

unquestionably a man of genius, one of the great historical scholars of the modern world. He knew the Orient as few men ever have, for he combined the sharp focus of the West with a native knowledge of Japan, Korea, China, and other lands. His knowledge of all branches of Oriental art was, for its day, unequalled.²²

There are certainly resonances with *The Book of Tea* in Mansfield's work. Taken at the most basic level, the word tea itself occurs constantly in Mansfield's creative writing, from the poem 'Camomile Tea' to the short story 'A Cup of Tea'. *The Book of Tea*, however, was more to Mansfield than just a celebration of the art of tea drinking. Reading the book, one is struck by words, phrases, passages, which seemingly connect with Mansfield's own life and which she may have used as inspiration in her own writing, consciously, or not. Take for example, *The Book of Tea*:

Those of us who know not the secret of properly regulating our own existence on this tumultuous sea of foolish troubles which we call life are constantly in a state of misery while vainly trying to appear happy and contented. We stagger in the attempt to keep our moral equilibrium, and see forerunners of the tempest in every cloud that floats on the horizon. Yet there is joy and beauty in the roll of billows as they sweep outward toward eternity. Why not enter into their spirit, or, like Lieh Tsû, ride upon the hurricane itself?²³

In 1920, in a letter to Murry, Mansfield wrote almost the very same thing, in her own words:

Everything has its shadow. Is it right to resist such suffering? Do you know I feel it has been an immense privilege. Yes, in spite of all. How blind we little creatures are! Darling, its [*sic*] only the fairy tales we *really* live by. [...] It has taken me three years to understand this – to come to see this. We resist – we are terribly frightened. The little boat enters the dark fearful gulf and our only cry is to escape – 'put me on land again.' But its [*sic*] useless. Nobody listens. The shadowy figure rows on. One ought to sit still and uncover one's eyes.²⁴

One item I discovered in the Alexander Turnbull Library in 2013 (amongst the recently acquired archive of John Middleton Murry material) was a framed poem – a gift for Mansfield's birthday in 1918. It was 'Reading the Book of Hills and Seas' by T'ao Ch'ien (AD 365–527), where the ancient Chinese poet catalogues the joys of summer: green grass, trees, birds and spring wine, gentle rain, solitude and a good book. If we needed more evidence of Mansfield's fondness for Eastern mysticism, here we have it.