

# Katherine Mansfield and Yuriko Miyamoto

By

Jiro Anzai

The story of a daughter of the upper-middle class bourgeois, of her having broken away from the conventions of her class, plunging quite recklessly and hastily into marrying a man far below her classes, more prompted by the very parental oppositions than deterred, only coming to the inevitable break after a brief spell, and yet through their perseverance and efforts eventually landing at the land of artistic fame and respectability, approvable even to the eyes of those once-disowned family members and respectables at large — is now fast becoming no news, nothing so new in our late twentieth century world.

During the first decades of this century, however, be it in Australia, New Zealand or Japan, it still was a phenomenon new and rare. And as such had been the case, our comparing in this little essay the famous Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) of New Zealand with the authoress Yuriko Miyamoto (1899–1951) of Japan, though Yuriko's literary renown is even now limited outside Japan, may well have some value for those concerned with cultural exchanges.

The writer of this article, nevertheless, is aware of the fact that in the very narrower sense of comparative literature that deals with either one-way influences or reciprocal exchanges between the two authors or authoresses, there are no such connections found between Katherine Mansfield or Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp of New Zealand and Yuriko Miyamoto or Yuriko Chyujyo of Japan; but as I have mentioned in the above, so long as we have been considering these two novelists and their respective works in a broader frame of references, there certainly are numbers of items that could be compared with some interest.

Moreover, under a closer observation, we find the pronouncement that Katherine Mansfield had had nothing to do with things Japanese was quite a misleading notion. For on at least two occasions Japan or a thought of Japan must have crossed Katherine's mind. This statement can be backed up with the very Katherine's confidence to Ida Baker or LM (her bosom friend of years, since their Queen's College days) of her thinking of visiting Japan.<sup>1)</sup>

According to Ida's description, this incident took place, soon after Katherine's return

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1) p.59 of Ida Baker's *Katherine Mansfield, the Memories of LM*.

to London from her Barvarian stay, the while she and Ida had been sharing the abode at Henry Bishop's unoccupied flat, although such a visit had never been realised, met by the fierce oppositions from Ida.

The fact that in one way or the other a thought about Japan had been hovering in Katherine's mind is also verifiable on the ground that in a little story named 'The Modern Soul' in *In a German Pension* (1911), she had made Fräulein Sonia speak about a little flock of Japanese thoughts.

For all this, however, as I have spoken of it before, in the very narrow sense of comparative literature, there seem to be no direct relationships or reciprocal exchanges between Katherine Mansfield of New Zealand and Yuriko Miyamoto of Japan; but as we begin to consider these two novelists and their works in a broader frame of references, we realise that there existed a number of similarities, climatic or other, that could be compared for our best interests.

Gift of sympathy is amply betraying in *The Garden Party* (1922) by Katherine and *A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken* (1916) by Yuriko

*A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken* is a full-length story, written by the said Yuriko at her seven-teen, that had overnight sky-rocketed her into the world of fame and her subsequent career towards a full-fledged writer.

Set in the so-called *Ich* novel style, the gist of the story goes as follows; *I* or a grand-daughter (a well-to-do urban girl) of the great landlord, spending *my* summer at the grand-father's towering mansion overlooking the poor and forsaken villagers, tried to strike out a friendly relationship with the people there, but despite much condescension *my* genuine efforts to ease their plights failed miserably, faced with the combined forces of hostilities, suspicions and greeds of them.

Somewhat same kind of sympathy and condescension are observable on the behaviour of Laura, a good-natured heroine of *The Garden Party* by Katherine, and thus, although these two mastery works had been produced by the two authoresses in different periods of their lives, not only do they share a mastery workmanship but also betray a gift of sympathy for the poor and afflicted of the world. One could of course argue about the point that Yuriko Miyamoto's *A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken* was of her earlier period; as a matter of fact, it had been her first published novel. On the other hand, Katherine's was of her last phase as it had been published only a year or so before her untimely death. Moreover, those Mansfield's earlier works, all being cynical or sardonic in tone as amply betraying in her *In a German Pension* series, they could not possibly have belonged to the same genre. But anyone familiar with Mansfield's literal (not literary) career should be recalling that squalid fact about her life then that even while her early works had been laboured out, she herself had gone through the most trying ordeals (or

that hasty marriage, subsequent separation from the nominal husband, conceiving another man's child and the fatal miscarriage) enough for a girl of nineteen. No one, thus, could have accused her for that betrayal of cynicism as genuine expression of her basic personality features.

