

before, I had a discussion on English and French literature with Murry at the noisy ABC cafe behind Charing Cross. In passing I mentioned the Chinese literary renaissance of recent years. I told him that Chinese novelists had mostly been influenced by Russian writers. He almost jumped for joy on hearing that, since both he and his wife worshipped the Russians. He had made a study of Dostoevsky and written a book entitled *Dostoevsky: A Critical Study*. As for Mansfield, her preference was for Chekhov. It was a source of constant regret to them that Russian literature had been so little noticed by the English. They believed that this neglect had enabled Victorian philistinism to exercise an influence over the content and form of fiction right up to the present day. Then I inquired how Mansfield was. He said that she was quite all right for the moment, and that he had been able to bring her back to London for two weeks. He gave me their address and asked me to meet her and their friends the next Thursday evening.

So I would see Mansfield. I was the luckiest of men. The following Wednesday I visited H. G. Wells at his country house in Easton Glebe and returned to London with his wife the next day. It was raining hard that day. I remember being soaked to the skin by the time I arrived home.

It was hard to find their house. (I always have great trouble finding my way in London. I really hate this labyrinthine city.) Finally I reached the place, a small two-storey house. Murry opened the door. I felt a bit awkward, standing there, holding an umbrella and several Chinese scrolls, paintings and examples of calligraphy that had just been returned to me by a friend of mine. I entered the house, took off my raincoat, and was led into a room on the right. Until then I had had a holy reverence for Mansfield as a famous young woman writer. I had never expected to find in her a creature of 'beauty and grace'. I had presumed her to be a literary woman in the style of Rose Macaulay, Virginia Woolf, Roma Wilson, Mrs Lucas and Vanessa Bell. Male writers and artists have always had a reputation for eccentricity. Today, women writers seem to strive to be even more eccentric. The most conspicuous thing about them is the way they dress: in as simple and plain a style as possible. They try to be unfashionable and 'anti-feminine'. They wear their hair short, never combing it, but just letting it fall in a tangle down on their shoulders. Their stockings are always made of coarse stuff. Their shoes are either muddy or dusty, and always in the ugliest style. As for their skirts, they are either too short or too long. They sometimes have a couple of 'genius yellow haloes'⁶ in between their brows, or sometimes they wear those repulsive tortoiseshell American spectacles. They never wear make-up or jewellery. Instead, the occasional cigarette stain can be seen on their fingers. Nine out of ten times their laughter is louder than that of their male companions. They stick out their chests and stomachs when they walk, giving no hint