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Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, eds. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*. Volume 5, 1922-1923. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xv + 360 pages. ISBN 978 0 19 818399 0. £ 60

- 1 The fifth and last volume of Katherine Mansfield's *Collected Letters* completes a series which is the fruit of a lasting collaboration, with the first volume published in 1984. Margaret Scott, a former Manuscripts Librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, has a knack for deciphering Mansfield's notoriously illegible handwriting, as sampled in the frontispiece to the book, and did the transcribing. Vincent O'Sullivan, a prominent Mansfield scholar, is responsible for the annotations, dating, and other aspects of the edition. That the completion of the publication of the letters coincided with a major Mansfield conference in London in September 2008 and the subsequent founding of the Mansfield society is a sign both of Mansfield's enduring importance as a writer, and of the presence of a thriving community of Mansfield scholars. The main body of Mansfield's writing is now available: her correspondence, notebooks, journals, critical writings, poems, and published short fiction.
- 2 The letters collected here were written over the last year of Mansfield's life, when she was struggling with tuberculosis, after several years in search of treatment which took her from one country to another. The volume starts with the last letters Mansfield wrote from Sierre, in Switzerland, after a six-month stay there, as she was preparing

for her stay in Paris. While in Paris, between January and June, Mansfield received an X-ray treatment from a Russian doctor that she hoped would cure her. It was a time of wistfulness for her: “always my thoughts and feelings go back to New Zealand [...]. Really, I am sure it does a writer no good to be transplanted – it does harm” (80), she wrote to a fellow writer in March 1922. She went back to Sierre for the summer (June to August), and to London (August and September), where she had arranged to meet with her father who was on a trip. Their meetings were a comfort to her, although she still refers to herself as “your undeserving little black sheep of a child” (113). In London she also met friends, through whom she heard of the Gurdjieff Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, recently established in Fontainebleau-Avon in France. George Gurdjieff encouraged a lifestyle based on Eastern philosophy and the development of the will through simple living. Mansfield saw this as a chance to come back to a sincere, natural mode of living that she thought would help her understand herself: “What is important is to try & learn to live – really live, and in relation to everything – not isolated (this isolation is death to me)” (304). She decided to abandon conventional treatment and joined the Institute in October. There she felt that she belonged to a community, and her letters celebrate the ordinary she was back in touch with through daily work. She was intellectually and emotionally making the most of the time she had left, and the “new life” she discovered then was her way of coming to terms with death; she died in January 1922, at the age of thirty-four.

- 3 Even in sickness and suffering Mansfield retained her humour and did not lose interest in daily life and gossip. Mostly, she continued to be creative with her life, calling her lungs her “wings,” and writing to her father: “I have just finished a story with a canary for the hero, and almost feel I have lived in a cage and pecked a chick weed myself” (220). These last letters show that her astonishing will, curiosity and intelligence saw her through to the end.

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Christine LORRE is a Senior Lecturer at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. Her research is in postcolonial literature, Asian-American literature, and postcolonial theory. In 2007 she was a visiting scholar at the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies, Victoria University of Wellington. She is the author of several articles and book chapters, including “The Tropes and Territory of Childhood in *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (1951) by Janet Frame” (in *Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writings in Context*, eds. Marta Dvorak and W. H. New, 2007).