Nevertheless, taken as a whole, one could not help feeling that both the authoresses are sharing essentially the same propensity of sympathy for the under-privileged; in fact, they seem like having a genuine gift of sympathy as well as empathy into the matter, so much so that even the meanest reader with sabre-toothed ethos could not help feeling a kind of pathos. A closer reviewing, however, reveals to us the fact that Muse has shed more favours on Katherine than Yuriko. Indeed, pathos seems to be prevailing far more copiously in Mansfield's work.

Perhaps one reason why this is so, or the reason why *A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken* by Yuriko is felt less in the degree of pathos is the absence of such whole-sale sacrifices as they had visited the ANZAC soldiers in the World War I that had left their survived (in which Katherine and rest of the Beauchamps were included)<sup>2)</sup> mourning forever over their loved ones. Just how strong Katherine's love for the young brother Leslie can well be recalled as we trace her bosom friend Ida Baker's nickname to its root<sup>3)</sup>; in fact, long before his premature death in the War, she had gone so far as to instruct Ida to take up Lesley as her first name, this Lesley being the feminised version of her fond brother Leslie Heron Beauchamp's first name.

As such had been the case, it can not be a mere fancy for us to imagine that behind a benign mask of a children's party, one can detect Mansfield's generous sympathy for the youthful war dead, with a fountain of her pathos secretly drawing from a hidden well buried deep inside her memories' bosom.

Although Yuriko shares the equally strong attachment towards her younger brother, at the time of her turning out *A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken*, he was quite alive; moreover, no such a dark cloud was seen hovering even on the far horizon as far as Yuriko's family were concerned.

#### A daughter of the upper-middle bourgeois and the sensitive father

Yuriko's father was not only a Tokyo University graduate but also a Cantabrigian top-level architect that had pioneered in Japan in making a number of modern European-style buildings; indeed, to his credit go such well-known buildings as Keio University Library at Mitaka, Kaijyo (maritime insurance) and Yusen Buildings at Marunouchi, Salvation Army HQ and YMCA at Kanda, Tokyo, and several summer

2) pp. 96, 97 of Murry-edited *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield*.

3) Ida Baker's p. 21 *op. cit.*

houses for some of the most influential Zaibatsu families.

As to what sort of father Katherine Mansfield had had, I do not think we have much need to elaborate for the English readers; suffice it to say that he had been a very important businessman, in Wellington, New Zealand and later came to be knighted by the Crown.

Thus, despite the climatic as well as cultural differences, there is so much homogeneity in the lives of the two authoresses. Firstly, though Yuriko is about eleven years junior to Katherine, they are of the contemporary generation, and a daughter of the upper-middle class bourgeois, whose father's steadily rising income and social status had enabled her to have all that a girl of her age could ever have hoped for; namely, having been given a chance to go overseas for education at a finishing school or a college education of well repute (to be exact, Queen's College, London for Katherine, and Columbia University, New York for Yuriko), a good musical education and ample opportunities to sample or appreciate many realms of arts, before turning to the life of pen.

From what we could read and gather about Yuriko's early life, we can say with certainty that she was a prodigy, much loved by her father, and loved and adored him in return, not just for his mere worth but because he was a sensitive man, a man of arts, not a worldly and common type of architectural engineer. Although Yuriko's autobiographical novels are peppered with words betraying intense emotional bonds between the daughter and father, the following quotation would well impart the intensity of her attachments to the father or just how much the daughter had loved him.

