

DIFFERENCES IN KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND ANTON CHEKHOV  
AS SHORT STORY WRITERS

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AS SHORT STORY WRITERS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent of Katherine Mansfield's literary indebtedness to Anton Chekhov. Throughout the critical writing about Mansfield there are many suggestions that her work is similar to that of Chekhov, but, these allusions are, for the most part, vague in pointing out specific likenesses.<sup>1</sup> The reader of such criticism may finally begin to wonder if

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<sup>1</sup>There are two articles advancing the idea that Katherine Mansfield directly plagiarized Chekhov: Elizabeth Schneider's "Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov," Modern Language Notes, L (June, 1935), 394-397; and E. M. Almedingen's article in the London Times Literary Supplement, November 16, 1951. In these essays Chekhov's "Sleepy" and Katherine Mansfield's "The Child Who Was Tired" are compared, and the conclusion is that she has copied Chekhov. After one reads the stories, it is pretty obvious that this is true. Alpers, her latest biographer, does not argue the point; however, "The Child Who Was Tired" was written by Katherine Mansfield during her very early years, appearing in 1910, and the story may be reckoned as a literary exercise more than anything else. Furthermore it is the only instance of her plagiarizing Chekhov.

Also, if Katherine Mansfield in her earlier stories may be accused of plagiarism, then she showed no favoritism for Chekhov. C. H. Norman, who was writing for New Age when Katherine Mansfield was also employed by that magazine, has pointed out in the Times, November 23, 1951, several sources from which she derived the bases for her stories. They are Hubert Crackenthorpe's Wreckage and Sentimental Studies, published in The Yellow Book; Henry Harland's Grey Roses and Mademoiselle Miss; George Egerton's Keynotes and Discords; Villiers de Lisle Adam's Contes Cruel; and stories from Barbey D'Aurevilly.

specific likenesses really do exist. The following excerpts exemplify the "Katherine Mansfield-and-Her-Russian-Master" type of criticism which gave rise to this study.

George McLean Harper explains Katherine Mansfield's attraction to Chekhov by quoting her as saying he is "really alive."<sup>2</sup> Martin Armstrong maintains, "She obviously studied Chekhov devoutly. . . ."<sup>3</sup> "For her view of life she went directly to Chekhov, Dostoevsky and Tolstoi, because their views are compatible with hers," notes Sylvia Berkman, who has done, perhaps, the leading critical study of Katherine Mansfield.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Alpers, Mansfield's most recent and comprehensive biographer, sums up the question thus: ". . . she sometimes dreamed of Chekhov, as a man of good faith: 'good, kind, quietly happy,' in a Russian way. The Russians 'understood.' They had some gift of living that held a magnetic attraction for her."<sup>5</sup> Zinaida Schakhowskoy believes, "Katherine Mansfield found in his [Chekhov's] work a response to the cravings of a sick woman's instinct, and, spurned in her turn by her own

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<sup>2</sup>George McLean Harper, "Katherine Mansfield," Quarterly Review, CCLIII (October, 1929), 386.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Armstrong, "The Art of Katherine Mansfield," Fortnightly Review, CXIX (March, 1923), 484.

<sup>4</sup>Sylvia Berkman, Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study (New Haven, 1951), p. 115.

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Alpers, Katherine Mansfield, A Biography (New York, 1953), p. 330.

country, went forth to enchant French readers. . . ."<sup>6</sup>  
 Margaret Bell, speaking of Katherine Mansfield's not having  
 been accepted earlier by the public, asks, "But if the pub-  
 lic did not want the truth? Just carry on until it did.  
 Chekhov was not afraid to wait. Why should she be?"<sup>7</sup>

Elizabeth Bowen, an admirer of the genius of Katherine  
 Mansfield, simply emphasizes, "Chekhov was her ally, not  
 her authority."<sup>8</sup> Jessamyn West in a brief analogy makes  
 only a vague implication, "I am speaking of what the nov-  
 elist, as a novelist, wants to know about himself, that  
 state which Chekhov referred to as 'the slave cast out'  
 and which Katherine Mansfield called 'purity.'<sup>9</sup> Katherine  
 Mansfield's art," declares the Literary Digest, "resembles  
 the great Russian-physician-novelist in that it preaches  
 no sermon, points no moral, expounds no philosophy."<sup>10</sup>  
Scholastic Review strikes the same monotonous note, "Her  
 idol was a Russian writer, Chekhov. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Current

<sup>6</sup>Zinaida Schakhowskoy, "Chekhov," The Contemporary Review, CLXIV (November, 1943), 297.

<sup>7</sup>Margaret Bell, "In Memory of Katherine Mansfield," The Bookman, LXXVI (January, 1933), 40.

<sup>8</sup>Elizabeth Bowen, "A Living Writer," Cornhill, CLXIX (Winter, 1956), 121.

<sup>9</sup>Jessamyn West, "Secret of The Masters," Saturday Review, XL (September 21, 1957), 13-14.

<sup>10</sup>"Greatest Short Story Writer," Literary Digest, LXXVI (March 17, 1923), 32-33.

<sup>11</sup>"Katherine Mansfield," Scholastic Review, XXXVII (October 7, 1940), 37.

Opinion states, "Her name is often linked with that of Anton Chekhov, and her art. . . resembles that of the Russian writer."<sup>12</sup> "A whole generation has matured since she wrote," observes the London Times Literary Supplement. "For instance, the adoration of Chekhov, to which Katherine Mansfield herself was prone, has resolved itself into a reasonable attitude. . . ."<sup>13</sup> John Middleton Murry, defending his wife's story "The Child Who Was Tired," intimates that Chekhov had influenced her when he points out, "What she [E. M. Almedingen] calls 'the typically Chekhovian' opening to 'Pictures' amounts to nothing: there is no reason to suppose even the influence of Chekhov here. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

The two critics whose remarks epitomize the unsubstantial generality about Katherine Mansfield's similarity to Chekhov are both noted American scholars, Edward Wagenknecht and Joseph Warren Beach. Wagenknecht admits no more than a hint at the similarity when he poses the question, "Where did she get her wisdom--this girl--her almost Shakespearean subtlety, her terrifying powers to read bare the human soul? Certainly not from her

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<sup>12</sup>"Katherine Mansfield's Hold on Literary Immortality," Current Opinion, LXXIV (April, 1923), 436.

<sup>13</sup>London Times Literary Supplement, March 2, 1946, p. 102.

<sup>14</sup>London Times Literary Supplement, October 26, 1951, p. 677.

contemporaries in England at any rate."<sup>15</sup> Beach pretends to look directly at the similarity, but actually names only one or two points of likeness and gives no specific examples:

The mention of Katherine Mansfield always brings to mind her chief master in the short story. Not merely does she resemble him in her sensitive feeling-tone; she suggests him also by her tendency to subordinate incident to mood, and by many other features of technique that follow from this.<sup>16</sup>

Katherine Mansfield herself makes numerous expressions of admiration for Chekhov. But these expressions, like the allusions of her many critics, are only general. In her Scrapbook she makes notes concerning Chekhov: "In the future," she quotes from an essay by Leon Shestov, "probably, writers will convince themselves and the public that any kind of artificial completion is absolutely superfluous." Her remark to this prediction is, "Tchehov [sic] said so."<sup>17</sup> Another quotation from Chekhov expresses the idea, "I should like to meet a philosopher like Nietzsche somewhere in a train or a steamer, and spend the whole night talking

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<sup>15</sup>Edward Wagenknecht, "Katherine Mansfield," English Journal, XVII (January, 1928), 272.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Warren Beach, "Katherine Mansfield and Her Russian Master," Virginia Quarterly, XXVII (October, 1951), 604.

<sup>17</sup>Katherine Mansfield, The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield, edited by J. M. Murry (New York, 1940), p. 26.



to him." Her sentiments recorded underneath are, "So should I, old boy!"<sup>18</sup> Later in the Scrapbook she is grateful to Chekhov and writes rapturously, "Oh Darling Tchekhov [sic]! I was in misery tonight--ill, unhappy, despondent, and you made me laugh. . .and forget, my precious friend."<sup>19</sup> After another Chekhov quotation, this one about the effects of his illness, she asks, "Who reads between the lines? I at least. K. M."<sup>20</sup>

From the allusions of the critics and from Katherine Mansfield's own admiration, the casual student of her work might conclude that Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov bear a very striking similarity. And there is no doubt that certain similarities do exist. This study proposes to show, however, that there are marked differences in their lives and work, differences so marked that they tend to refute the idea of any overwhelming resemblance in the two writers. The value of such a study is to lay the groundwork for arriving at a true relationship between Katherine Mansfield and the Russian by correcting the generally false impression that she is little more than a feminine Chekhov in miniature.

The following points will be taken up in developing this line of thought: first, the contrast in their

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

formative years--years leading up to their first productive writing; second, the contrast in their range of subject matter and theme; third, the contrast in their handling of material; and fourth, the contrast in their personal philosophies. Their influences on the broad stream of literature will be considered, and the conclusion will consider what it was about Chekhov that attracted Katherine Mansfield.

## CHAPTER II

### FORMATIVE YEARS

#### Anton Chekhov

Chekhov was born on January 16 or 17, 1860, the third in a family of six children.<sup>1</sup> His grandfather Chekhov, Yegor Mikhailavich Chekh, was a serf who bought his freedom and that of his family for 3,500 rubles. Chekhov's father, Pavel, had been apprenticed to one of the richest shopkeepers in Taganrog, and though, as Chekhov later described him, he was a mediocrity and a man of little ability, he was also extremely vain and without a doubt artistic. His mother, Yevgenia Yakolevna Morozov, belonged to the merchant class, her father having been a seller of cloth. Chekhov once said that he got his talent from his father and his soul from his mother; but this is, as are nearly all generalities, probably only partly true. For, from his father, a man who was most responsible for the reserve he displayed in manhood, he also seems to have inherited most of the harshness and stubbornness he possessed. In a letter to his cousin Michael, written in January, 1877,

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<sup>1</sup>The source for the biographical material on Anton Chekhov in this chapter is: David Magarshack, Chekhov, (London, 1952).

Chekhov relates that his mother had said he possessed an inborn and inveterate spite.

The first educational experience of Chekhov came at the Greek school at the Church of St. Constantine. Here he experienced numerous beatings at the hands of his teacher, one Vuchina; but he had become used to this type of punishment from his father, and beatings along with grosser punishments, though he was but seven years old, did not shock him any longer. In 1868 he passed into the first class of the Taganrog secondary school. He spent ten years there, failing the examinations at the end of the third and fifth forms because his father insisted that he work in the store. Despite the rather severe discipline under which Chekhov lived his boyhood, he seems to have been a happy and even mischievous young man. His letters to his brothers and other members of his family reflect the capacity of the young to adjust to hardship.

In 1876, Chekhov's father fled to Moscow because of bankruptcy, and the rest of the family, with the exception of Chekhov, followed. Alexander and Nicholas immediately enrolled at the University of Moscow and the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture respectively. Three years later Chekhov passed his matriculation examination for the University of Moscow and immediately left Taganrog for Moscow to enter the University and to try to help sustain his nearly impoverished family. Before long

he decided to submit to a magazine some of the humorous stories which he had improvised for the entertainment of his family and which had thrown them into fits of laughter. He studied the market and sent his first stories to The Dragonfly, a Petersburg weekly. His first story, "A Letter to a Learned Friend," which appeared in this publication in 1880 brought him five kopecks a line.

During the first years of his literary apprenticeship, Chekhov was also busy trying to maintain himself as a medical student at the University of Moscow. As a boy he had acquired an interest in medicine from his first experience with peritonitis contracted while bathing in a cold stream, and from subsequent conversations with one Dr. Schrempf, who studied at Dorpat. After his degree in 1884, however, Chekhov found himself making more money from his writing than from his medical practice, and his attentions were turned sharply toward a literary career. But the time he spent studying medicine, Chekhov considered most valuable:

The study of medicine has had an important influence on my literary work; it has considerably enlarged the sphere of my observations. . . . It has also had a directive influence. . . . Familiarity with the natural sciences and with scientific method has always kept me on my guard, and I have always tried where it was possible to be consistent with the facts of science, and where it was impossible I have preferred not to write at all. . . . I do not belong to that class of literary men who take up a sceptical attitude towards science, and to the class of

those who rush into anything with only their own imagination to go upon, I should not like to belong.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of 1882 Chekhov had become a regular contributor to Nikolay Leykin's Fragments, another Petersburg weekly. He also wrote for the Alarm-Clock, a Moscow humorous weekly, and The Onlookers, which he edited with his brother Michael. By 1885 Chekhov had become an established writer, but wished to free himself from Leykin, who was making him into a hack. Through a gradual decrease in the number of stories submitted to Leykin and an increase in production for The Petersburg Gazette, Chekhov was able to write his last for Leykin in 1887. The importance of the break with Leykin was that it prompted Chekhov to formulate the principle that was to underlie all of his later writings-- effective probing into the evils of society. David Magarshack calls attention forcibly to this serious feature latent in the artist's early work:

What is so remarkable about Chekhov's Juvenilia is that in one form or another they all contain a criticism of life. That at once marked him out as different from the hundreds of other contributors to the Russian popular magazines. In his early twenties, therefore, Chekhov was already deeply conscious of the high purpose of literature, however little he may at the time have respected his own writings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>W. H. Bruford, Chekhov and His Russia (New York, 1947), p. 15, citing Anton Chekhov, Letters of Anton Chekhov to His Family and Friends, translated by Constance Garnett (London, 1920), p. 369.

