



Mansfield: A Novel

C. K. Stead

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Spanning three years in the life of the writer Katherine Mansfield during the First World War, this novel follows the ups and downs of her relationship with Jack Middleton Murry and her struggle to write the "new kind of fiction" which she felt the times demanded. She is restless, constantly on the move, in and out of London, to and from France, even, once, into the war zone to be with her French lover, novelist Francis Carco. For a short time, Mansfield is able to behave as though the war is merely "background", but her ardent relationship with her brother, who arrives from New Zealand to fight in France, makes detachment impossible - as does her love for Jack's Oxford friend Frederick Goodyear, also a soldier. The war's shadow remorselessly darkens all their lives, but only increases Mansfield's determination to break through as a writer. While sticking scrupulously to what is known about Mansfield's life and those of her friends (a cast that includes D. H. and Frieda Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Dora Carrington, Lytton Strachey, Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, Lady Ottoline Morrel and Virginia Woolf), this novel is extraordinary in taking the reader beyond the point of biography into the mind, emotions and sensibility of its subject. It is a sharp, subtle and appealing portrait of the person of whose work Virginia Woolf wrote: "It was the only writing I was ever jealous of."

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