

might write a book of stories good enough to ‘offer’ you. . . . If I *don’t* succeed in keeping the coffin from the door you will know this was my ambition.

Yours, in admiration and gratitude
Katherine Mansfield

I haven’t said a bit of what I want to say. This letter sounds as if it was written by a screw driver, and I wanted it to sound like an admiring, respectful, but warm piping beneath your windows. I’d like to send my love, too, if I wasn’t so frightened. K.M.³⁴

In conversation with Orage, Ruth Mantz recalled the following exchange: “The only letter from Katherine that I ever kept” Orage told me, “was this letter, which led to our meeting again, dated September 11th 1921. You may use it, but I would like to have it back”.³⁵ This letter comes just a few weeks after one of Mansfield’s most painful and depressing periods, when she had discovered Murry’s affair with Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, resulting in a vituperative exchange of telegrams and letters between the unhappy couple. To me, this letter stands out as Mansfield looking back from her present unhappy life, alone, sick, seemingly abandoned by Murry, and searching out someone from her past who offered security at a point in her life when she had never felt so insecure. It is a letter written from a place of complete despair, and a desire to reconnect and to perhaps forge a new direction for herself. I suggest it is almost certainly this letter that would eventually act as the catalyst for Orage sending Wallace’s book to Murry, in Switzerland, a few months later. It also seems entirely possible that Orage deliberately sent the book to Murry, knowing that he would hate it, and that, understanding Mansfield’s contrary nature, this would immediately make her curious to read it. Moore also concurs with this opinion:

But why of all reviewers to Murry? Murry with his entrenched hostility to occult ideas? And if Katherine were the intended recipient, why not simply send it to her in the first place? Murry said he found the book’s gnostic speculations positively repellent mumbo jumbo. His scepticism only accentuated her enthusiasm.³⁶

Orage played this point well. Keen for Mansfield to read the book, he nevertheless did not wish to be seen sending her things directly. Mansfield and Orage now kept up a secretive correspondence, with Mansfield giving him the code name ‘China’; for example, on Saturday 14 January 1922, she wrote in her notebook, ‘Posted my story to Pinker. Heard from China’.³⁷

Mansfield continued the Paris-based Russian doctor Manoukhin’s expensive X-ray treatment of the spleen, extolled as a cure for tuberculosis, with a London