<sup>3</sup>Magarshack, op. cit., p. 65.

The turning point in Chekhov's career came about in 1885, when D. V. Grigorovich, a veteran novelist, asked the publisher of the big Petersburg daily New Times, Alexey Suvorin, to hire Chekhov as a contributor. Alexey Suvorin soon sensed in Chekhov the perceptive qualities of a literary genius.

The social evils in Russia during Chekhov's entire life were some of the most flagrant that have existed in any country of the modern world, and they could not have failed to make an imprint upon him as an observant and sensitive young man. The melancholy resulting from this impression was so indelibly stamped upon him that it was bound to affect his writing.

As late as 1897, seven years before Chekhov's death, the number of peasants was still in a preponderance of 77.1 per cent of the Russian population.<sup>4</sup> The conditions of the laborer (both on the farm and in the factory) were regulated by the needs of the employer and the laborer's endurance only. Children were often employed, and it was common for them to work fifteen hours a day. Governmental indifference to working conditions generally--the illegality of collective action by labor, the fluctuations in the labor market, and the low level of industrial output--kept the Russian worker on an extremely low social

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<sup>4</sup>Sidney Harcave, Russia, A History (Chicago, 1952), p. 306.

and economic level. His sad state was magnified by the primitive conditions in safety and sanitary provisions in the factories and mines where he worked; furthermore he was often subjected to beatings and was regularly searched at the end of each day's labor. Although the cost of living was low, the wages of a laborer did not provide a decent existence. In most cities the cost of the average rental alone was higher than the total wage earned by the average worker. Workers were forced to live almost anywhere there was a shelter, such as in a barracks, a garret or a factory.

Throughout the cities, bureaucratic control of municipal government restricted improvement of service, so that water systems remained faulty, lighting was inadequate, and pavements were defective. The great mass of city inhabitants had no voice in their government, and the few who did have a voice served personal interests rather than those of the many. A prime example of the corruption was the lack of electric trolley cars in St. Petersburg until 1908, because the real estate owners feared that improved transportation would encourage the moving of city dwellers to the suburbs and thereby depress rents. "Sloth, the product of a long history in centralized autocracy, weakened the initiative and inhibited activity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 309.



Yet the position of the city worker was still better than that of his country cousin. To many who had observed the peasant class before the liberation, and again after the liberation, there was evident lack of improvement in the position of this class. The statesman Andrew Dickson White stated:

A change had indeed been brought about by the emancipation of the serfs, but there was little outward sign of it. The muzhik remained, to all appearance, what he was before: in fact, as our train drew into Petersburg, the peasants, with their sheepskin caftans, cropped hair, and stupid faces, brought back the old impressions so vividly that I seemed not to have been absent a week. The old atmosphere of repression was evident everywhere. I had begun my experience of it under Nicholas I, had seen a more liberal policy under Alexander II, but now found a recurrence of reaction, and everywhere a pressure which deadened all efforts at initiating a better condition of things.<sup>6</sup>

It was impossible for the peasant to free himself from debt because of the imbalance between the wages he earned and his expenditures. His yearly income amounted to an average of \$67.50, while his yearly expenditures amounted to an average of \$79.60.<sup>7</sup>

The third and highest stratum of Russian social structure, the nobility, in 1887, comprised 1.5 per cent of the population.<sup>8</sup> The loss of serfs had reduced many of the

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<sup>6</sup>Andrew D. White, The Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White (New York, 1905), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Harcave, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

nobles to a shabby gentility. They murmured sadly over the bygone days and complained about the decline in morality and the drunkenness of the peasants. Those who prospered did so mostly by grants from the Czar.

The church, which had always been one of the most ennobling forces in Russian history, was made ineffectual because the Czarist regimes had gradually forced it to participate in the repressive actions of the state. The parish priests were expected to report to the representatives of the bishops any violations of obedience to the emperor, and even to reveal the secrets of confession; representatives of the bishops checked on the clergy; the representatives of the state checked on the bishops; and the Holy Synod was under state control.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore the pessimism, commonly attributed to Chekhov, no doubt reflects the stalemate which had been reached in Russian society during the period when he emerged upon the literary scene.<sup>10</sup> The influences that played upon him he considered a great challenge to be overcome; these influences were in no way fortuitous, but were imbedded in Russian life. The following passage from a letter to Suvorin, Philip Rahv calls the "locus classicus" from the standpoint of literary critics and biographers alike--

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>10</sup>Philip Rahv, "The Education of Anton Chekhov," New Republic, CXXXIII (July 18, 1955), 18.

a passage in which Chekhov explains why plebian writers pay the price of their youth for what the gentry were endowed with by nature. The statement is the less Chekhovian for its fleetingly biting tone:

Go ahead and write a story about a young man, the son of a serf, an ex-small shopkeeper, a choir-boy, high school and university student, brought up on respect for rank, kissing priest's hands, and the worship of others ideas, offering thanks for every mouthful of bread, often whipped, going to school without shoes, fighting, torturing animals, fond of dining with rich relatives, playing the hypocrite before God and people without cause, except that consciousness of his own insignificance-- then tell how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself one drop at a time and how he wakes one fine morning to feel that in his veins flows not the blood of a slave, but real human blood.<sup>11</sup>

The formative years of Anton Chekhov were years when Russian reality could not satisfy young men who were alert and inquisitive, and who sought a better life and fruitful occupation. When they could not find these rewards in society, they could not reconcile themselves to the ideals and opinions of society. They felt the emptiness of the social scene and made futile efforts to fill the vacancy. Conscious of their helplessness, unable to find any useful social work, many of the best men became despondent and began to consider themselves superfluous. Some even

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., citing Anton Chekhov, Life and Letters of Anton Tchekhov, translated and edited by S. S. Koteliansky and Philip Tomlinson (London, 1925), pp. 145-146.

committed suicide.<sup>12</sup> During the dark eighties, when the intelligentsia of the country was rudely awakened from its dream of freedom and thrown into the mire of pessimism and when all the meanness and shallowness of the frail human soul sprang forward to take the place of erstwhile bright ideals of liberty, justice, and brotherhood, Chekhov became the reflector of his time.<sup>13</sup> He was destined to show up all the horror of Russian actuality, and to say with unparalleled force to a society suffering from blindness of the soul, "We can not go on living like this."<sup>14</sup>

#### Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp on October 14, 1888. Her youth was spent in a family of hardy pioneering stock headed up by her father, Harold Beauchamp. At the age of fourteen he began his business career as an assistant to his father, Arthur Beauchamp, who was a general merchant and auctioneer. Later Harold became one of the most successful business men in New Zealand. Ultimately, in 1923, he was knighted in recognition of his distinguished public service and pioneering business influence. Katherine's mother was Annie Burnell

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<sup>12</sup>Elaine Elnett, Historic Origin and Social Development of Family Life in Russia (New York, 1926), p. 58.

<sup>13</sup>Bryllion Fagin, "Master of the Gray Short Story," Poet Lore, XXXII (September, 1921), 417.

<sup>14</sup>Bruford, op. cit., p. viii.

Dyer, the daughter of Joseph Dyer, a prosperous pioneer in Australia.<sup>15</sup>

When Katherine was a child her father presented a gruff, dictatorial exterior to his children, though in later years Katherine's sympathy for him was very deep. Alpers depicts Harold Beauchamp: "Unselfcritical, loud and hearty, more demanding than he knew, yet lovably ingenuous, he was the original Stanley Burnell in his daughter's highly unfilial stories--and the 'Daddy' of the uncompleted 'Six Years Later.'"<sup>16</sup> And it was he who helped Katherine in acquiring some of those things which were to enable her to become an artist.

Her mother was considered a snob by some acquaintances, and was troubled with regrets which may have caused her to be prejudicial toward her New Zealand surroundings; these regrets were from having been uprooted and flung into strange surroundings, and, "She had to have babies against her will and to suffer from the illusion of privilege in a self-levelling colony."<sup>17</sup> She was, however, brave and Katherine wrote to a friend on receiving news of her mother's death, "She 'lived' every moment of life more fully and completely than anyone I've ever known--

<sup>15</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Alpers, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

and her gaiety wasn't any less for being 'high courage'--  
courage to meet anything with."<sup>18</sup>

Katherine had three sisters, Vera, Charlotte and Jeanne. Annie's sister, Bell, and her mother, Margaret Mansfield Dyer, were also members of the Beauchamp household. When Katherine was five years old the family moved to the village of Karori, a half-hour's drive from Wellington. The same year Katherine Mansfield's only brother, Leslie Heron, was born. The provincial estate to which the family moved was the setting for the later masterpieces of Katherine Mansfield's work. Harold Beauchamp states in his Reminiscences:

Chesney Wold was quite a farmlet--cows, a couple of horses, pigs and poultry. It was here that Katherine spent some of the formative years of her childhood, which she reconstructed so vividly in many of her stories that I often feel that the five years meant as much to her as they did to my wife and myself.<sup>19</sup>

Katherine entered at Karori State School in 1895 and distinguished herself by being good in arithmetic and atrocious in writing. She was a recluse even at this early age and had only one chum, a native Maori princess named Maata.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 40, citing Harold Beauchamp, Reminiscences and Recollections (New Plymouth, New Zealand, 1937).

<sup>20</sup>Maata is the subject of a novel supposed to have been written by Katherine Mansfield, which was never uncovered. P. A. Lawlor, who wrote The Mystery of Maata (Wellington, 1946), said that he interviewed the woman

She had also begun to become difficult at home; her sole refuge became Granny Dyer, who held Katherine in her mother's stead while Annie voyaged with Harold. By the time Katherine had reached the third year at Karori, she apparently was no longer so atrocious in writing, for she exhibited a slight talent by winning the composition prize with "A Sea Voyage."

In 1898 Harold Beauchamp moved the family back to Wellington, and Katherine, Charlotte, and Vera began attending Wellington Girl's High School in Thorndon. Here Katherine received printed criticism in the high school paper after her story "Enna Blake" appeared in it, and followed that story with "A Happy Christmas Eve"--a story of the indebtedness of the rich to the poor. When she was twelve, Katherine was sent to Miss Swainson's School at Fitzherbert Terrace, and it was here that she began exhibiting critical acuteness and assertiveness. Though she was still under the imposition of adult power, she was undergoing the rage and rebellion of a young, strong individual. She felt stifled and misunderstood at home, quarreled violently with her sisters and, ". . . resented the orthodoxies of her substantial bourgeois life."<sup>21</sup>

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who claimed to be Maata in 1940. She told Lawlor that she had the manuscript in her possession, but did not let him see it. A native's pride in keeping her word to Katherine Mansfield, who had instructed her not to let it be published, was Maata's reason for not giving Lawlor the novel.

<sup>21</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 21.

Though Katherine was barely fifteen in 1903, she made the long-sought break from her home, and set sail for London and Queen's College. At Queen's she discovered her destiny, that of becoming a literary artist. At first she became influenced by the decadents Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, and Paul Verlaine. These were fed to her in large doses by one Professor Rippman, a youthful literary dilettante and a teacher of German. She assumed the nom de plume of Katherine Mansfield, Mansfield her grandmother's maiden name and her own second name, and submitted her first piece of writing to the college magazine in March, 1904, the year of Chekhov's death. It was entitled "Die Ensame--The Lonely One,"<sup>22</sup> and her troublesome literary career and lonely European life were appropriately launched.

Paradoxically the early background for this career could hardly have been a background more suitable to the development of social and economic optimism than that which prevailed in New Zealand during Katherine Mansfield's life there. Abundant signs of physical welfare and vitality showed everywhere. The unusually low infant death rate, the health of the children, the sturdy appearance of both women and men, and the lowest death rate of any country in the world all attested to this vitality.<sup>23</sup> Many outdoor

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<sup>22</sup>Alpers, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>23</sup>J. B. Condliffe, New Zealand in the Making (Chicago, 1930), p. 442.



sports were pursued (the settings and characters of Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories reflect the leisure hours predominated by sea bathing and tennis), and this pursuit of sports, having a high dependence on economic welfare, reveals that adequate food, good housing, and abundant leisure were very common. J. B. Condliffe sums up the high standard of living prevalent in New Zealand:

This multiplicity of sporting facilities is equal proof with the suburban houses and gardens of a more equitable distribution of wealth and leisure than exists in most countries. The average age of marriage is high, girls come to marriage mature and physically strong, the birth-rate is controlled and low; but the infant death rate is so low that the increase in population becomes comparatively high. This economy of human life and energy is of the first importance. It is both cause and effect of the high standard of living consistently placing humanitarian consideration above private gain.<sup>24</sup>

At dawn of the twentieth century there could be drawn no sharper contrast among nations than that between New Zealand, with its optimism of a new democracy, and Russia, with its pessimism of an ancient autocracy. Perhaps some of the most significant differences between Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov may be traced to this fundamental contrast.

