

THE UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

When the Turnbull Library succeeded in acquiring all Katherine Mansfield's notebooks and her 480 letters to her husband, it became, and will remain, by far the largest repository of Mansfield manuscripts in the world. This situation, while of great importance to New Zealand, carries its own problems.

Mansfield scholarship is now more stringent and searching than it has ever been. Most of the books whose method is to skim the cream off the top and employ subjective free-floating interpretations have probably now been written. But the books based on a careful study of the manuscripts have yet to be written. Requests from all over the world, but particularly from the United States, for photocopies of unpublished Mansfield manuscripts are increasing in number – requests which the Library has certain qualms about meeting.

When Antony Alpers first saw the notebooks – in the Turnbull Library after publication of his biography – he said they 'contain a good deal of material that has never been published. Some of this however never will be published, simply because it is illegible.' But in fact, if one spends long enough working on Mansfield manuscripts, there remains only a very small, practically negligible residue of illegible material. Which is not to say that any of it is easy to read, but just that with time and effort the handwriting will yield. It will be seen, then, that overseas students, confronted by one page or six pages of photocopied manuscript, never having seen the hand before, will make little or nothing of it and will be tempted into unreliable guesses. Even Middleton Murry, who knew his wife's hand better than anyone else did, and who is, to date, Katherine Mansfield's soundest editor, made many errors of transcription in editing the *Journal* and the *Letters*.

For the most part the unpublished portions of the notebooks are early attempts at writing which Middleton Murry thought did not merit publication. And indeed, what is the justification for giving publication to material which is derivative, mannered, melodramatic, sentimental and immature? Just that scholars now need to be able to study the roots of Katherine Mansfield's stylistic and thematic development, and that biographers cannot do justice to her without these revealing, thinly disguised passages of early autobiography. Since the Turnbull Library owns this valuable material, it is concerned to see that the manuscripts are responsibly published under its own auspices. The proposal, therefore, is to publish all the unpublished passages in future issues of the *Turnbull Library Record*, beginning in this issue with Katherine Mansfield's early attempt at a novel: *Juliet*.