"... 'Daddy, dear' Expressing a joy of the reunion with him, with all her limbs, Nobuko (Yuriko's fictionalised name) stamped the hallway floor at her feet with one of her white *tabi*-socked feet..."<sup>4)</sup>

Perhaps, one might raise a doubt about the adequacy of having Katherine's father categorised into a sensitive one. Faced with the existence of so many derogatory or negativistic pictures of the father in her earlier renderings, one may be reasonably permitted to surmise him as such; but the discernible eyes would penetrate into the very surface crust to see the daughter's eternal worship of the father and concerns about his wishes, as it being amply expressed in such a short tale as "The Apple Tree," not that one by the Nobel-prised Galsworthy, but a little memory piece rendered by no other than our Katherine herself, in 1915.<sup>5)</sup>

Similarity in their hasty marriages and the inevitable breakups

Similarity is, as mentioned in the introductory, almost symbolically expressed in their

4) p. 65 of Yuriko Miyamoto's *Nobuko* (Shincho edition). *tabi* means bifurcate-toed Japanese socks.

5) pp. 86, 87 of *the Journal*.

head-long plunge into reckless love affairs and ill-fated marriage in that the youth in these two authoresses had been too impatient to wait; and wanting to experience something much more tangible, vital and fulfilling, with their brash, accelerated eagerness, they had jumped overboard the ship of the conventionalities binding the so-called respectables; they had indeed jumped into a sea of the naked reality world, landing with a man far below their calibre. And yet, the point that should be made clear here is that even amidst this ordeal, never had they accused those that must have agitated them into the fatal plunge, taking all the blames and consequences upon themselves.

#### Similarity in the transfer of sister-to-brother love to their second husband

There can be no denying of the fact that the deaths of their respective young or younger brothers had opened up a new vista for future in the career of our two authoresses, together with a strong resolve to strike out something positive; in Katherine's, they have crystallised into what we now understand as the typically Mansfieldian works whose contents and pathos woven into them are, in short, a New Zealander's version of *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

In fact, even her love for and marriage with, John Middleton Murry, could well have been a case of, or, an extension of this sister-to-brother love, or a transfer of Katherine's sisterly love for and over the young brother Leslie, to her second husband John Middleton Murry, Murry's being a year junior to Katherine fulfilling this younger brother status.

The essentially same kind of transfer of love from the young brother to a *younger* man husband is discernible in the case of Yuriko versus Kenji Miyamoto pair (Yuriko Miyamoto's Miyamoto is this Kenji's last name; Yuriko's own last name or her maiden name being Yuriko Chyujo). Yes, indeed, this transfer of love and love object from her younger brother to the younger man husband Kenji Miyamoto is betraying in Yuriko's own description, in that her experiencing a strong stir of emotion upon finding her fond, ill-fated brother's age happened to be the same with Kenji's.<sup>6)</sup>

#### Ida Baker versus Katherine, and Yoshiko Yuasa versus Yuriko

It can be said of them that both Katherine and Yuriko are sharing the same kind of companionship in that the two authoresses had had the very intimate girl friend whose existence had sometimes caused a suspicion among them of a Lesbian love. While Katherine's journals and letters as well as Ida Baker's memories are peppered with expressions that betray their intense emotional bonds, we could not deny the fact that

6) p.88 of Yuriko Miyamoto's *Landmark* (Shincho Edition).

Yuasa versus Yuriko relation is also loaded with the same sort of emotional charges.

As fore-mentioned, it was only after and through Mansfield's suggestion that Ida Baker had taken upon her the very same name Lesley, the feminised version of Katherine's brother's name Leslie; originally, Ida had been thinking of taking up the name Katherine Moore as hers; and though Ida had insisted on the point that this Katherine was not Katherine Mansfield's *Katherine* but of her mother's maiden name's, a psychological implications are peeking through a thin veneer. Thus, the very fact that Katherine had insisted on bestowing her fond brother's name upon her bosom friend's is of a paramount significance; perhaps, more so than either Katherine or Ida herself had ever realised.