Although the families of Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov were both provincial, hers was wealthy and renowned,

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

his poor and obscure. Contrasted to New Zealand's general atmosphere of equality, Russia's feudal atmosphere fostered an actual continuation of serfdom even though the serfs had been freed. Katherine Mansfield's family was one of the most respected families in New Zealand and belonged to the highest socio-economic stratum, even though New Zealand was a self-levelling colony; whereas Chekhov's family was among the lower echelons of Russian social and economic structure. Harold Beauchamp was an important figure in the development of New Zealand. Pavel Chekhov, whose father was a serf, was a small grocery store proprietor who could support his family neither in Taganrog nor in Moscow. Annie Beauchamp was a sensitive woman who was not a native of New Zealand and hated the monotony of her provincial life. Yevgenia Chekhov was from a line of Russian merchants and typified the Russian provincial woman's resignation to her maternal role.

Katherine Mansfield had an extremely advantageous rearing, but she revolted against her family's supervision at an early age and dreamed of the day when she could escape her antipodean "bourgeois" existence. She may have inherited this rebellion from her mother who, it has been shown, felt forced to have babies against her will and voyaged with Harold Beauchamp to escape the domesticity which she felt held her down. Katherine Mansfield fretted, displayed a fierce temper, was a recluse, and fought with her sisters.

She apparently wished to free herself from family ties and did so through the means of her wealthy father. Chekhov, however, worked hard to help support his family, and felt it was part of his duty to do so. His was a close-knit family, and he had a strong allegiance to his brothers and sister, father and mother. He would not have dreamed of an education abroad and had resigned himself early in life to the conditions of his mother Russia.

When Katherine Mansfield arrived at Queen's College, she had graduated from the most exclusive girls' school available to her. London was one of the most glamorous cities of the world, a direct contrast to her homeland, and thousands of miles from Wellington. London and Queen's College were the fulfillment of all her romantic dreams, and in the assertiveness of her new freedom she embraced the art of the literary decadents. She became a free thinker, but one without guidance, and her rebellious nature was further kindled by the bohemian litterati under whose influence she fell.

By contrast Chekhov had gone to public school in a small sea town and had to finance himself while struggling to attend the University of Moscow. Moscow itself was still strongly under the influence of an agrarian culture and was not much different from other Russian provincial towns of the period. Its lack of glamor and its predominantly peasant population presented no illusions of grandeur to a rural boy.

Chekhov remained true to his family, to his class, and to what might be called his homeland.

In these two authors the impetus to write arose from different causes. Katherine Mansfield had been struggling for expression from earliest childhood. Had it not been for her father's wealth, she probably could never have gone abroad and fulfilled her destiny. She was an excellent cellist and had decided to become a professional musician. Her father vetoed this move; and she, therefore, sought expression in literature. She had exhibited no marked talent up to the time of her arrival at Queen's College, but after her introduction into a literary atmosphere, she began the excruciating task of molding herself into a writer. She never achieved fame and full acceptance until her final days, and only then after heartbreaking labor that contributed to her early death.

Chekhov had an inborn knack for telling a story. His early development as a writer came about through an urgent need for money to help support himself and his family. He was first interested in a medical career and turned his whole attention to writing only after he had become successful as a "hack" for the humorous weeklies. He had felt no frustrated urge for what he thought of as artistic self-expression; on the contrary he had arrived at writing rather naturally out of necessity. As a result he wrote easily and rapidly almost from the first. He was reared in a time of

social and economic stagnation and in a discouraging social position that could have offered him very little hope of becoming an artist, and he had early reconciled himself to an unglamorous profession in medicine with the goal of financial security.

## CHAPTER III

### SUBJECT MATTER

#### Range of the Subject Matter of Anton Chekhov

Arising from the formative years, the subject matter of Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov presents a second area of contrast. Chekhov's work exhibits a diversity of subject matter not often found in a short story writer. There is no question that his range is incomparably greater than Katherine Mansfield's; his sympathies were broader, and his acquaintance with the world was more extensive. As a doctor he came into close contact with many different kinds of people and aspects of Russian life. He was not only interested in but active in both the sciences and the humanities. It was said of him that he was constantly and "ravenously gulping down"<sup>1</sup> impressions of life about him. He invited many friends to his home in Melikhovo and was always ready to hobnob with anyone he met, including policemen, midwives, actors, tailors, prisoners, cooks, religious devotees, teachers, prostitutes, landowners, bishops, circus performers, functionaries of all ranks and departments,

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<sup>1</sup>Kornei Chukovsky, "Friend Chekhov," Atlantic, CLXXX (September, 1947), 84.

peasants from northern and southern regions, generals, bathhouse attendants, engineers, horse thieves, monastery novices, merchants, singers, soldiers, watchmakers, piano tuners, firemen, examining judges, deacons, professors, shepherds, and lawyers.<sup>2</sup> The myriad of characters with whom Chekhov deals in his stories might be grouped under the headings which W. H. Bruford lists in Chekhov and His Russia: "The Peasant; The Landowner; The Official Class--Administration, Justice, Police; The Church; The Intelligentsia, Education and The Liberal Professions; and Industry and Commerce, Town Life."<sup>3</sup>

There are, first of all, the peasants, Chekhov's impressive peasants of every kind. They led a gloomy life during Chekhov's time. The abominable conditions of the village life of these lowly people is typified in the story "Peasants."<sup>4</sup> There exists in the village of this tale almost all the foulness that might be called to mind. Filth, coarseness, and poverty are predominant. Moral standards are practically nonexistent. The peasants drink even when they cannot afford the necessities of life, and drinking leads to quarreling and fighting. The communal

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>Bruford, op. cit., p. v.

<sup>4</sup>All stories by Anton Chekhov mentioned in this study are taken from the translations of Constance Garnett, The Tales of Tchekhov, 12 volumes (London, 1918).

open-field farming method breeds cheating and stealing. Much of the peasant's suffering is caused by his profound ignorance. Olga, the self-emancipated country girl who obviously speaks for Chekhov, sums up the character of the peasants of the village:

. . .they were coarse, dishonest, filthy and drunken; they did not live in harmony, but quarrelled continually, because they distrusted and feared and did not respect one another. Who keeps the tavern and makes the people drunken? A peasant. Who wastes and spends on drink the funds of the commune, of the schools, of the church? A peasant. Who stole from his neighbors, set fire to their property, gave false witness at the high court for a bottle of vodka? At the meetings of the Zemstvo and other local bodies, who was the first to fall foul of the peasants? A peasant. . . Yet they were human beings. . . and they had no help and none to whom to look for help.<sup>5</sup>

Another type of village peasant who fared better than his brethren was the rich muzhik. He was a peasant who had become a capitalist, on a small scale, by cheating the other peasants. Gregory Tsybukin in "In the Ravine" is such a muzhik. He had become wealthy by numerous dishonest transactions. The village merchant Dyudya in "Peasant Wives," and Jacob, the innkeeper in "Murder," are other muzhiks who cheated to acquire their wealth. Aspects of peasant life may be seen incidentally in such stories as "The Schoolmistress," the study of a teacher in a peasant village; and "The Wife," a story about one of the few

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<sup>5</sup> Chekhov, "The Peasants," The Witch and Other Stories, Vol. VI, 326.



Chekhov philanthropists who came to the aid of the peasants. Chekhov's dreary pictures show that he well comprehended the peasant's life both from his visits as a physician and from his own family origin.

Most of the Russian landowners in Chekhov's stories are people who have lost their fortunes and their power through the liberation of the serf. These country squires and ladies seldom have enough money to fulfill their wants, and are often the target for ridicule by the very peasants who have been freed from them. The landowner's typical attitude is marked by a lack of initiative and energy. In "At Home" Vera's grandfather sits and plays patience, dozes, eats large meals, and glares at the servants. In "A Trivial Incident" a younger country squire is referred to by the peasants as "the illustrious duffer."<sup>6</sup> He is imposed upon by his servants and gnawed at by loneliness. "Ariadne" displays a decayed bankrupt squire; while in "The Schoolmistress," Khanov, though a man of education and refinement, spends his time wastefully and dies from drink. Nearly all of Chekhov's landowners are in debt. In "The Neighbours" one proprietor is paying 12 per cent on a second mortgage. A few are exceptions to the general rule of indebtedness, such as Alekshin in "Gooseberries" and "About Love," but he prospers only by extremely hard

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<sup>6</sup>Chekhov, "A Trivial Incident," The Chorus Girl and Other Stories, Vol. VIII, 297.

work. In "The Black Monk" another landowner prospers also by concentrated effort.

The landowner leads a life not so much apart as completely above that of the peasants. In "Last of the Mohicans" a shrew of a woman hauls her husband into court to complain of his letting down the family name by mixing with merchants and going shooting with a clerk. An old bore in "At a Country House" speaks of keeping the middle classes in their places. In "On Official Duty" the young magistrate has self-recriminations about the suicide of a peasant and dreams that other peasants are accusing him. But no matter how much the landowner suffers from loss of position, money, and prestige, he feels compelled to cling futilely and pathetically to his noble tradition. In "My Life" a father disowns his son for becoming a house painter. There is a scandal in "A Problem" because a son is dishonest. "The Trousseau" presents a picture of gentlefolk bound by tradition. And Vera in "At Home" is forbidden to speak to common workmen.

The Cherry Orchard is, of course, the classic example of Chekhov's indictment of the landed aristocracy, but his short story "The Princess" offers up a summation of his views of this group. "The Princess" is the story of a lady of nobility who envisions herself a great benefactress. In reality, however, she has done nothing for her fellow man.

In the Russia of Chekhov's time officialdom meant any of the group of people who were employed in a government job. The person might be a Zemstvo doctor, an engineer, a prison guard, a policeman, an army officer, a judge, a prosecutor, etc. There are so many stories, therefore, that deal with the official class that it is difficult to select arbitrarily any number of them and say that they are representative. It will be noted that most of these stories deal rather bluntly with corruption in the official classes. Among the lower grades of government employees may be seen a petty official in "Small Fry," who is attempting to write Easter congratulations to his hated superior in order to win favor. In "The Cattledealers" railway officials are bribed by a cattleman who is shipping his livestock by train. "A Happy Ending" is a story about a railway guard who accepts tips instead of tickets. Doctors and police officials are bribed into issuing a false death certificate in "In the Coach House." In "My Life" the railroad engineer, for lack of sufficient bribes, builds the station-house outside of town. A peasant in "Darkness" thinks a doctor will not get his brother released from a hospital because the peasant cannot pay him enough.

In "The Duel" Laevsky parades his idleness, but is secure in his post as an official in the Ministry of Finance.

In "An Anonymous Story" Orlov's intimates are idle officials. In "Ladies" a director of education must pass over the most suitable candidate because a young man of means has inveigled the wives of various important people into giving him a testimonial. "Anna on the Neck" shows how much a pretty wife can do for the advancement of a most commonplace official. "Ward Number Six" reveals the horror of a mental ward under the supervision of an insensate guard. Cruelty of other prison officials is recalled in "Murder," which reflects Chekhov's trip to the penal colony on Sakhalin. The story "Gusev" shows how soldiers sick with consumption are smuggled on board ship by their superiors just to be gotten rid of. In relation to this type of subject matter it may be noted that Chekhov has among his collection a number of stories dealing with soldiers. The most famous, perhaps, is "The Kiss," which is often included in anthologies of short stories.

Chekhov's doctrine of work might be applied to all officials, as it is to prison guards in a letter to Suvorin on Chekhov's returning from Sakhalin:

. . .the conception of honour goes no further than the "honour of the uniform"--the uniform which serves as an everyday decoration of the prisoners' dock. No, we must work and all the rest may go to the devil. The chief thing is we must be just, and all the rest will be added unto us.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Chekhov, The Life and Letters of Anton Tchekhov, p. 183.

Another subject which Chekhov writes about in his stories is the church. But Chekhov seldom deals with the church itself. There are a few stories like "The Story Without a Title," "The Bishop," "The Black Monk," and "Easter Eve," wherein the plot involves the lives of priests or monks. For the most part, one sees only the prominent influence which the church has upon the Russian people, and such cursory allusions to it abound in many of Chekhov's stories. In most houses there are icons, such as may be found in the house mentioned in "A Troublesome Visitor." There is a profusion of crossing one's self as in "The Darling." Prostration at the altar makes his characters feel better, as it does the boy in "The Steppe" when he falls before the holy image. The crowds at mass are crushing, as in "Easter Eve." These and other examples of the church's part in the lives of every level of Russian society are prominent in Chekhov's work.

A fifth area of Russian life which Chekhov has treated is the intelligentsia. Intelligentsia is a word which, in Russia, has been used to describe educated persons in sympathy with the proletariat, those who share advanced or radical political and social views.<sup>8</sup> Among Chekhov's stories of the intelligentsia, ones about students and teachers are most prominent. The students appear to be

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<sup>8</sup>Bruford, op. cit., p. 142.

quite free thinkers and doers. Chekhov does not condemn them for their actions, but does not condone them either. In "Anyuta" the intellectual youth, a third-year medical student, lives with a twenty-five-year-old mistress. In "A Nervous Breakdown" students are the ones who most often frequent the houses of prostitution. And in "A Dreary Story" the old professor does not condemn them for their actions. Other teachers may be found in such stories as "The Teacher of Literature."

Characterized also as intelligentsia are a lawyer, in "A Woman's Kingdom"; a director of a bank in "An Anonymous Story"; a writer in "Landmarks"; an actor in "Jeune Premier"; and doctors in "Ward Number Six," "The Runaway," "Surgery," and "The Grasshopper." Some of these characters are pseudo-intellectual and others are truly intellectual. The pseudo-intellectuals are the wife and her lovers in "The Grasshopper." The truly intellectual is the tragic Dr. Ragin, in "Ward Number Six."

