

REVIEWS

Gerri Kimber. *Katherine Mansfield: The Early Years*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

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MANY YEARS ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Gerri Kimber and discussing our mutual admiration for the writings of Katherine Mansfield. I felt sad at the time that Gerri had not visited New Zealand, birthplace of Katherine Mansfield and setting for many of her finest stories. Since our meeting, she has been able to make that journey, thanks to a research grant from the Friends of the Turnbull Library. *Katherine Mansfield: The Early Years* proves that she made excellent use of her time there.

This biography covers a period often skated over by Mansfield biographers—the time from her birth in 1888 until, twenty years later, she left New Zealand’s shores for ever. Mansfield’s husband John Middleton Murry, her first biographer and editor of her letters and journals, had a sentimentalised view of his wife’s childhood and had himself never been to New Zealand. He was keen to emphasise the time in her life when she was connected to himself. Claire Tomalin had also never visited, and her biography covers Mansfield’s time there in less than forty pages. Kimber has redressed this imbalance.

She was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, though she experimented with many different names and identities throughout her short life, including the simple initials “KM,” which Kimber aptly chooses to call her. Dividing up her book into sections according to the homes in which she lived, she gives us KM’s story thoroughly and clearly, giving each location its due, starting with KM’s birthplace, 11 Tinakori Road in the Wellington suburb of Thorndon (now the Katherine Mansfield House and Garden Museum), site of her formative early years. The little school in Karori, where the family moved in 1893, would be the setting for scenes in Mansfield’s finest story “The Doll’s House”; 75 Tinakori Road was KM’s home from

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1898 to 1903, when she attended Wellington Girls' High School, saw her first story in print in the school magazine, and received her very first review. It was at high school that she formed intense friendships and told fibs—the lines between fact and fiction were always blurred for KM.

The biography leaves New Zealand in chapter 6 when the Beauchamp family took their daughters to London, where they became pupils at Queen's College. Kimber describes these as wonderful years for KM, when she discovered Oscar Wilde's writings, developed her skills as a cellist, poured out her sexual longings in an early unfinished novel named *Juliet*, and met Ida Baker, who remained an important friend throughout her life. I was amused to read that KM received a grade of "disappointing" in English literature during this time. In the final chapter, Kimber describes KM's brief return to New Zealand (1906–08), when her resistance to her family's plans for her to play the role of nice young lady in the capital's social scene ended with her father's reluctant permission to return to England. Kimber describes the ways in which KM shocked Wellingtonians with her behaviour and manners during this time but also describes her camping holiday in the Urewera district of the North Island, during which she learned to see the beauty of the New Zealand bush and found subject matter for later stories.

Throughout, Kimber makes the young Katherine Mansfield come vividly alive. To achieve this, she makes skilled use of extracts from early diaries, letters and poems, and she examines such juvenile stories as "A Fairy Story," "The Tiredness of Rosabel," "She," "Die Einsame," "Your Birthday," and "About Pat." Kimber explores KM's developing fascination with windows, death, isolation, trees, and birds, all things which first emerge in her youthful writing and also appear in her mature works. We see KM experimenting even as an adolescent writer with different voices and techniques; we see the literary influence of Wilde and other "Decadent" writers who inspired her to write in a distinctly modernist way, and we see her extraordinary eye for miniaturist detail, such a feature of her adult style. In the early works that Kimber describes so fully, we also see KM's frustrations with her parents: "The mother was a slight pale little woman. She had been delicate and ailing before her marriage and she never could forget it" (from *Juliet*).

This biography gives an insightful analysis of KM's development, both as a woman and as a writer. The text is well illustrated with maps and many photos, some never before published, of KM, her homes, the buildings she knew, and her friends and relations. Kimber writes lucidly and entertainingly in an accessible style, sharing her own knowledge of Mansfield's stories with enthusiasm and perception. Her book is the first biography of KM that "concentrates solely on her childhood and adolescence" (Kimber 3). Kimber provides an important, detailed look at KM's early creativity and her juvenilia, revealing how many of the images and themes from these early years carried through to her adult work. This book fills a gap in the world of Katherine Mansfield scholarship and is a most welcome addition.

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John Goodby. *Discovering Dylan Thomas: A Companion to the Collected Poems and Notebook Poems*. University of Wales Press, 2017.

xi + 284 pages. Paperback, GBP 24.99.
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DISCOVERING Dylan Thomas aims to provide a companion to Dylan Thomas's published poems and notebooks, including the fifth notebook, which was rediscovered in 2014. Composed by the foremost expert on Dylan Thomas, John Goodby (Sheffield Hallam University), the text contains previously unpublished material—including three examples of juvenilia (“Forest picture,” “Idyll of unforgetfulness” and “In borrowed plumes”)—and provides a meticulous overview of Thomas's poetry.