You might say that there is nothing strange about one's making a friend of the same sex, especially when one is, in the course of one's life, going through one's school days. But as I came to know the presence of Ida that had sustained Mansfield throughout her short-lived but intensely burnt-up literary as well as human career, I could not help feeling the sameness in Yuasa versus Yuriko relations. For, when informed of Yuriko's thinking of marrying Kenji Miyamoto, Yuasa grew hysterical and hid her shoes and dresses, so that Yuriko had to go out barefoot to run the *blockade*, hitch a taxi home to her parents' mansion and make the date with Kenji in her sister's borrowed outfit.<sup>7)</sup>

This story reminded me of an incident of the fuss raised by Ida on hearing Katherine's contemplating the visit to Japan; for Ida too went into a frenzied state and threw a cord about Katherine's feet.<sup>8)</sup> This last act or throwing a cord about Katherine's feet would have been an act of fettering, a symbolic gesture on the part of Ida of stopping Katherine's move away from her, thus equalling Yuasa's attempts at hiding Yuriko's shoes and dresses. In both of these we can see a child-woman; yes, indeed, however intellectual fronts had they put up, in their emotional or affective life, they had been loaded with inordinately twisted kind of emotions, the analysis of which seems beyond our present scope.

#### In love of the Chekhovian literature

Similarity between our two authoresses is also discernible in their love of Chekhov and his literature, and in their similar ability of striking up something worth-while out of the trifles of our ordinary life or lives. It should be noted also that although some people in the Western hemisphere had accused Katherine of plagiarism, we have to remember that at the time Chekhov and the Chekhovian literature had been very popular, and its very influences had been almost universally felt, having among those drawn to

7) p. 154 of Tomoko Nakamura's *Yuriko Miyamoto*.

8) Ida Baker's p. 59 *op. cit.*

his magnetic power in Japan, Yuriko Miyamoto, Yoshiko Yuasa, and many others, as the very proof of the influences.

There seems to be another feature in the Mansfieldian literature, and it is called by Saralyn Daly as "personal immediacy of view,"<sup>9)</sup> which is also observable in Yuriko Miyamoto's literature. As I have explained in the fore-mentioned part, this is traceable back to the Chekhovian influences. And yet, the fact that the immediacy of personal view has grown so much a part and parcel of Mansfield's is verifiable by comparing Miss Mansfield's "*Apple Tree*" with Galsworthy's equal-titled "*Apple Tree*," from the latter one can hardly recognise this immediacy of the personal view.

There, however, are a number of dissimilarities. In the first place, Yuriko Miyamoto could hardly be passed as a short story writer; in fact, she has been more remembered for her turning out a number of full-length autobiographical novels, the nature and contents of which come very close to the Western tradition of *roman fleuve*.

Her naïveté in worshipping wholesaley the Soviet systems went so far as to praise the existence of a pregnant nurse with her own bulging belly as the very proof of the equal rights for women. It is indeed a case of, by her own doing, reducing *ad absurdum*; to use a pregnant woman with her encumbering body, carrying the full load of a baby within her system as a nurse, is betraying the existence of a slave-labour condition under Stalinistic Russia, seems never occurred to her. As such had been the case, Yuriko Miyamoto's later works are, despite their being set in a massive, *roman fleuve* style, a literature of questionable quality.

Just how antipodal Yuriko's attitude towards motherhood had been to Katherine's, is quite showing in their respective writings. For, in her first full-sized autobiographical novel entitled *Nobuko* (fictionalized name of Yuriko herself as its heroine), Yuriko Miyamoto tells us as follows; "For Nobuko, to become someone's mother is a terrifying thing; when she had been full of doubts about her present life, what she could do, had she born a child that would insist on her being tied to the life ..."<sup>10)</sup>

Compared to the negativistic attitude above, Katherine's desire to have her baby at all costs had been in a marked contrast; in fact, a very genuine love of motherhood is seen breathing there; "Some day when I am asked; 'Mother, where was I born?' and I answer; 'In Barvaria, dear ...'"<sup>11)</sup> Yes, indeed, Katherine went so far as to keep quite an unrelated baby child named Walter, hatched up from a London slum, in her custody, so as to compensate for the unbearable loss of her own due to the miscarriage.