The final heading listed by Bruford in his categorizing of Chekhov's characters is industry. It has been pointed out that Russia was predominantly agrarian in Chekhov's day, for the industrial revolution reached Russia late. The industry in Russian cities functioned under handicaps, but nevertheless it was an integral part of Russian life. "A Doctor's Visit" and "A Woman's Kingdom" show that Chekhov

was aware of the social problems that came with the growth of industry. "Pechenyeg" is a story about mining, in which the mine owner dupes the miners into working without pay. "The Drunk" displays a rich manufacturer flaunting his power in the face of his employees.

City life and family relations of the worker are the subject matter of a number of stories, too. In some respects, a few of these stories of the family life of the city dweller strike one as being similar to some of Katherine Mansfield's, particularly the stories about children. But not many stories of this type exist in Chekhov's writing. A few examples of child and parent relationships may be seen in "Volodya," "A Father," "The Head of the Family," and "Uncle Vanya."

#### Range of the Subject Matter of Katherine Mansfield

Compared to Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield explored a limited sphere. She had from her childhood been a recluse, and most of the time she lived apart from the world as an adult in order to perfect the literary art with which she was never fully satisfied. Consequently her contacts with people were limited to relationships with relatively small groups. She has, however, within that limitation created stories of incisive meaning. Especially with the group of stories dealing with her childhood background, she has

created a group of characters who continue to live. The range of her subject matter might be drawn under three headings: "Die Ensame," which she was as a young girl in New Zealand and in her early days in London and on the continent; marital and other man-woman relationships which she experienced through a disastrous early marriage, a pregnancy while she was unmarried, and her travels on the continent, separated from her second husband, J. M. Murry; and relationships of children to parents.

As "Die Ensame," Katherine Mansfield was sensitive to the loneliness of others. Many of her stories depict young women who have been deserted in the world by predatory males, and matured women living unfulfilled, solitary lives of loneliness. Among these stories reflecting "Die Ensame" may be found "Frau Fischer," which is almost autobiographical in its treatment of an unmarried pregnant girl.<sup>9</sup> "Je ne Parle Pas Francais" is the story of a girl deserted in Paris by her lover. "The Little Governess" concerns a governess who is traveling across France on a train and is molested by every male she encounters; she is finally stranded and alone in the city. "Miss Brill" spends her days living a part which is not at all what she represents to others; she is

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<sup>9</sup>The short stories by Katherine Mansfield have been taken from the volumes Bliss (New York, 1920); The Doves Nest (London, 1923); The Little Girl (New York, 1924); In A German Pension (New York, 1926); and The Garden Party (London, 1927).



ultimately and cruelly awakened to her loneliness and insignificance. "The Life of Ma Parker" is a story about an old charwoman who has lost her only loved one and who, beaten down by the brutalities of life, seeks only a spot in which she may weep. "Pictures" is a story about a middle-aged actress destitute and about to be evicted from her lodging; not being able to find an acting part, she allows herself to be picked up. In "A Canary" a study is made of a very lonely spinster whose only companion in life is a canary which, itself, ultimately dies and leaves the spinster shrouded completely in loneliness. "The Woman at the Store" is a grim picture of a New Zealand bush country mother turned from a pretty girl into a half-demented hag by loneliness. And "The Tiredness of Rosabel" tells the story of a London shop girl dreaming of love in her lonely flat.

A second group of characters with which Katherine Mansfield is occupied are men and women who are disillusioned or unhappy in their relationships. Among this group may be found such stories as "At Lehmans," a tale about a young girl who is conscious of the misery of a pregnant woman who is about to give birth. The girl is enamored with a young man to whom she is about to fall prey in a secluded storeroom of a cafe. Just as the girl is being seduced, the pregnant woman in a room overhead electrifies her with a piercing scream. This young girl is struck numb

by the sudden recognition of what might happen to her, and repulses her lover. "A Wedding" also depicts a female's revulsion of sex-life. The wife in this story feels she is being attacked by her husband. In "A Dill Pickle" a lonely woman chances to meet her former lover and tries to generate some of her old love for him. His self-centered attitude is, however, the same as it always was, and she abruptly leaves him. "The Man Without A Temperament" tells the story of a husband who lives with his invalid wife, pretending to be patient and understanding, while he practices infidelity. In one of Katherine Mansfield's most praised stories, "Bliss," a young wife in the midst of her first forceful realization of happiness suddenly discovers that her husband is having an affair with her best friend. "Marriage a la Mode" tells of a wife who inhumanly ridicules her husband's love before a group of pretentious artists. The chief character in "The Black Cap" runs away with her lover while her husband reads the newspaper.

Katherine Mansfield's stories of family life are depicted in her New Zealand's stories and are recalled from her childhood experiences. The Burnell family, which is her own, presents the characters of her mother, father, grandmother, sisters, brother, and aunt, along with her neighbors of Chesney Wold days. These stories are considered to be

her real masterpieces. Outstanding among them is "At the Bay," a day in the life of the Burnell family. "Prelude" re-lives Katherine Mansfield's move from Wellington to Karori. "The Garden Party" pictures the afternoon of a party at a New Zealand country house from which a young girl flees to pay her respects to the <sup>wife</sup> mother of a dead hired hand. "Sun and Moon" is the story of a boy and girl who live in an atmosphere of a happy home and sneak downstairs at night to view the festivities of an adult party. "Little Girl" relates how a young daughter is harshly spoken to by her irate father and punished by a spanking. But she recognizes after conveying her hate for him, that he is, after all, a sad and lonely man. "The Voyage" is the story of a girl who is about to set sail on an ocean trip with her grandmother. Lil and Our Else, recurring children in the New Zealand stories, are treated cruelly by their schoolmates and rudely by the frustrated Aunt Beryl in "The Doll's House."

#### Themes in the Subject Matter of Chekhov

It is somewhat apparent from the stories listed as examples of the subject matter of Chekhov that he was deeply conscious of the social evils which existed in Russia during his life. These evils are a dominant presence in his work. Although he took no part in political or social issues and

abstained from positioning himself in respect to parties, his stories bare to the reader a need for reform. He differed from his contemporaries who were men of strong and outspoken political convictions.<sup>10</sup> They preached what specific reforms were to be made in order to improve conditions. Chekhov merely showed what existed, because he himself did not believe that in his lifetime reforms could be effected, so deep were the evils imbedded in Russian society. He loved his fellow man, but seeing no hope for their improvement, he preached indifferentism; indifference to the juggernaut of Russian social and political structure was the only thing which could save a person from being crushed.<sup>11</sup>

Chekhov was by nature "morbidly shy of too demonstrative attitudes, gestures and words."<sup>12</sup> This innate characteristic probably accounts for his failure to take a positive political stance. Nevertheless, one is forced to see in his stories an abhorrence of the Russian system

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<sup>10</sup>They numbered Nicholas Leskov, a reactionary novelist who wrote Cathedral Folk; Nicholas Saltykov, pseudonym N. Shchedrin, who wrote a fierce comment on the life of the provincial nobility in Golovlev Family; Vladimir Korolenko, who wrote Makar's Dream and spent two years in exile in Siberia for his radical political views; and Maxim Gorky, one of the first proletariat literati. Harcave, op. cit., p. 320.

<sup>11</sup>J. Berg Esenwein, "Recorder of Lost Illusions," Lippincott's, XC (September, 1912), 366.

<sup>12</sup>Alexander Kuprin, "To Chekhov's Memory," Reminiscences Of Anton Chekhov (New York, 1921), p. 70.

of government. He pitied men, but he excoriated Russian society.<sup>13</sup> He shunned propaganda, but he went to the very roots of human activity motivated by a social order which was behind the times.

Chekhov's solution to the problems was a doctrine of work, but he seems to despair of its ever becoming a reality. In the tale "An Artist's Story" he argues with the character Lida that the avalanche of inhumanity blocks the path to any sort of reform:

You go to their help with hospitals and schools, but you don't free them from the fetters by that, on the contrary, you bind them in closer bonds, as by introducing new prejudices, you increase the number of their wants, to say nothing of the fact that they've got to pay the Zemstvo for blisters and books, and so toil harder than ever.<sup>14</sup>

One of Chekhov's most famous stories is "Ward Number Six." In this story his antipathy to Russian actuality is most terrifyingly stroked. It is the story of a sensitive intellectual so out of place among his insensitive colleagues, that he is finally remanded to the insane ward of which, ironically, he had once been the head doctor!

Thomas Mann has written:

This story of eighty-seven pages, written in 1892, makes no direct accusations; but it is so frighteningly symbolic of debasement of humanity under the decline of the aristocracy

<sup>13</sup>Esenwein, op. cit., 365.

<sup>14</sup>Chekhov, "The Artist," The Darling and Other Stories, Vol. I, 163.

that young Lenin said to his sister, "When I had finished that story yesterday evening, I found that it positively haunted me. I couldn't stay in my room. I got up and went out. I felt as if I myself were locked up in Ward Number Six."<sup>15</sup>

What could the Russian people do under such circumstances? The answer is nothing. Confusion, inevitable evil, despair, the inability of people to sympathize with one another have reduced existence almost to brute level. Chekhov's heroes are sensitive and, therefore, lost. His antagonists are insensitive and prey upon the sensitive. Chekhov as an artist was deeply conscious of the pains of Russian life, the infinitesimals and pinpricks of everyday life among the animalistic members of his society. He was the prototype of his heroes, smitten daily by the inhumanity of life about him, conscious of but inevitably accepting the misery that existed in the lives of all Russians.

#### Themes in the Subject Matter of Katherine Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield was a person alone in the world, trying to deal with her fellows in affection and candor. Into the world of glitter and pretension she had fled as a girl, seeking an outlet for her expressiveness, and the shock she encountered in the world's sham, she never recovered from. Her theme "Die Ensamé" emerged as dominant

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Mann, "The Stature of Anton Chekhov," New Republic, CXXXII (May 16, 1955), 24.

from the beginning of her career. This theme is the anguish of the lonely person, hopes unfulfilled, expectant, torn by the brambles of the world. "Repeatedly in her hours of despair Miss Mansfield uses the image of a small child, a vulnerable, helpless creature mortally stricken by the brutality of the world. . . ."<sup>16</sup> This child's world is hardly a step removed from that of the sensitive female who is weak, and who is afraid of the insensitive, strong, and predatory male.

In her later years she looked upon New Zealand as a paradise lost, and her life there, reappearing in her memory, became the substance of her finest work. Scenes and little incidents of family life recalled from childhood become her second preoccupation. In the stories already named these matters are constantly recurring. Her deep longing for security and understanding, for love and companionship as associated with family life, are reflected in many of her stories.

#### Significance of the Themes of Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield

What the themes of Chekhov's stories signify is an acceptance of reality developed from his boyhood. From his early rearing and his eye-opening experiences as a boy of a poor and relatively insignificant family, he became

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<sup>16</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 13.

aware of the harshness of life. Later as a struggling writer who had to help support his family and himself as a student, he experienced serious deprivation. As a doctor he saw with an objective eye the realities of a world which was basically bad. His native temperament was passive, and he had inherited from his serf grandfather the attitude of accepting conditions over which there was no control. All these experiences and inherent traits gave him a stable and objective viewpoint, and he was resigned to suffering even while deploring it.

Chekhov was never disillusioned, probably because he never had a chance to develop illusions. What existed he was unable to do anything about. What he did was to present life about him. His immense sympathy for and understanding of others did not get in the way of his perception. He drew Russian life as it existed, with no embellishments and no judgements. The whole of his work reflects his mother Russia. Russia is the central character always haunting the reader.<sup>17</sup> The illusions of the Russian people faded when the freeing of the serfs did not improve conditions. Many characters, like those in Andreyev's "The Wall," battered themselves to death for naught.<sup>18</sup> Things could not be changed. Chekhov saw this and sadly accepted what was inevitable.

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<sup>17</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "Katherine Mansfield," New Statesman and Nation, XXXI (February 2, 1946), 87.

<sup>18</sup>Fagin, op. cit., p. 418.



Because of this passivity Chekhov was accused of lack of feeling. His contemporaries took him to task because he failed to rise up in righteous indignation. This he could not do. He could not abandon his inborn passive nature for soap-box oratory. Not understanding this attitude which was contrary to their outward revolt, his critics mistook his passiveness for a lack of love for his countrymen. Alexander Kuprin, who knew Chekhov, has depicted him as a man somewhat different from the apathetic person he was accused of being:

How mistaken were those who wrote or supposed that he was a man indifferent to public interests. . . . He was tormented and distressed by all of the things which tormented the minds of the best Russians. One had only to see how in those terrible times, when absurd, dark, evil phenomena of our public life were discussed in his presence, he knitted his thick eyebrows, and how martyred his face looked, and what a deep sorrow shone in his beautiful eyes.<sup>19</sup>

In reinforcement of Kuprin's testimony, Chekhov's personal life was filled with philanthropy and kindness. His love for his family and his help to them have already been mentioned. His trip to Sakhalin Island, a penal institution in Siberia, attested to his desire to shed light on the evils of the system of penal servitude that existed in Russia. His gift of a library to his home town of Taganrog revealed his desire to educate the illiterate. His diary and letters are filled with accounts of his benevolence,

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<sup>19</sup>Kuprin, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

generosity, and service:

September 29, 1896--I was at a meeting of the Zemstvo council at Sevpukhavo.

