite and lack of sincerity. Bell, Woolf's nephew and biographer, agrees that the review "was perceptive and discreet, and by no means unfair to the novel" (Alpers 1982, 258). Woolf, hurt as she was, must have been alerted to the novel's shortcomings, since, as Tomalin observes, after that review, "none of [Woolf's] novels was cast again in the old conventional mode,

¹⁴ See: Kaplan 1991, 150n14; Alpers 1982, 257-258.

¹⁵ In a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1931 Woolf explained why the novel was far from satisfactory "When I came to [after the crisis caused by *The Voyage Out*], I was so tremblingly afraid of my own insanity that I wrote *Night and Day* mainly to prove to my own satisfaction that I could keep entirely off that dangerous ground. [...] Bad as the book is, it composed my mind [...]" (1981, 231).

none could have earned Katherine’s gibe of being ‘Miss Austen up-to-date’” (1987, 198).¹⁶

Simpson sees the relationship between Mansfield and Woolf as based on “a gift-economy,” an exchange of gifts of praise and encouragement, gifts which can, however, be withdrawn if the beneficiary fails to maintain “their collective ideas and representations” (2015, 52).¹⁷ In this light, the critic claims, Mansfield’s praising of *Kew Gardens* can be interpreted as an expression of her satisfaction with Woolf’s acceptance of her gift - her influence (the suggestion of a story), while the negative review of *Night and Day* reflects her disappointment with Woolf’s betrayal of that influence (56). Simpson’s discussion of the friendship between Mansfield and Woolf underscores its professional character – it is literature and writing that really matter, and are a test of loyalty. This valorization of the professional and withdrawing of the intimate – Mansfield and Woolf did not talk about their precarious health, their relationships with men, or their losses – draws attention to the masculine aspect of their friendship.

5. FAILURE OF THE FRIENDSHIP

The friendship between Mansfield and Woolf spanned five years during which time they enjoyed phases of intense closeness, when Mansfield was in London in 1918 and 1919, when they met and wrote to each other regularly and sent each other little presents – coffee, flowers, cigarettes; however, in their relationship there were also rather long periods of silence marked by a sense of acute disappointment in the other, which, I believe, was caused by deficiency of trust on both sides. In one of her first letters to Woolf Mansfield wrote: “[P]ray consider how rare it is to find someone with the same passion for writing that you have, who desires to be scrupulously truthful with you – and to give you the freedom of the city without any reserves at all” (313). Both writers were ‘scrupulously truthful’ in matters concerning literature but were not able to extend this ‘truthfulness’ to their personal relationship – ‘the freedom of the city’ had its limits. The scrupulous guarding of their intimate lives led to periods of painful silence, the sense of betrayal and abandonment, which exacerbated their jealousies. Woolf did not know the extent of Mansfield’s physical and emotional suffering caused by rapidly developing tuberculosis, Mansfield knew nothing about Woolf’s mental breakdowns; neither knew anything about the other’s suffering and confrontation with death – her own and of those she loved, of loneliness and helplessness. There was between them, to quote Woolf, “a perfect understanding [...] – a queer sense of being ‘like’ – not only about literature” (1978, 45) – there was intimacy in this friendship (Smith 1999, vii), even of a homoerotic kind (14) but “guarded” (Lee 1996, 387). Although they could reach perfect understanding of how to construct “subjectivity in fiction [or how] to acknowledge the strange within the self, the masculine within the feminine,” how to depict the moments of

¹⁶ The view that Mansfield’s reviews, not only the negative one of *Night and Day*, but also the very positive one of “Kew Gardens”, played a role in accelerating the development of Woolf’s narrative strategies is shared also by Moran (1996, 14), and Kaplan (1991, 145-68), Lee (1997, 386-401), or Alpers (1982, 249-252).

¹⁷ Simpson draws on the theory of Marcel Mauss, according to which “the exchange of gifts has a social function and works to create and consolidate a sense of solidarity and commitment” (2015,52).