As Goodby suggests, while this text is in some senses best seen as a guide to *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* (2014), the volume's scope and aims go beyond that. It is a rigorous and revealing volume, including both new material and a sophisticated yet accessible scholarly apparatus detailing Thomas's poems. The volume consists of a thorough introduction and three parts. The “Supplementary Poems” are a selection of ten poems which were not included in the 2014 centenary edition of Thomas's poetry (edited by Goodby). The second section, “Annotations, Versions, and Drafts,” comprises the bulk of the volume, and includes details of allusions and references on a poem-by-poem basis, as well as critical histories, overviews of variations, and publication details. The volume is rounded out by a section containing three appendices, which provide publication details for Thomas's main poetry collections, a description of the fifth notebook, and errata for the 2014 hardback edition of Thomas's collected poems.

The most noteworthy new material, from the point of view of either a Thomas scholar or a juvenilia scholar, naturally relates to the fifth notebook, discovered during Thomas's centenary in 2014 and purchased by Swansea University. Goodby's initial research has identified this as “a successor to the four [notebooks] covering the period April 1930–April 1934” (2). Goodby reveals that this fifth notebook contains sixteen poems, six of which appeared in Thomas's debut *18 Poems* (published in 1934, the year he turned twenty) and a further ten which were published in *Twenty-Five Poems* (1936, the year he turned twenty-two), including “several of Thomas's finest and most original poems” (2). While this volume only presents Goodby's initial research on the notebook, he does put forward three notable arguments which demonstrate the significance of this find. First, this notebook gives us a clearer idea of the order in which Thomas composed his poems across 1934–35. Second, it disproves critical

assertions that Thomas did little work when he first arrived in London in 1935. Finally, the notebook contains several poems for which there previously existed no autograph manuscripts or drafts. Therefore, the fifth notebook ultimately provides us with a deeper understanding of Thomas's development as a poet in the mid-1930s.

More broadly, Goodby's text advances two main aims. First, Goodby aims to encourage movement "towards a properly informed critical conversation about his [Thomas's] poetry" (6). To achieve this, Goodby offers a wide variety of empirical evidence for the sources of Thomas's poetry, including evidence of Thomas's reading, as well as critical and compositional histories of the individual poems. This information frequently illuminates Thomas's poems without reducing the interpretive scope of the poetry. Second, Goodby argues that Thomas's modernism is an event of major significance in English-language poetry, and that appropriate recognition of Thomas's achievement reveals and corrects two failings of existing scholarship: the ways in which the complex and accomplished poetry of the 1940s is overlooked and undervalued, and the Anglo-centric emphasis of literary histories, especially those of modernism. Goodby's argument on both fronts is persuasive, and it is a valuable contribution to current scholarship not only on Thomas, but to our broader discussions of modernism and mid-twentieth-century poetics. Goodby's inclusion of three examples of unpublished juvenilia, and his consequent discussion of them, sheds some light on "the role of mimicry in [Thomas's] work" (4). Goodby's blunt suggestion that "too much fuss" has been made of Thomas's juvenilia by readers who are perhaps "unwilling or unable to get to grips with the infinitely better mature poetry" (5) is therefore somewhat undercut by the fact that Goodby's own analysis of the juvenilia in this volume illuminates aspects of Thomas's later work.

The "Annotations, Versions and Drafts" which comprise the bulk of the volume offer both welcome interventions in outdated scholarly appraisals of Thomas and a multitude of concise insights which scholars, students, and the general reader will appreciate. For example, Goodby recasts Thomas's "If the lady from the casino" as a potential attempt at Surrealist automatic writing, drawing a sharp contrast with Ralph Maud's suggestion that Thomas wrote the poem whilst drunk (52). This is a microcosmic example of the way in which Goodby's annotations overcome the older critical tendency to exaggerate Thomas's personal habits whilst simultaneously simplifying—and sometimes denigrating—the sophistication of Thomas's writing. Instead of being another example of Thomas's supposedly *louche* lifestyle and a reflection of the odd, beer-swilling Welshman, "If the lady from the casino" is instead one more aspect of Thomas's multi-faceted modernist poetics. Across this volume, Goodby convincingly depicts Thomas as a socio-cultural hybrid and a voracious reader, adept at creating his own mystique and obscuring the dense allusions of his poetry, who persistently engaged with the international arts and multimedia of his time. Impressively, Goodby traces critical interpretations, compositional histories, and details of revisions in his annotations, while also offering readers potential connections between the emotional tone of the poems and the socio-political climate in which they were written. The annotations vary between concise, short entries, to lengthier engagements which offer revelatory analysis of such iconic poems as "The force that through the green fuse". Repeatedly, the complex interfaces between

Thomas's multitudinous influences and his own poetics, whether it is a Lawrentian aversion to masturbation or shades of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), are laid bare.

Goodby is successful in providing his readers with the tools and information that will allow more "informed critical conversations" about Thomas's poetry. The juvenilia and notebook poems here demonstrate the complex relationship between invention and imitation, between plagiarism and parody, that formed part of Thomas's development as a poet. Both erudite and accessible, *Discovering Dylan Thomas* is a welcome companion for scholars, students, and admirers of Thomas's poetry.

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