Foot-fetichism is betraying in Katherine's lagging Victorian barefoot consciousness and Yuriko's immaculately white *tabi*-socks' consciousness

9) p. 23 of Saralyn R. Daly's *Katherine Mansfield*

10) Yuriko Miyamoto's p. 141 *op. cit.*

11) p. 42 of *The Journal*.

On the page 41 of Murry-edited definitive edition of Katherine Mansfield's *Journal*, are a few passages that contain a curious reveal. They tell us that she had made a resolve not to walk with bare feet again until she had grown accustomed to the climate. Hitherto unnoticed by or having escaped the critical eyes, this means that Miss Mansfield (or to be exact, Mrs. Bowden in her separation from her nominal husband and at a Barwarian cure village, or Wörishofen, Germany) had had a liking to walk with her discalced feet in wild woods or natural surroundings. Important a point here is that she is making a resolve to repeat the fond barefoot walk, as soon as she had grown accustomed to the climate.

In my opinion, these passages are providing us a clue or key to the mystery of the inordinate amount of self-consciousness of the bare legs, so overtly mentioned in her work *The Luft Bad*, the presence of which has been pointed out (nevertheless, left unexplained) by Saralyn R. Daly in his study.<sup>12)</sup> You might say that the fact that Katherine went barefoot and pronounced in her *Journal* that she would repeat the barefoot stroll in wild woods upon her growing accustomed to the climate means her leading "the simple life of the place, going barefoot ... taking long walks in the beautiful wooded country"<sup>13)</sup> as described by Ida Baker in her recent memories, and thus no more proves that she had anticipated the late twentieth century phenomenon of the barefoot *hippy* life, than a private journal could propel the barefootism inasmuch as her literary work had caused only Daly to take a notice of this bare leg consciousness.

This state of consciousness, however, seems to me to be running not only parallel to her love of the barefoot strolls in natural surroundings but to a masked expression of the preposterous urges to liberate her limbs from the lagging anklets of the Victorian conventions that were as yet dictating a respectable woman to be hosed and shod before showing herself to the public eyes.

Just as that famous Shakesperian phrase "Birds of a feather flock together" signifies, Freda Lawrence, the wife of the famous D. H. Lawrence and truly honest-to-goodness barefoot baroness (her being the daughter of Baron von Richthofen) had been Katherine's friend. In their love of going barefoot and being close to nature, both Katherine and Freda were of the same feather, or to be exact, of the same soul whose discalced soles would draw almost a sensual joy from tramping over the unsoiled earth.

Yes, indeed, they are, so unlike that heroine in the Hollywood versioned "Barefoot Contessa," the daughters that came, not out of the barefooted pesantry but of the upper-middle class bourgeois or even far higher entitled classes. In fact, Mrs. Bowden's or Mrs. Lawrence's behaviour is comparable to those of Marie-Antoinette at Le Petit Triannone, in her milk-maid period, and at her masquerading costume that betrays on the part of

12) Saralyn R. Daly's p. 31 *op. cit.*

13) Ida Baker's p. 51 *op. cit.*



the daughter of the Establishment the existence of the same urge to get herself away from the tradition-laden notion of niceties and to enjoy the natural womanhood, or woman foot.

Yuriko Miyamoto's constant references to her white *tabi*-socked feet, although seeming at first sight to be in a sharp contrast to the Katherine's equally frequent references to the discalced state of her feet (mentioned in her journal pages), are converging on the point of foot fetichism showing in both the authoresses' works.

As such had been the case, we can fairly say that: that careful avoiding by Mansfield of the direct mentioning of bare feet, except in the said private journal, and that fetichism's appearing only in the form of the bare leg consciousness, is inversely telltaling the deep-rooted lags of the Victorian tradition even in such an enlightened soul as Katherine; in the same way, the constant mentioning by Yuriko of the immaculately white *iabi*-socked feet betrays the existence in her of the tradition bound sense of niceties still fettering her mental as well as corporeal feet.