“encountering the foreigner within, as ordinary experiences of the extraordinary” (Smith 3), they were not ready to take this friendship onto a more intimate level, and thus their relationship excluded the possibility of mutual emotional support. The lack of the intimate knowledge of the other’s life predicaments led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of their actions and intentions.

Mansfield and Woolf’s relationship suffered enormously also from the fact that they were associated with different literary and social milieus in which they were the only serious women writers – Woolf with the intellectual and snobbish Bloomsbury, and Mansfield with the authors and publishers originally associated with little magazines, mainly, however, John Middleton Murry, a critic and editor, and from 1918 her husband. Patricia Moran observes that it was “the men in each circle, who worked hard to ensure that only one woman ‘won’ [and] championed one woman by undermining the other” (12-13). Such manipulation of the masculine social circles reinforced the element of competition in the writers’ relationship; to illustrate the effect of such manipulation, Kaplan draws attention to a diary entry, which records Woolf’s reaction to the article “The Story-Writing Genius” by J.W.N. Sullivan, which appeared in the *Athenaeum*: “I can wince outrageously to read K. M’s praises in the *Athenaeum*. Four poets are chosen; she’s one of them. Of course Murry makes the choice, & its Sullivan who rates her story a work of genius. Still, you see how well I remember all this – how eagerly I discount it” (Woolf qtd. in Kaplan 112). Woolf’s self-conscious envy of Mansfield is here evident (Kaplan 2012, 112). Moran, on the other hand, quotes from a letter in which Mansfield complains about Roger Fry’s praise of Woolf as a writer as if her own work was non-existent: “He (Roger) thinks that Virginia is going to reap the world. That, I don’t doubt, put on my impatience. After a very long time I nearly pinned a paper on my chest, ‘I too, write a little.’ But refrained” (Mansfield qtd. in Moran 1996, 13).

Bernikow writes that “a failure of friendship is an intriguing mirror, reflecting the forces at work in a woman’s life” (1981, 127); neither Mansfield, nor Woolf, however, were able to look in “that particular mirror” (132). It was only after Mansfield’s premature death in January 1923, that Woolf reflected on the reasons behind the failure of their friendship (all contact between them stopped after Mansfield had left for the South of Europe in 1920, when her health seriously deteriorated): “The surroundings – Murry & so on - & the small lies & treacheries, the perpetual playing & teasing, or whatever it was, cut away much of the substance of friendship. One was too uncertain. And so one let it all go” (1978, 227). To a great extent, then, their friendship fell victim to social circumstances, snobbery, the competition of the literary life, manipulation of the men around them, the precarious health of both women, and their self-consciousness as well.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Mansfield died prematurely and did not leave much information on her perception of the relationship with Woolf. But Woolf, who survived Mansfield by eighteen years, continued to record her thought and dreams about Mansfield after Katherine’s death. The role which Mansfield played in Woolf’s life cannot be underestimated; their ‘priceless talks’ were to stay with her for many years after Mansfield’s death, and often serve as points of reference for her literary work. As Ali Smith (2014) points out, “Mansfield fascinated Woolf on questions of gender, class, foreignness, transience, honesty, survival,

dialogue and interruption, and above all, how to put it into the art, how to catch it, how to lose it. Katherine Mansfield meant all those things to Virginia Woolf.”