January 10 to February 3, 1897--Busy with the census. I am enumerator of the 16th district, and have to instruct (fifteen) enumerators.

February 22, 1897--I went to Sevpukhavo to an amateur performance in aid of the school at Novossiolkki.

May 24, 1897--I was present at the examination of two schools in Tchirkov.

July 13, 1897--Opening of the school at Novossiolkki which I have had built. The peasants gave me an icon with an inscription. . . .

July 22, 1897--I received a medal for my work on the census.<sup>20</sup>

But even though Chekhov worked hard and displayed high courage and love for his countrymen, he knew that no prolonged help was forthcoming. He realized that the multitude of evils existing in life could not be swept away in a single lifetime. Chekhov might have said, "This is life. It is not good, but there is little anyone can do about it. We must live it as it is. Perhaps tomorrow will be better." It has been said that he had no hopes for the present, but he did not pretend to read the future. In "The Duel" Laevsky, who has been defeated by life, looks out upon the little boat carrying his former antagonist to a ship anchored in the harbor:

"It [the] sea flings the boat back," he thought; "she makes two steps forward and one step back; but the boatmen are stubborn, they work the oars unceasingly, and are not afraid

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<sup>20</sup>Anton Chekhov, The Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov, translated by S. S. Koteliansky and Leonard Woolf (New York, 1948), pp. 229-232.

of the high waves. The boat goes on and on. Now she is out of sight. . . . So it is with life. . . . In the search for truth man makes two steps forward and one step back, but the thirst for truth and stubborn will drive them on and on. And who knows? Perhaps they will reach the real truth at last."<sup>21</sup>

Maybe here can be seen a glimpse of a more inspiring optimism for the generations to come than Chekhov is ordinarily credited with.

The themes in Katherine Mansfield's life signify that she could not, as Chekhov had done, come to terms with life. She had from her childhood fought for her freedom from parental control. She had fled to the glamor of a romantic bohemian world. She had embraced the life of a free-thinker and a free-doer. She had sought from the beginning a romance that did not exist. Then she was brutally brought face to face with reality, and its harshness bewildered and crushed her. She fled from it, constantly seeking higher values that she hoped to discover in her work. She was a slave to her art in an attempt to capture something she could cling to. When she found nothing, she fell back on the memories of her childhood, where there had been the only real security in her life. But her childhood was only a dream she could not recapture. She never found her place in the world.

Katherine Mansfield strove all her life to discover people who were sympathetic. When she failed in her search,

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<sup>21</sup>Chekhov, "The Duel," The Duel and Other Stories, Vol. II, 159.

there was nothing to do but shrink from the coldness and austerity of the world. She hated the falseness of the world and never recognized, as had Chekhov, that the falseness was inevitable. She could not resign herself to it and fought against it until her death. Her sympathy for the people who were hurt by the world's falseness was great, but she was never able to treat these people objectively, to separate them from herself, and many of her stories are thoroughly autobiographical in spirit, even when not in fact.

This peculiarly personal approach to her work explains the fact that, although living in a world like Chekhov's, of transition, changing values, disintegrating orders, she did not adopt social chaos and ugliness as an important theme. Instead she chose to deal with the frail, child-like symbols of herself. Perhaps ignoring themes of a larger scale resulted, in part, from her not feeling any strong ties with a homeland, with a large homogeneous community. She was thousands of miles from New Zealand. The social and political problems arising in Britain--labor strife, slums, depression, imperialism, and even world war--these were not the subjects with which she was strenuously in contact or with which she chose to deal. Her ignoring these subjects reflects in a measure her own preoccupation with herself and her own emotional experience. It is true that a few of her stories deal directly with

social injustice. "The Doll's House" depicts her recognition of the existence of class distinctions. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" shows the victims of a Victorian father's power. "The Garden Party" is another story of the existence of class distinction, but such themes are not numerous in her stories.

Awareness of class distinction was apparent in Katherine Mansfield even as a child. She attempted to break down barriers by having as her only close friend, a Maori native, and by writing a story entitled "A Happy Christmas," which is about the indebtedness of the rich to the poor.<sup>22</sup> She exhibited the same tendency in her embracing of the bohemian element in her college days and early days as a writer. She also had little to do with the wealthy or influential upper class people among her contemporaries. These sustained denials indicate clearly that her hatred of class distinction was a natural characteristic of her romantic, rebellious spirit. But aside from those stories dealing with class distinction, the bulk of her work ignores social and political evils as such.

The basic difference between the themes of Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield stems from one source: Chekhov shows a compromise with life that is the mark of a moral

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<sup>22</sup>Alpers, op. cit., p. 45.

certainty and, therefore, artistic maturity; whereas Katherine Mansfield shows that she never achieved moral certainty and its concomitant, the quality of artistic maturity.<sup>23</sup> She was aware toward the end of her life that she had exhausted her small world of experiences and that she could not go forward as an artist. To do so would have required the compromise with reality which she could not make.<sup>24</sup> She was grasping for a way to effect this compromise at Gurdjieff Institute at Fontainebleau when she died.

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<sup>23</sup>Sam Hynes, "Katherine Mansfield, The Defeat of the Personal," South Atlantic Quarterly, LII (October, 1953), 560.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### HANDLING OF MATERIAL

#### Use of Detail

It is the purpose here to depart from conventional critical procedure slightly and consider certain random items which might easily come under the heading of one of the three or four subdivisions of plot, setting, and character commonly used in literary analysis. For example, the use of detail is a most important comparative feature which would usually fall under the heading of setting, but may also be included under plot and character.

Somerset Maugham in his article "Credo of a Story Teller," gives Chekhov's opinion of detail:

He claimed that a short story should contain nothing that was superfluous. "Everything that has no relation to it must be ruthlessly thrown away," he wrote. "If in the first chapter you say that a gun hung on a wall, in the second or third chapter it must without fail be discharged." That seems sound enough, and sound too is his claim that descriptions of nature should be brief and to the point. He was himself able in a word or two to give the reader a vivid impression of a summer night when the nightingales were singing their heads off, or of the cold brilliance of the boundless steppes under the snows of winter. It was a priceless gift.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Somerset Maugham, "Credo of a Story Teller," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXXI, No. 38 (March 21, 1959), 110.

It is this gift of painting a picture, of evoking the mood of a scene or character with only a stroke that sets Chekhov apart from his predecessors. Chekhov had this advice to give in a letter to his colleague Gorky about an overabundance of detail:

I shall begin by saying you have no self-restraint. You are like a spectator in a theatre who expresses his delight so unreservedly that it prevents himself or the other from listening. . . .as one reads these descriptions one wishes that they were more compact, shorter, say about two or three lines.<sup>2</sup>

Katherine Mansfield could well have been the artist to whom Chekhov was speaking. Often she was guilty of weighing down or cloying the reader with an overabundance of detail. The following is an example from "The Man Without a Temperament" and illustrates the "spectator-in-a-theatre" treatment of detail. The reader tracing the path of the character is overwhelmed by a kaleidoscope of description which cannot adequately be digested:

And he turned and swiftly crossed the verandah into the dim hall with its scarlet plush and gilt furniture--conjurers furniture--its notices of services at the English church, its green baize board with the unclaimed letters climbing the black lattice, huge "presentation" clock that struck the hours on the half-hours, bundles of sticks and umbrellas and sunshades in the clasp of a brown bear, past the two crippled palms, two ancient beggars at the foot of the staircase, up the marble stairs three at a time, past the life-size group on the landing of the

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<sup>2</sup>Anton Chekhov, Letters on the Short Story, edited by Louis Friedland (New York, 1924), pp. 84-85.



stout peasant children with their marble grapes, and along the corridor, with its piled up wreckage of old tin boxes, leather trunks, canvas hold-alls to their room.<sup>3</sup>

What Chekhov might very well have done with Katherine Mansfield's description of a man crossing the verandah and proceeding to the room is simply to say, "He crossed the verandah and went to their room." He would have complained to Katherine Mansfield as he did to Zhirkevich, "Description and description and no action at all."<sup>4</sup> A passage from Chekhov's "Easter Eve" offers an interesting example which may be compared to the foregoing excerpt from "The Man Without a Temperament." Here the character passes from the church into an enclosure of monks' cells, views the cells, and then returns. "I came out of the church. I wanted to have a look at the dead Nikolay, the unknown canticle writer. I walked about the monastery wall where there was a row of monks' cells, peeped into several windows, and, seeing nothing, came back again."<sup>5</sup> This is an arbitrary selection, but is typical of Chekhov's dislike for wordiness.

Katherine Mansfield apprehends nature with the same penchant for extended description as she does indoor scenes. The following example of her occupation with detail comes

<sup>3</sup>Mansfield, "The Man Without a Temperament," Bliss, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>Chekhov, Letters on the Short Story, pp. 84-85.

<sup>5</sup>Chekhov, "Easter Eve," The Bishop and Other Stories, Vol. VII, 64.

at the end of a long metaphoric passage of description and is telling about little pools at the sea shore:

. . .the sunlight seemed to spin like a silver coin dropped into each of the small rock pools. They danced, they quivered, and minute ripples laved the porous shores. Looking down, bending over, each pool was like a lake with pink and blue houses clustered on the shores [*italics mine*].<sup>6</sup>

Here the descriptive detail is pursued even to bending over and looking down. Chekhov would not have sought to capture such minutiae, as he plainly stated in the following passage:

Descriptions of nature must above all be pictorial, so that the reader, reading and closing his eyes, can at once imagine the landscape depicted; but the aggregation of such images as twilight, the sombre light, the pool, the dampness, the silver poplars, the clouded horizon, the sparrows, the distant meadow--that is not a picture, for, however much I try, I can in no way imagine all this as a harmonious whole.<sup>7</sup>

Chekhov was a lover of nature, an outdoorsman, an ardent angler. He was conscious of the beauty of nature everywhere. But in his enthusiasm he very seldom fails to adhere to his principle of carefully selecting the right detail to create the desired impression. Sometimes Chekhov depends entirely upon the reader's past experience of a scene in nature for his desired effect. Nearly everyone has experienced the loveliness of a spring morning. What can an author say about it other than what Chekhov says in

<sup>6</sup>Mansfield, "At the Bay," The Garden Party, pp. 28-29.

<sup>7</sup>Chekhov, Letters on Short Story, p. 74.

the opening of "The Head-Gardener's Story"? "It is extremely pleasant to sit in a garden on an April morning listening to the birds and looking at the flowers which have been carried out into the open air and are basking in the sunshine."<sup>8</sup> What could be added that would not mar the reader's impression of the scene? This is what he meant when he said that the reader might close his eyes and immediately imagine the landscape. This type of description is the kind he admonished Gorky to use when he said:

The descriptions of nature are the work of an artist. . . .frequent personification. . . .makes description somewhat monotonous. . . .sweetish. . . .not clear; beauty and expressiveness are attained only by simplicity. . . .The sun set, It was dark, It began to rain.<sup>9</sup>

Katherine Mansfield in a striking simile describes a lady from "Bliss":

. . .who was taking off the most amusing orange coat with a procession of black monkeys round the hem and up the fronts. . . .And a funnier thing still was that now her coat was off she did look like a very intelligent monkey--who had even made that yellow silk dress out of scraped banana skins. And her amber ear-rings; they were like dangling nuts.<sup>10</sup>

It will be noted that she has dealt with rather minute details. In her work this preciosity is almost standard.

<sup>8</sup> Chekhov, "The Head-Gardener's Story," The Schoolmistress and Other Stories, Vol. IX, 273.

<sup>9</sup> Chekhov, Letters on Short Story, p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> Mansfield, "Bliss," Bliss, p. 123.

Chekhov, as cannot be reiterated too much, ignores minute detail. He achieves his character portraits by drawing general features or actions. Quite often he will in one sentence impart to the reader an insight that cannot be drawn with innumerable descriptive sentences. When, at the end of a brief descriptive passage about the Jew Moiseika in "Ward Number Six," Chekhov says, "This is the Jew Moiseika, an imbecile, who went crazy twenty years ago when his hat factory burned down."<sup>11</sup> More is revealed in that final summary than one would care to take the time to ruminate upon. The implications of Moiseika's character and history are all too clear.

Katherine Mansfield's propensity for drawing the minute is obviously because, first, being a woman, she was more attracted to it. One is aware of a desire in her to reproduce the very fine in the objects about her. This hunting out of superfine detail in her work should not be overlooked in this discussion of the use of detail. Her writing is saturated in it. A prime example is the almost microscopic inspection of an enamel box in "A Cup of Tea":

. . .an exquisite enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a miniature creature stood under a flowery tree and a more minute creature still had her arms round his neck. Her hat, really no larger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons and there

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<sup>11</sup>Chekhov, "Ward Number Six," The Horse-Stealers and Other Stories, Vol. X, 33.

was a pink cloud like a watchful cherub floating above their heads. . . . He took a pencil, leant over the counter, and his pale bloodless fingers crept timidly towards those rosy, flashing ones, as he murmured gently: "If I may venture to point out to madam, the flowers on the little lady's bodice."<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps a second reason for her intense interest in the microscopic might be she looks at the world through the eyes of her child characters. Sun and Moon are fascinated by the microscopic world which is so uniquely a child's own:

Two silver lions with wings had fruit on their backs, and the salt cellars were tiny birds drinking out of basins.<sup>13</sup>

Chekhov's details are not only fewer, but more openly operative in establishing character and scene.