Similarity in their expressing a strong interest in psychology, together with some anticipatory tendencies in the use of a stream of consciousness technique

Among Katherine Mansfield's works, we find one extremely short story, the title of which is no other than psychology itself. On the other hand, although Yuriko Miyamoto did not have such a brandly titled work, there are a number of passages that are skirt-ing the realms of the Jamesian psychology; in fact, there is at least one mention in which she had placed a very high expectation on psychology as a means of easing the workers' plights.<sup>14)</sup>

Elsewhere, both the authoresses use, though as yet very crude, what later generations came to call a stream of consciousness technique; it is much more clearly expressed, however, in Mansfield's '*The Daughter of the late Colonel* (1921)' that precedes at least a year to James Joyce's *Ulysses* and about three years to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925); such is also observable throughout Yuriko Miyamoto's works.

In reference to this, Virginia Woolf's otherwise razor-edge-sharp eyes were failing to see the depths of Katherine's sensibility, as expressed in her *A Writer's Diary* (p. 10). Virginia versus Katherine situations remind me of that well-known rivalry between Nagon Seisho, the authoress of the famous *Pillow Book*, and Shikibu Murasaki, the very authoress of *The Tale of Genji*, in that, parallels are seen, in between the Woolf-Murasaki similarity set against the Katherine-Nagon pair.

To elaborate the point, I am seeing the Katherine-Nagon pair as those whose works are more inspired by the on-the-spot insight and emotions than the latter, when compared

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14) Tomoko Nakamura's p. 205 *op. cit.*

to the works by the Woolf-Shikibu pair that go about their business as inspired or led by much more cool and rational eyes than the former pair.

### Conclusion

Thus, despite the climatic differences and differing careers both literally and personal, we can fairly say that Katherine Mansfield of New Zealand and Yuriko Miyamoto of Japan had shared much in common, firstly in their family backgrounds, secondly in their literary precocity, and lastly in their especial sensibilities and debts to the Chekhovian literature. Of this family background problems, the paramount is their inordinate amount of attachment and affection for their respective younger brothers, the fact of which was vividly recorded by their avowed pens and the subsequent literary developments that came out.

On top of these, a point is stressed that despite our acknowledgement of the influences of the Chekhovian literature upon both the authoresses and their works, we could interpret them as part and parcel of the then much prevailing *Zeitgeist*. For all this, we could not help seeing the existence of genuine sensibilities in them both that had come to make each an indigenous writer. Nevertheless, there are a number of differences in the two. In fact, among those differences, there are a number of tempting issues, among which is the problem of the *if's* contained; that is, for example, a possibility that had Katherine Mansfield lived longer than she had lived, there would have been such and such a change.

It is so easy a task for us to place both the authoresses in the running account of English literature or of Japanese literature and to say that we have done with it, but as we set to put their works under the lens of perusal, we begin to feel extra depths of insights as well as reveals about the nature of literature, especially about the art of novel writings; although a number of people had, ever since their reading the Chekhovian literature and encountering either the Mansfieldian or Miyamotoan works, kept complaining that nothing happens in their works, this very epitaph as betraying the shallowness of their novel quality.

Despite these complaints, however, the very fact that they have survived to this day to be read and reread is more than anything else so eloquently testifying that they had indeed long before the advent of the modern fiction anticipated the idea of even the so-called modern novels, from which the unnecessary details and sensational incidents have been removed.

On top of this, a point was stressed in that both Mansfield and Miyamoto had turned out their respective representative works, or 'The Garden Party' and "A Crowd of the Poverty-stricken", a virtuoso piece in literature, quite apart from the so-called realistic or socialistic schools whose snobbish sentimentality had, although quite prevailing in the '30's throughout the world literature, defeated their very ends due to their non-literally

ulterior *leit-motif*.

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