The Garden Party Study Guide

The Garden Party by Katherine Mansfield

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Widely anthologized, "The Garden Party" is considered Katherine Mansfield's finest piece of short fiction. Such modernist authors as Virginia Woolf were profoundly influenced by Mansfield's streamof- consciousness and symbolic narrative style. "The Garden Party" is a remarkably rich and innovative work that incorporates Mansfield's defining themes: New Zealand, childhood, adulthood, social class, class conflict, innocence, and experience.

Structured around an early afternoon garden party in New Zealand, "The Garden Party" has clear connections to Mansfield's own childhood and adolescence in New Zealand. The main character of the story, Laura, is an idealistic young girl who wishes to cancel the planned afternoon gathering when she learns of the death of a working-class laborer who lives down the hill from her parents' home. The story concerns Laura's alternating moments of resistance and conformity to her mother's idea of class relations. Like Laura, Mansfield was the daughter of a well-to-do businessman—Harold Beauchamp—and his wife, Annie Burnell Dyer Beauchamp. Like the Sheridans in "The Garden Party," the Beauchamps lived luxuriously, in grand houses in and around Wellington, New Zealand.

"The Garden Party" was first published in 1922 in a collection entitled *The Garden Party and Other Stories* and immediately became a classic example of the short story form. In an essay published in 1957, Warren S. Walker wrote, "The most frequently anthologized of Katherine Mansfield's works, "The Garden Party" has long enjoyed a reputation for near-perfection in the art of the short story." In her time, Mansfield was seen as one of the prime innovators of the short story form. After Mansfield's death in 1923, Virginia Woolf would remark in her diary, "I was jealous of her writing— the only writing I have ever been jealous of." Even though it has enjoyed a fine reputation, critics and readers alike have puzzled over what they see as an unsatisfactory ending—an ending that, as Warren Walker remarks, "leaves readers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a vague sense that the story somehow does not realize its potential."

Author Biography

Katherine Mansfield was born Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp to a wealthy family in Wellington, New Zealand, on October 14, 1888. She was educated in London, deciding early on that she wanted to be a writer. She studied music, wrote for the school newspaper, and read the works of Oscar Wilde and other English writers of the early twentieth century. After three years in London she returned to New Zealand, where her parents expected her to find a suitable husband and lead the life of a well-bred woman. However, Mansfield was rebellious, adventurous, and more enamored of the artistic community than of polite society.

Mansfield began publishing stories in Australian magazines in 1907, and shortly thereafter returned to London. A brief affair left her pregnant and she consented to marry a man, George Bowden, whom she had known a mere three weeks and who was not the father of her child. She dressed in black for the wedding and left him before the night was over. Upon receiving word of the scandal and spurred on by rumors that her daughter had also been involved with several women, Mansfield's mother immediately sailed to London and placed her daughter in a spa in Germany, far away from the Bohemian artists' community of London. During her time in Germany, Mansfield suffered a miscarriage and was disinherited. After returning to London, Mansfield continued to write and conduct various love affairs.

In 1911, Mansfield published her first volume of stories, *In a German Pension*, most of which had been written during her stay at the German spa. That same year she met John Middleton Murry, the editor of a literary magazine. Although they lived together on and off for many years, her other affairs continued. Together Mansfield and Murry published a small journal, the *Blue Review*, which folded after only three issues. However, the experience led to friendships with members of the literary community of the day, including D. H. Lawrence and Frieda von Richthofen Weekly. In 1918, Mansfield was granted a divorce from Bowden, and she and Murry married.

Stricken with tuberculosis in 1917, Mansfield became very ill. She continued to write, publishing her collections *Bliss and Other Stories* and *The Garden Party and Other Stories* in 1920 and 1922 respectively. The latter collection includes both "The Garden Party" and "Miss Brill." The collections received favorable critical attention, and she continued to write even after her health forced her to move to Fontainebleau in France. Though she was separated from Murry for long periods towards the end of her life, it was he who saw that her literary reputation was established by publishing her last stories and her collections of letters after she died of a massive pulmonary hemorrhage in January, 1923, at the age of thirty-four.