It might be noted that the settings of Katherine Mansfield's stories are predominantly in hotel rooms, drawing rooms, bedrooms, and lobbies. Here the author's proximity to objects and to people allows her unhampered freedom at scrutinizing them. Such settings of reduced scope lend themselves more easily to a high particularization of detail. Chekhov's settings are as varied as his subject matter and range from an isolated steppe to a lunatic ward in a hospital.

Both Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield employ poetic imagery. A typical example from Chekhov may be seen in "Champagne":

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<sup>12</sup>Mansfield, "A Cup of Tea," The Dove's Nest (New York, 1923), p. 52.

<sup>13</sup>Mansfield, "Sun and Moon," Bliss, pp. 208-209.

The two clouds had moved away from the moon and stood at a little distance as though they were whispering about something which the moon must not know.<sup>14</sup>

For the most part, Chekhov does not rely heavily on imagery for descriptiveness.

It has been pointed out by Ian Gordon that Katherine Mansfield has a strong flair for poetry, and among the first critics to note it was Conrad Aiken. Gordon suggests that her stories are not to be read altogether as narratives, that they are written with the resources and intention of lyrical poetry. Like the lyrical poet she conveys the feeling of human situations, and her stories have all the implied emotion of a lyric poem.<sup>15</sup> When she depicts Reggie's emotions in "Mr. and Mrs. Dove," she takes up a position within the character from which she can sense his elation. From this sympathetic position she transforms the ordinary scene into a highly romantic one filled with imagery:

Then he noticed what a top-hole afternoon it was. It had been raining all the morning, late summer rain, warm, heavy, quick, and now the sky was clear, except for a long trail of clouds, like ducklings, sailing over the forest. There was just enough wind to shake the last drops off the trees; one warm star splashed on his hat. The empty road gleamed, the hedges smelt like briar, and how big and bright the hollyhocks glowed in the cottage gardens.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Chekhov, "Champagne," The Schoolmistress, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup>Ian Gordon, Katherine Mansfield (London, 1954), p. 25.

<sup>16</sup>Mansfield, "Mr. and Mrs. Dove," The Garden Party, p. 120.

The summer afternoon is no ordinary afternoon for a boy in love. It takes on the aspects of enchantment.

Ryabovitch, in Chekhov's "The Kiss," experiences a similar elation to Reggie's, but it might be noted that there is a lack of impression dealt with in terms of imagery:

When he went back into the drawing room his heart was beating and his hands were trembling so noticeably that he made haste to hide them behind his back. . . .Something strange was happening to him. . . .His neck, round which soft, fragrant arms had so lately been clasped, seemed to be anointed with oil; on his left cheek near his moustache where the unknown had kissed him there was a faint chilly tingling as from peppermint drops, and the more he rubbed the place the more distinct was the chilly sensation; all over from head to foot he was full of a strange new feeling which grew stronger and stronger. . . .[italics mine].<sup>17</sup>

The strange new feeling that grew stronger and stronger, what was it? The reader does not see what manifestations this feeling takes. Do clouds turn into ducklings, or a drop of water into a star, and does the star sound "pling!"? The kiss on his cheek was not glowing peppermint, it was as from peppermint; and his neck was not anointed in oil, it seemed to be anointed in oil. It appears that Chekhov does not often attempt to convert his characters' experience into sensory impressions. The pervading atmosphere of "The Kiss" is not built up by sensory flashes from within the

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<sup>17</sup>Chekhov, "The Kiss," The Party and Other Stories, Vol. IV, 164-165.

character. The character has, although his cheek tingles, been more or less impassively handled.

Employment of poetic diction, particularly in onomatopoeic effects, is strongly reflected in Katherine Mansfield's stories. She attempts to reproduce the sounds of people, animals, and the inanimate; and she seems infatuated by chirping birds so that each sound has a separate tone and translation: "Sweet" and "missus" sing the canary; "yeep" chirps the sparrow and so on. The sounds of insects, fish, machines, boat whistles, playing cards, musical instruments, and a whole world of audibles pop in and out of her work. She is also given to mimicking the pronunciations of her characters, such as, she carried a "perishall" or there were a "dozzing" at least, ad infinitum.

But the finest poetic quality, probably, which Katherine Mansfield has produced may be found in her metaphorical description. This quality is dealt with at length in Elizabeth Bowen's article, "A Living Writer." Splendid examples abound throughout Katherine Mansfield's writing. A prime example comes from "Daughters of the Late Colonel": "The sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and photographs."<sup>18</sup> One of the oldest subjects in literature, a dawning day, which has forever suffered from trite handling, is here

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<sup>18</sup>Mansfield, "Daughters of the Late Colonel," The Garden Party, p. 112.



surely dealt with originally. One of Katherine Mansfield's greatest achievements was the creating of a prose style that borrowed from poetry. She set the following aim before herself. She would find new expressive qualities, "Perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose. Almost certainly in a kind of special prose."<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that in the years succeeding the setting of such a standard, she achieved it.

#### Point of View

In plotting a story, Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield differ fundamentally. His is more often objective handling of attack; hers is more often subjective. This difference becomes apparent when the two stories "The Steppe" and "Prelude" are compared. Both of these stories deal with the same subject, the moving of a child to a new home. "The Steppe" reveals Chekhov's method of looking at his subject matter from an external position and substantiates his statement, "Subjectivity is a terrible thing. It is bad alone, that it reveals the author's hands and feet."<sup>20</sup> He is unobtrusive, but at hand as the author from the beginning. This kind of approach is quite usual with him. "The Steppe" begins with a simple statement:

Early one morning in July a shabby covered chaise, one of those antediluvian chaises without springs in which no one travels in Russia

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<sup>19</sup>Gordon, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>20</sup>Chekhov, Personal Papers of Anton Chekhov, p. 121.

nowadays, except merchants' clerks, dealers and the less well-to-do among priests, drove out of N., the province of Z., and rumbled noisily along the posting track.<sup>21</sup>

In the next paragraph he continues to display the reserve common in most of his descriptions. He passes no value judgement by implication or otherwise:

Two inhabitants of N. were sitting in the chaise; they were a merchant of N. called Ivan Ivanivitch Kuzmitchov, a man with a shaven face, wearing glasses and a straw hat, more like a government clerk than a merchant. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Katherine Mansfield in "Prelude" takes up a position not on the outside observing, but on the inside, as if she were in the story herself:

There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy. When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled; the grandmother's lap was full and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance. Isabel, very superior, was perched beside the new handy man on the driver's seat.<sup>23</sup>

By stating, "Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance," Katherine Mansfield obviously reflects the thinking of someone about Linda. It implies instantly a value judgement on Linda, and the reader immediately starts casting about for someone to attach it to. He very soon feels that it is the author by way of Kezia--a grown up Kezia who is remembering and

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<sup>21</sup>Chekhov, "The Steppe," The Bishop and Other Stories, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Mansfield, "Prelude," p. 1.

judging her mother, remembering and laying bare her old feelings, remembering and fitting into a pattern the emotions of this childhood episode.

Pat is introduced quite casually, as if by accident, but at the same time Katherine Mansfield intimates a number of things: he is newly hired, will drive the buggy, is good with children, and is Irish.<sup>24</sup> From this introduction the author shifts to the attitude of Linda toward her children and their bewilderment:

Lottie and Kezia stood on the patch of lawn just inside the gate all ready for the fray in their coats with brass anchor buttons and little round caps with battleship ribbons. Hand in hand, they stared with round solemn eyes, first at the absolute necessities and then at their mother.

"We shall simply have to leave them. That is all. We shall simply have to cast them off," said Linda Burnell. A strange little laugh flew from her lips; she leaned back against the buttoned leather cushions and shut her eyes, her lips trembling with laughter.<sup>25</sup>

Unpredictably, the author moves from one character's mind to another's, now to Linda's, now to Kezia's, now to her own, yet in a very detached, observing way, and the reader, treated from the beginning as someone who already knows the scene and people well, is tricked into familiarity with them before he has time to feel lost.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Alpers, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>25</sup>Mansfield, "Prelude," pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup>Alpers, op. cit., p. 216.

This subtle shifting of point of view to introduce several characters within the confines of a single sentence is revealed in the foregoing paragraph and also in "Daughters of the Late Colonel." One scene pictures the sisters discussing the maid, Kate, and reveals their envy of the girl's youth and her independent manner and whether or not she should be kept on. Then they ring for her:

And proud young Kate, the enchanted princess came in to see what the old tabbies wanted now.<sup>27</sup>

In a few words the viewpoint has been shifted from the two sisters to that of the maid, who is resentful that they have rung twice.

In Katherine Mansfield's stories straightforward chronological narration is seldom employed. She alternates between present and past time and sometimes future. Chekhov favors the chronological progression and slips easily over a period of days, months or years in a single phrase of summary:

In May the Laptevs moved to a country villa at Sokolniki. By that time Yulia was expecting a baby.

In the next sentence the reader has been projected forward a year:

More than a year had passed. Yulia and Yartsev were lying on the grass at Sokolniki not far from the embankment of the Yaroslav railway. . . .<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Mansfield, "Daughters of the Late Colonel," p. 88.

<sup>28</sup>Chekhov, "Three Years," The Darling and Other Stories, p. 274.

Sometimes the period of time which has elapsed is not indicated:

One day after dinner he ran breathless  
into the lodge and said: "Go along, your  
sister has come."  
I went out. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Most commonly, however, the reader is carried forward in a time sequence that leaps no more than a day or so.

Katherine Mansfield's often bewildering involvement with time comes from her employing the formal flashback and semi-stream of consciousness technique. Sylvia Berkman comments as follows on this aspect of her work: "By means of these devices Miss Mansfield can so order her elements that her immediate situations exist intact; past time and future are strained through the present with the resultant high concentration of material."<sup>30</sup> "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" is an excellent example of the liberties Katherine Mansfield characteristically takes with chronological order. The story opens with two women discussing what is to be done with the effects of their dead father:

Do you think father would mind if we gave his  
top hat to the porter?<sup>31</sup>

From this introduction the story is a progression of shifts in time. From the opening lines of present tense the story

<sup>29</sup>Chekhov, "My Life," The Peasants, p. 179.

<sup>30</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>31</sup>Mansfield, "Daughters of the Late Colonel," p. 83.

shifts immediately to the past tense and from there changes tense almost with the introduction of each new character. What this radical changing of tense and preoccupation with time seem to indicate is that the two sisters have become victims of time. Their youths have been spent in attending their father, and not noticing, they have become old maids. The shifting of tense spans the lives of the two daughters seen through their eyes in the present. After the progression of shifts, the story returns through a kind of stream of consciousness to the present where it ends:

If mother had lived, might they have married?<sup>32</sup>

This shuttling of tense is especially notable in Katherine Mansfield's later stories. Through such variations character may be unfolded as well as plot. In "Prelude" and "At the Bay," the characters have inside existence in different tenses. Stanley Burnell, who is usually effervescent, energetic, and outgoing, lives in the present and thinks of the present; so does old Mrs. Fairfield; but Linda lives in the past; and Beryl lives in the future; of course the children's world is always the present.

Since Chekhov's attack was external he had to take the reader from the outer aspects of his subject to the inner. He effected this transition by infinitesimal touches which,

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

at first, hardly arrest the reader's attention. These transactions take place along a narrative surface with increasing frequency, so that before long the reader has departed from his straight and narrow way and has begun a submergence into the character's true emotion. In "The Lady and the Dog," the surface line is the central character's attitude toward his affair with a lady as being trivial and a passing fancy; the submergence is his overwhelming and all-pervading love for her.

Another more obvious difference in the plotting of Katherine Mansfield's stories and in Chekhov's is the use of the surprise ending, the twist, the punch line. Chekhov has employed this device in only a few of his stories, but Katherine Mansfield has very frequently turned her stories on a reversal. This reversal may be seen in such stories as "Bliss," "Pictures," "Feuille D'Album," "The Little Governess," "The Woman at the Store," "Mr. Reginald Peacock's Day," "A Dill Pickle," and others. Although Katherine Mansfield's stories do contain humor, these reversals are, for the most part, void of humor. One example from the stories above is the grim tale of "The Woman at the Store." This story moves against a background of pity for a hag of a woman who has lost her beauty and youth in the desolate New Zealand bush. She recounts to three prospectors how often her husband leaves her and her

child alone while he takes extended trips in to civilization. The husband is the cause for her misery. One of the prospectors decides to comfort the mother, and the other two have a roaring laugh behind his back when the woman and their partner retire together for the evening. Up to this point the little girl has displayed a passion for drawing lewd pictures. Her mother has rapped the girl's head and given her a stern admonition after the girl says, "Mumma. . . . Now I'm going to draw them what you told me I never was to--now I am."<sup>33</sup> When the other two prospectors prepare for sleep, the girl, out of spite, draws the picture saying, "Now I done it ter spite Mumma. . . ." <sup>34</sup>

The child had drawn a picture of a woman shooting a man with a rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in.

In other examples of reversal of ending, the reversal underscores the irony. In "The Little Governess" an ancient white-haired old man, who has saved a young girl from predatory males and has comforted her like a father, lures her into his apartment and attacks her! Irony is an important element in Katherine Mansfield's art and informs the central meaning in many stories.