Lee explains that after Mansfield’s death, Woolf continued to be jealous of what her rival-friend might have achieved; for instance, after writing the final sentence of *Mrs. Dalloway* – “For there she was” – she made a note in her diary on her own achievement which would have overshadowed Mansfield’s had she lived (1996, 400). But at the same time, she equally vividly remembered Katherine as a close friend, a writer whose opinion she highly valued and with whom she would still like to share her thoughts. In the course of writing *The Hours* (the first title of *Mrs. Dalloway*) she was asking herself: “Am I writing *The Hours* from deep emotions? ... Or do I write essays about myself?” (Woolf qtd. in Lee 1996, 399). This is an echo of their discussions concerning subjectivity in fiction and brings to mind Mansfield’s view that what matters is “[t]he moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal” (2016, 350), so the question which Woolf is asking in fact reads as ‘Am I faithful to Katherine?’ The friendship of Mansfield and Woolf was intense and professionally rewarding; it was also difficult, filled with jealousies and competitiveness. Although it could not flourish fully, it was unique and left its mark in the life of Woolf, who eight years after Mansfield’s death wrote to her lover, Vita Sackville-West: “[Katherine] had a quality I adored, and needed... I dream of her often – now that’s an odd reflection – how one’s relation with a person seems to be continued after death in dreams, and with some odd reality too” (Woolf 1981, 366).

REFERENCES

- Alpers, Antony. 1982. *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Bell, Quentin. 2004. *Virginia Woolf : biografia*. Translated by Maja Laverigne. Warszawa: Twój Styl.
- Bernikow, Louise. 1980. *Among Women*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Caine, Barbara. 2009. Introduction to *Friendship. A History*, edited by Barbara Caine, ix-xvi. London, Equinox.
- Daly, Saralyn R. 1965. *Katherine Mansfield*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Davison, Claire. 2014. *Translation as Collaboration. Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and S.S. Kotlianski*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kaplan, Sydney Janet. 1991. *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Kaplan, Sydney, Janet. 2012. *Circulating Genius. John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- King, Preston. 2000. Introduction to *The Challenge of Friendship in Modernity*, edited by Preston King and Heather Devere, 1-13. London: Cass.
- Lee, Hermione. 1996. *Virginia Woolf*. London: Vintage Books.
- Mansfield, Katherine. 1984. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*. Vol. 1 (1913-1917), edited by Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mansfield, Katherine. 2016. *The Diaries of Katherine Mansfield*, edited by Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- McNeillie. 2012. "Bloomsbury." In *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, edited by Susan Sellers, 1-28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meyers, Jeffrey. 1978. *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Midorikawa, Emily, and Emma Claire Sweeney. 2014. "Feminist writer's friendships: feel the fear and do it anyway." *The Independent*. Accessed 15 May, 2018 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/feminist-writer-s-friendships-feel-the-fear-and-do-it-anyway-9589326>
- Moran, Patricia. 1996. *Word of Mouth*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.
- Simpson, Kathryn. 2015. "'[O]ur precious art': Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and the gift economy." In *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence*, edited by Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey, 51-64. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Smith, Ali. 2014. *Getting Virginia Woolf's Goat: A Lecture*. NPGLondon. Sound Cloud. Accessed May 12, 2018. <https://soundcloud.com/npglondon/getting-virginia-woolfs-goat-a-lecture-by-ali-smith>
- Smith, Angela. 1999. *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. A Public of Two*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tomalin, Claire. 1988. *Katherine Mansfield. A Secret Life*. London: Penguin Books.
- Wilson, Janet. "Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and the Nature Goddess Tradition." *Literature & Aesthetics* 27 (1) 2017, 17-38. Accessed October 12, 2018. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/LA/article/viewFile/11783/11095>
- Woolf, Leonard. 1964. *Beginning Again. An Autobiography of the Years 1911 to 1918*. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1976. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 2 (1912-1922), edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1977a. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1 (1915-1919), edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1978. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2 (1920-1924), edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1981. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4 (1929-1931), edited by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich
- Woolf, Virginia. 1994. *To the Lighthouse*. 1927. London: Chancellor Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2003. "Kew Gardens." In *A Haunted House. The Complete Shorter Fiction*, edited by Susan Dick. 1919. London: Vintage Books.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

AUTHOR'S BIO: Mirosława Kubasiewicz, PhD., is a lecturer at the Institute of Modern Languages at the University of Zielona Góra, Poland, where she teaches courses in the history of English literature. Her research interests focus on connections between

literature and philosophy, the work of Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf and other women writers.

E-MAIL: m.kubasiewicz@in.uz.zgora.pl