Chekhov is not interested in the surprise ending type of narrative so much as Katherine Mansfield, and when the

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<sup>33</sup>Mansfield, "The Woman at the Store," The Little Girl, p. 68.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



touch of irony is presented by Chekhov it is not the principal point of the story but an accessory, a part of life which is ridiculous but nevertheless true. When one does see the surprise ending story it is treated humorously, almost farcically. In "A Story Without a Title" Chekhov has written a tale that must have been the type of funny story that endeared him to the ordinary Russian reader. It is the story of a Father Superior who goes to the city to save souls. When he comes back to the monastery after an extended stay, he relates with words of hell-fire and brimstone the evil that existed there. It ends:

After describing all the charms of the devil, the beauty of evil, and the fascinating grace of the dreadful female form, the old man cursed the devil, turned and shut himself up in his cell.

When he came out of his cell in the morning there was not a monk left in the monastery: they had all fled to town.<sup>35</sup>

#### Rendering of Character

In contrasting the rendering of character, Katherine Mansfield reveals hers indirectly, subversively. Chekhov reveals character directly as well as indirectly. He shows the reader as well as tells the reader. For example, he begins to draw Kalashnikov in "The Horse-Stealers" by implication:

Kalashnikov had the dignified manners of a sedate and sensitive man. He spoke weightily,

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<sup>35</sup>Chekhov, "A Story Without a Title," The Horse-Stealers, p. 194.

and made the sign of the cross over his mouth every time he yawned. . . .<sup>36</sup>

This description may imply numerous things about Kalashnikov. At any rate he certainly seems an absurdly well-mannered man. But he does not develop in such a manner:

. . .and no one supposed that he was a thief. . . had already been twice to prison. . .sentenced. . . to exile in Siberia, and bought off by his brother and uncle, who were as great thieves and rogues as he was.<sup>37</sup>

When Chekhov has completed this brief descriptive passage the reader not only sees the sham but hears about it directly. He also sees that his acting is just a facet of his despicable nature. Chekhov has shown the exterior of Kalashnikov and then has told us the interior.

Katherine Mansfield treating Kalashnikov might have continued the length of the story with indirect revelation of his character. She would have shown him, but she would not have told the reader he was evil. He would have continued to develop like Harry in "The Man Without a Temperament," until the very end of the story. Harry acts very gallant, the perfect gentleman, and has not been said to be anything else. But the reader knows that he is a despicable cad, although Katherine Mansfield never says so.

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<sup>36</sup>Chekhov, "The Horse-Stealers," p. 15.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

This presentation of character by each author follows a distinct pattern. The pattern in Katherine Mansfield's stories is that the reader learns what people think, say, and do. In Chekhov's stories it is what they do, say, and think, plus a direct estimate by the author. "A Married Man's Story" by Katherine Mansfield begins by presenting the thoughts of the husband; then his thoughts are followed by his speech, and then, following his speech, the action that is the background for his present position is presented. In many of Katherine Mansfield's stories the action takes place within the character's mind. In Chekhov's "A Classical Student," Vanya first sets off for his examination and is quickly returned; then he speaks with his mother about failing; then he reflects upon his failing. Chekhov estimates the situation and says that it was decided by the parents to send him into business.

What the handling of subject matter of Chekhov and of Katherine Mansfield indicates is what Sylvia Berkman has pointed out. Sudden spontaneity determines Katherine Mansfield's approach to fiction. Her stories reflect the qualities of her own temperament, a sharp nervous intensity--life, ". . .viewed through the intensifying glass of her own vision."<sup>38</sup> Her characters are indistinguishable from herself in that they all possess her imaginative perception.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

Chekhov's approach is determined by a certain measured and emotional restraint. The warm humanity of Chekhov does not soften his work, but the puzzled irony and the lightening touch of humor create a medium capable of subtle modulation.<sup>40</sup>

A final contrasting feature of the two authors' work may be seen in the handling of antecedent action. Chekhov prepares the reader for subsequent action in the story by relating purely expository information about the character from the outset. Katherine Mansfield sets up her people and situations by revealing in flashbacks the action which has occurred prior to the introduction of the character.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

## CHAPTER V

### PERSONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Some critics have attempted to deduce from Chekhov's writing a definite philosophy. Invariably as soon as they reach a conclusion, they must confront some glaring inconsistency in their theses. Chekhov himself was unable to formulate a consistent or extensive philosophy. Ivan Bunin, quoting Chekhov, reveals Chekhov's indecisiveness concerning immortality:

"It's a superstition, and any superstition is awful. One should think clearly and courageously. One day we must discuss it all thoroughly, you and I. I'll prove to you, like two and two make four, that immortality is nonsense."

But more than once he said the opposite, even more firmly: "It's quite impossible that we should disappear without a trace. Of course we live after death! Immortality is a fact. Just wait, I'll prove it to you."<sup>1</sup>

What Chekhov seems to be saying generally, in his stories, he boiled down into a few words in letters to Pleshcheyev. One excerpt reads:

I don't know what this ideal life is, just as it is unknown to all of us. We all know what a dishonest deed is, but who has looked upon the face of honor? I shall keep to the truth that is nearest to my heart and which has been

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63. <sup>1</sup>Ivan Bunin, "Chekhov," Atlantic, CLXXXVIII (July, 1951),

tested by men stronger and wiser than I am. This truth is the absolute freedom of man, freedom from oppression, from prejudices, ignorance, passions, etc.<sup>2</sup>

He writes again to Pleshcheyev a few months later:

My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love and the most absolute freedom--freedom from violence and lying, whatever forms they may take.<sup>3</sup>

W. H. Bruford has pointed out that Chekhov was an agnostic, but his very agnosticism made him aware of his shortcomings as a philosopher: "No one [more than the agnostic] has a sharper sense that all things are mysterious."<sup>4</sup> However much Chekhov turned against religion, he was attracted to it. One finds Chekhov's understanding of the monk in "Easter Eve" difficult to be an expression of a man who did not have a religious heart. Ieronim the monk has lost his beloved fellow and deacon, Nikolay, and mourns for him, but cannot go to Easter Eve Mass because he must work the ferry:

I could fancy Ieronim standing meekly somewhere by the wall, bending forward and hungrily drinking in the beauty of the holy phrase. All of this that glided by the ears of the people standing by me he would have eagerly drunk in with his delicately sensitive soul, and would have been spell-bound

<sup>2</sup>Chekhov, Personal Papers, pp. 150-151.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>4</sup>Bruford, op. cit., p. 204, citing O. Elton, "Chekhov," The Taylorian Lecture (Oxford, 1929).

to ecstasy, to holding his breath, and there would not have been a man happier than he in all the church. Now he was plying to and fro over the dark river and grieving for his dead friend and brother. . . .

I came out of the church. I wanted to have a look at the dead Nikolay, the unknown canticle writer. I walked about the monastery wall, where there was a row of cells, peeped into several windows, and seeing nothing, came back again. I do not regret now that I did not see Nikolay; God knows, perhaps if I had seen him I should have lost the picture my imagination paints for me now. I imagine that lovable poetical figure, solitary and not understood, who went out at nights to call to Ieronim over the water, and filled with flowers, stars and sunbeams, as a pale timid man with soft mild melancholy features. His eyes must have shone, not only with intelligence but with tenderness and that hardly restrained childlike enthusiasm which I could hear in Ieronim's voice when he quoted to me passages from the hymns.<sup>5</sup>

Though scientific study had created doubt in Chekhov, the religion of his old Russia worked upon his heart and upon his imagination. One sees the pull of it again in "The Bishop," who was so strong in religious spirit, and in "The Student" as he thought:

Truth and beauty which had guided human life there in the garden and in the yard of the high priest had continued without interruption to this day, and had always been the chief thing in human life and in all earthly life, indeed. . . .<sup>6</sup>

There is an awareness in Chekhov that something is lacking, something to which he can cling. Perhaps that is why so much of his work is shrouded in sadness. Much of his gray

<sup>5</sup>Chekhov, "Easter Eve," The Bishop, pp. 64-65.

<sup>6</sup>Chekhov, "The Student," The Witch, p. 176.

outlook is, of course, accounted for by his reflecting upon the state of Russia; but even after he began to take a little more cheerful view of Russia's prospects his work lacked a central religious orientation. The pathos of this lack can be felt in the following passage from "In the Ravine." Anisim says:

There is no God, anyway, you know, mamma, so what considering can there be?

Perhaps there is a God, only there is no faith. When I was married I was not myself. . . . and while I was being married I thought all the time there was a God! But when I left the church it was nothing. . . . Father does not believe in God either.

The elder does not believe in God either. . . . And the clerk and the deacon too. . . . You can go about the whole day and not meet one man with a conscience. And the whole reason is that they do not know whether there is a God or not. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps not knowing whether there is a God does not fully account for Chekhov's sense of isolation in his work, but perhaps it does account for the isolation of his characters in their transactions with one another. The characters are hardly ever quite able to gain sympathy from another character or to be sympathetic themselves. In "Misery" old Iona, whose son has died, and who can find no one to whom he can express his sorrow, ends by telling his tale of woe to his little horse. Iona seeks a sharer of his misery, but all ears are deaf. Mirsky writes that perhaps no other writer excels Chekhov in conveying the mutual

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<sup>7</sup>Chekhov, "In the Ravine," The Witch, pp. 201-202.



unsurpassable isolation of human beings, the impossibility of their understanding each other.<sup>8</sup> The idea forms the core of almost every one of his stories.

Katherine Mansfield was also an agnostic. She did not, however, have that touch of the Russian resignation in her character. On the contrary, she had a rather dominating personality and from her New Zealand environment had absorbed plenty of pioneering zest: She was a fighter, and fought every inch of her difficult way. When she was finally beaten down by the persistence of her illness, she fabricated a kind of mystic faith, though obviously a misdirected one.<sup>9</sup>

She once wrote to J. M. Murry:

My philosophy is the defeat of the personal. There is no God or help or Heaven or help of any kind, but love.<sup>10</sup>

Later, in another letter she added an explanation of her philosophy:

It seems to me there is a great change come over this world since people like us believed in God: God is now gone for all of us. Yet we must believe and not only that, we must carry our weakness and our sin and our devilishness to somebody. I don't mean in a bad abasing way. But we must feel that we "are known," that our hearts are known as God knew us. Therefore, love today between "lovers" has to be not only human but divine.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>D. S. Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature (New York, 1926), pp. 85-86.

<sup>9</sup>Harper, op. cit., 378.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

This notion proved a frail substitute, for in a few days she wrote again:

I wish there was a God. I am longing to praise him, thank you.<sup>12</sup>

Katherine Mansfield's conception was that we all must be as children to enter the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>13</sup> Along with her rapturous embrace of the world in child-like love, however, there was a revulsion--a revulsion from a world in which the child could not feel secure. Over and again one sees the image of her in her children, a vulnerable, helpless creature beaten down by the world and unable to find companions who would deal with her as she did with them. Our Else and Lil are such creatures.

Although Katherine Mansfield's and Chekhov's views are not incompatible and although they both deal with the sensitive soul in an unresponsive world, there is in them a differing conception of life. Sylvia Berkman states that Chekhov, having formulated the view, "We shall not play the charlatan, and we will declare frankly that nothing is clear in this world,"<sup>14</sup> apparently never varied from this attitude. "Only fools and charlatans understand everything."<sup>15</sup> In the total pattern of Chekhov's work, life remains an enigma. Life is beyond all human understanding. One must resign himself to all of its bewilderment and frustration,

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>13</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

accept these with as much compassion as one can, and do one's work. In Katherine Mansfield there is revealed, the total pattern traced, a sort of confirmed idealism. She undertakes the struggle for the rich possibilities apparent in life, a goal which would give her peace and happiness. But constantly lying across her path are the brambles and thorns of life, deterrents to her realizing her goal. These deterrents create despair.

## CHAPTER VI

### LITERARY INFLUENCE

Both Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov for some time have been recognized as artists who helped bring to its peak of cultivation the art form of the short story. Their positions of greatness are secure as an avant garde of a more modern form notable for its theme of frustration and isolation. Yet, vital interest in these two writers has begun to wane. The drought of publications concerning either of them is marked. From 1955 to the present there has been practically no critical notice taken of Chekhov's stories or his life. Katherine Mansfield has likewise begun to disappear from the public eye, and Anthony Alper's biography, published in 1953, may become her epitaph.

The reason for dismissing both authors in this day is not difficult to understand. Never before has it been so important for literary artists to identify themselves with ideologies; and Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield avoided dogma which might be adopted and defended. In Russia artists contemporary with Chekhov, but definitely inferior to him, are being lauded for their open abhorrence of the old czarist system. But Chekhov, who ranks no less among the great Russians than Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and

Gogol, has been entombed along with others who failed to align themselves with forces of rebellion. Katherine Mansfield, whose minor masterpieces have outlived the adverse criticism of Kay Boyle, Louis Kronenberger, and George Stevens, has had more written about her tempestuous personal life than about her "poetry in prose," and now is viewed primarily as a writer who pioneered in the development of the modern short story.

The size and range of Chekhov's and Katherine Mansfield's international literary reputation must be taken into consideration when evaluating these writers today. Chekhov was widely read in Russia and in the English-speaking world. Katherine Mansfield has been read chiefly by people who speak her own tongue. Chekhov's first fame as a writer came from the common class. In Russia he has always been considered a lowbrow writer. The self-conscious intellectual was always cool to him. The highbrows of fifty years ago either affected to despise him or really did. His real stronghold was among the honest Philistines in the street.

Chekhov has become in Russia a reflection of a mood that dominated the period in which he lived. The period during which he wrote is known as Chekhovskoe nastroenie-- the Chekhov state of mind.<sup>1</sup> When it is realized that for

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<sup>1</sup>"The political atmosphere of the average man of the intelligentsia (as distinct from the active members of the parties) may be summed up in Chekhov's dream that 'perhaps

the Russian reader, Chekhov is indissolubly associated with his age, it becomes easier to see why some Russians do not share the unbounded admiration for him that is found in the West. He is the expression of a stage of the past, of which the Russian people are not proud--the stage largely responsible for one of the greatest shames in Russian history: the collapse of the intelligentsia in the black days following Russia's defeat in World War I. There can be no doubt, however, of Chekhov's greatness as a spokesman of his age and its complexities. Whatever position he holds among the greatest Russian writers, he achieved in full that which it was in him to achieve. There were no lost possibilities in him. This, perhaps, cannot be said of some of the other Russian masters.

Even so, Chekhov's direct influence on Russian literature has not been important. The success of his short stories contributed to the great popularity of that form, which became predominant after his death. Gorky, Kuprin, and Bunin looked to him as the master, but none can be recognized as his pupil. Certainly no Russian learned his art of constructing stories. Some of the younger writers began before the revolution to try to imitate

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in two or three hundred years we shall have a constitution.' This period is the age of Chekhov, and the dominant mood of his work is that which dominates the period." D. S. Mirsky, Modern Russian Literature (London, 1925), pp. 84-85.

him, but they soon defected. Of the artists who succeeded Chekhov, none has captured the secret of his narrative art. The Gorky-Andreyev school, which lived only from 1900 to 1910, owed him for bringing into prominence the short story form which they adopted. But in artistic economy, avoidance of empty spaces, care to place equal expressiveness and significance within every portion of the story, they failed to measure up to him, and Chekhov remained for them the unattainable ideal. His influence on the Znanie [knowledge] school of fiction, noted for its tendentious characteristics, is seldom more than superficial.

Among the works of Kuprin, Chekhov seems to be reflected in a novel, The Duel, one of Kuprin's best works, which concerns a sensitive young man who is constantly being wounded by the coarseness of life. Its point of view is rather that of the Chekhovian intellectual. But Kuprin was attracted to the Western type of story, which was based on action and strong situations. He loved intrigue and did not shun sensationalism.

Ivan Bunin's literary ancestors were Chekhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Goncharov. His lyrical stories went back to the tradition of Chekhov, but ultimately the lyrical element grew so that it burst the bonds of that strong restraint which makes it powerful. The Symbolist Annesky is also akin to Chekhov, because he finds his material in the

pinpricks and infinitesimals of life; but few readers feel themselves capable of the creative effort required to read his poetry. Another Symbolist, Blok, has in his poem "Nightingale Garden" been reminiscent of the story by Chekhov, "My Life," which itself is symbolical. But here the similarity between them ends. Tefy, the pseudonym of N. A. Buchinsky, is a disciple of Chekhov in that her humor is delicate and has little crude or coarse about it. But since she wrote for satirical journals whose careers were cut short because of government suppression, she was not afforded much audience.

Perhaps Chekhov's greatest Russian followers came from among the playwrights; but even here the non-dramatic, psychological, and ultra-realistic school of Chekhov was dominant for only a short time. The attempts to put a strong social meaning into Chekhov's framework did not bring any lasting success. By 1910 Chekhovian realism, although not his plays themselves, was quite dead. Chekhov has become a thing of the past in Russia, even remoter than Gogol and Leskov. Today his authority resides in the common people of Russia rather than in its writers. His high position among the top echelon of Russian writers remains unchallenged by anyone. Mirsky remarks, "But he is a classic who has been temporarily shelved."<sup>2</sup> Russian fiction is said to be free today from any trace of his influence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>D. S. Mirsky, Contemporary Russian Literature (New York, 1926), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



In England, where he was introduced primarily through the efforts of J. M. Murry, his works were given little notice by the common reader. They became the special property of the intellectuals and in the Chekhovian cults of England, France and America, Chekhov found his most devoted and enthusiastic admirers. J. M. Murry placed Chekhov among such English literary company as Shakespeare and Keats: "Always I found myself driven back to the pure poets--to Shakespeare pre-eminently, to Keats, and in our own day Anton Chekhov."<sup>4</sup> However, Chekhov's work found no consistent imitators. There were numerous artists influenced by him, but none of them, as had not the Russians, fully captured the secret of his narrative art: Writers such as Virginia Woolf, who spoke of having been bewildered by her first reading of Chekhov; William Gerhardt, a short-story writer and himself a biographer of Chekhov whose stories resemble those of the Russian; Sinclair Lewis, who exposed the vulgarity of success; Sherwood Anderson, whose criticisms were generous and whose own stories bear a striking resemblance to Chekhov's in his compassion for defeated people; John Galsworthy and Granville Barker, playwrights, who were exponents of naturalism; and numerous others.

In John Clare and Other Studies, Murry points out why so few writers had succeeded in imitating Chekhov:

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<sup>4</sup>F. A. Lea, The Life of John Middleton Murry (New York, 1960), p. 127.

We catch a glimpse of Chekhov's secret. We cannot know it wholly: if we did, we should be like him, and to be like him would be far in advance of what we are. But in so far as we do understand what he wrote and was, and have a sense of the simple unity of his seeing and his being, we are not surprised that Tchekhov's [sic] method has found so few followers, nor do we wonder why the one conspicuous attempt to imitate him (in Mr. Shaw's Heartbreak House) is merely a revelation of a strange insensibility in Mr. Shaw. . . .<sup>5</sup>

It might be assumed from this passage that the very genius of Chekhov made him fade from view before his literary light had illuminated the scene. Other literary geniuses have defied imitation, but they are as much subjects of critical scrutiny today as they were during their own time-- Shakespeare, to wit. But Murry himself does not attempt to compare the greatness of Chekhov with that of Shakespeare. What Murry is saying is that Chekhov's art is the mystery of simplicity, and that this simplicity has not been duplicated. Obviously Murry played a large part in personally influencing his wife, Katherine Mansfield, in her admiration of Chekhov.

The Russians viewed Chekhov with understanding, but the English sometimes viewed him with bewilderment. In order to understand what one reads one must have something in common with what the author is attempting to convey. With Chekhov, as with any foreign writer, it is hard to feel at home without learning something about the author's world. For English emulators the differences in interpretation

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<sup>5</sup>J. M. Murry, John Clare and Other Studies (London, 1950), p. 30.

proved, as did the mystery of simplicity, a barrier to reading with complete sensitivity and to adopting with approximation the form of Chekhov's stories. Otherwise, the cult of Chekhov may have become as influential in English literature as almost any which has been formed. It was felt that only an intellectual could understand Chekhov, and even among the intellectuals opinions were divergent. In Russia he had started as a comic writer, he was appreciated by the common people, he was among people of his own kind, and the intellectuals in Russia, therefore, found nothing so incomprehensible about his writing. In fact, his simplicity of thought and expression were at once recognized as a directness comparable with Pushkin's.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all the differences in interpretation, few have disputed Chekhov's universal claim to a place among the major writers of the nineteenth century. In comparing the size of a Tolstoy novel to the brevity of a Chekhov story, Bruford has quoted Thomas Mann as saying, "Genius can be bounded in a nutshell and yet embrace the whole fullness of life."<sup>7</sup> Chekhov has established himself not as an author who enjoyed a great influence, but as a prophet who foretells a more subtle development of the short story with taste, restraint, and complete naturalness.

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<sup>6</sup>W. H. Bruford, Anton Chekhov (New York, 1951), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

Katherine Mansfield is not a writer of magnitude who dealt with passion, pathos, comedy or robust adventure, but her position in literature is, although a minor one, secure. It is assured because her later stories so surely stand the test of repeated encounters. This observation was made by Sylvia Berkman in 1951, twenty-five years after George Stevens had written quite contrarily, "They [her stories] appear as tours de force, perfectly designed to arouse a particular response, and a response of fifteen years earlier cannot be felt again."<sup>8</sup> Stevens also said, ". . .her young women who thought it was exciting to make batiks and have tea in Bloomsbury, seem as far away as Amelia Osborne."<sup>9</sup>

How incorrectly Stevens had predicted a fate for Katherine Mansfield's stories! For Raoul Duquette, Constantia and Josephine, Linda and Stanley Burnell, granny and the children of New Zealand, and Miss Ada Moss possess a vitality seldom encountered in the sphere of the short story, a vitality no less strong for the years that have elapsed since its introduction.

It would be difficult to point out the effect upon the trend of literature produced by Katherine Mansfield's stories. Perhaps it is arbitrary to single out any

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<sup>8</sup>George Stevens, "On Second Thought," Saturday Review, XVI (October 2, 1937), 11.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

individual or individuals who may have stood at the head of the stream of development that the short story has run in the last fifty years, but Katherine Mansfield would not be the least among such figures as James Joyce, Sean O'Faolain, A. E. Coppard, and Sherwood Anderson, whose influences have in turn extended to Dorothy Parker and Ernest Hemingway with their penchant for the economy of words, and to the psychological studies of Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter and Elizabeth Bowen, and on to the type of New Yorker story. Nevertheless, Sylvia Berkman is cautious to point out that the true test of a writer is more than his position in the stream of historical development. "The value of his creation," she writes, "exists apart from time, as an artistic entity."<sup>10</sup> And the achievement of Katherine Mansfield in this sense is that which has really established her position. For like Chekhov, her secret has not been captured. What she manages to convey, somehow, is emotional vibration between characters which one experiences through intuition of actual life, intimate experiences which determine happiness.<sup>11</sup> In this sense Katherine Mansfield was an originator, but rather than duplicating her form, her imitators have, by their contrast, proved her originality.

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<sup>10</sup>Berkman, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

The standard Katherine Mansfield has established is set forth by Louise Bogan:

As an artist, it is clear that Katherine Mansfield was the forerunner, in English prose, of a new kind of sensibility which, up to our day, had only imperfect and broken expression in the prose of all literature. . . . Katherine Mansfield and others have caught something always present which writers in the past could not (or did not wish to) catch; . . . something new in the modes of perception has come into being for them to describe.<sup>12</sup>

And although Katherine Mansfield was a prophet of a new kind of sensibility arising in prose fiction, her footsteps have not been followed. She has left as a legacy an indefinable quality that sparkles with a brilliant little fire, like an exquisite diamond. But the little fire is dimmed somewhat in the light from larger gems that radiate across the breadth of mankind's experiences. In the last analysis her art is small, and the small is seldom that which would-be literary giants try to imitate.

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<sup>12</sup>Louise Bogan, "Katherine Mansfield," New Republic, CII (March 25, 1940), 415.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The areas in which Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield have been notably contrasted are their formative years, their subject matter, their handling of material, their personal philosophies, and their places in the broad stream of literature. Along with the contrasts in these areas, there exist certain undeniable similarities. These similarities are, however, either too general and vague or too minor to support the vast number of remarks about Katherine Mansfield's likeness to Chekhov. One feels that if the critical authors could find no more definite similarities, they should not have, perhaps, under-stressed the obvious attraction that Chekhov as a personality held for Katherine Mansfield. This attraction, stimulated probably by J. M. Murry, and revealed by Katherine Mansfield in her Scrapbook, was based upon her recognition of a soul which was in sympathy with her own.

What Katherine Mansfield saw in Chekhov was a person who was sensitive but who recognized that only the insensitive could survive. She saw a person who suffered from the "infinitesimals" of life. She saw a writer whose heroes can see life's promise, but cannot fulfill it; his people

are constantly pursued by the petty and the ugly. This conception of what life was like Katherine Mansfield had in common with Chekhov. Both authors were exceptionally sensitive and perceptive. There have been few who can picture with such agonizing clarity the little pains of life, the pains that rain down incessantly upon the sensitive, shelterless individual. No author has been able to surpass them in stripping naked the human soul in the anguish of everyday tortures and unfulfilled expectations.

But in this view of life what Katherine Mansfield must have admired most in Chekhov was what she herself lacked, a resigned coming to terms with life. Chekhov maintained, figuratively, a humorous half-smile upon his lips, indicating that he had given up the battle against insensitiveness long ago and was capable of taking its slaps in resignation, even in grace, as a gentleman might take the glove of the brute who could not provoke him. Katherine Mansfield could never take such abuses without fighting back. She wanted to come to terms with life, but it was not in her to do it. She struggled to solve the meaning of life throughout her brief career, and always with a glimmering hope that some day she could discover the answer. Among the vast army of life's meannesses she fought a continual fight, but against insurmountable odds. Her attack demanded a constant renewal of strength.



She would have liked to negotiate an armistice with life based on the compromise which Chekhov had made with it. If life had allowed her a steady hand and a resigned soul she would have given up the intense anger of her reprisals. She could have chosen to be quiet and to direct a pervading attack upon the ugliness of life. The power of Chekhov's reserve was what Katherine Mansfield was seeking when she died at the age of thirty-five.

There is in the technical aspects of the writing of Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield very little likeness. What she produced as an artist she owes to no one. What she had in common with Chekhov as an individual, living an individual's life, is negligible. The experiences which brought life into focus for her were not the same as his. The common bond was that Katherine Mansfield had the same vision of life that Chekhov had, and she yearned for his steady hand and impassive nature to record this vision.

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