Plot Summary

Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Garden Party" opens with frantic preparations being made for an afternoon garden party. The main character, Laura, is an idealistic and sensitive young girl. She is surrounded by her more conventional family: her sister, Jose, who, as the narrator tells us, "loved giving orders to servants"; her mother, Mrs. Sheridan, a shallow old woman whose world consists of having enough canna lilies; her father, a businessman; and her brother, Laurie, to whom she feels most similar in feeling and ideals. As many critics have remarked, Mansfield's prose depicts an almost dreamlike world.

This atmosphere is compromised for Laura when she hears of the death of one of the laborers who lives in the cottages down the hill from her house. Struck by the inappropriateness of throwing a garden party when a neighbor has been killed, Laura immediately suggests that they cancel the party. The rest of the story is structured around Laura's reconciliation of her concern for the dead laborer and her family's reactions to his demise. Laura attempts to convince Jose of the necessity of canceling the party. Jose's response is indicative of the family's overall view of the impoverished laborers. She chastises Laura for her desire to cancel the party, saying, "You won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental." The narrator's later description of the cottages reveals the family's general hostility toward their neighbors.

After Jose's rebuff, Laura attempts to convince her mother of the need to cancel the garden party. Laura's relationship with her mother is a significant aspect of "The Garden Party." Earlier, in greeting the workmen who were to put up the marquee, Laura had tried to mimic her mother in order to prevent the workmen from perceiving her as a child: "'Good morning,' she said, copying her mother's voice." In the next moment of her conversation with the handymen, however, Laura attempts to distinguish herself from her mother's perception of the working class.

At first, Laura is aghast at her mother's reaction to the news of the dead laborer. Mrs. Sheridan worries only that the death occurred in the garden: "'Mother, a man's been killed' . . . 'Not in the garden?' interrupted her mother." Mrs. Sheridan reacts to Laura's suggestion like Jose does—she becomes annoyed and thinks that the idea of canceling the party is absurd. Giving her a black hat to wear for the garden party, Mrs. Sheridan hopes it will change her mind. At first Laura resists this appeal to her vanity, but once she's left her mother's room, she sees herself in a mirror and is soon overwhelmed by her own "charm." Caught up in her mother's comfortable vision of garden parties and black hats, Laura now perceives the laborer as a distant object of curiosity—like a picture in the newspaper—and no longer a reason to cancel a lovely afternoon garden party.

The party itself is not fully described in Mansfield's story; the only impressions of it are given through snatches of conversation. From these moments it is apparent that the party has transpired as expected, with much made of Laura and her black hat: "Darling Laura, how well you look!" "What a becoming hat, child!" and so on. Soon afterwards,

however, the dead laborer once again disturbs Laura's complacency. Mr. Sheridan brings up the "beastly accident." Mrs. Sheridan suggests that Laura deliver some leftover food to the laborer's widow. At first Laura doubts the appropriateness of such an action, but she is soon convinced by her mother. Almost perversely, Mrs. Sheridan insists that Laura go down to the cottages in her party garb.

Laura's journey to the cottages is described as a journey into an anti-world. Rather than the fresh, airy, and ethereal Sheridan atmosphere, Saunders Lane is characterized by darkness, shadows, halfdressed children, and a sense of oppression. "Dark knots of people" are seen to stand outside the widow's cottage. Laura soon feels the inappropriateness of her dress. She plans to quickly drop off the basket and rush from the disturbing scene.

Unfortunately for Laura, the widow's sister will not allow her to escape so quickly. Laura meets the sorrow-ravaged widow—"her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips." Although her mother has asked her not to look at the dead body, Laura allows the sister to take her to the corpse. Contrary to her expectations, she is struck by the peacefulness and beauty of the young man and by how inconsequential garden parties and lace frocks are to one who is caught up in a different and incomparable dream. Overwhelmed by the disparity between her world and this picture of peaceful death, Laura exclaims in a sob, "forgive my hat."

Laura runs out and encounters her brother, Laurie. Sensing that Laura might be disturbed by her visit, he asks, "Was it all right?" Laura tries to explain her impressions to Laurie but realizes that this momentary sight of the transcendent is unexplainable. Laurie, however, understands what Laura has seen and in response to Laura's unfinished exclamation "Isn't life—" answers, "*Isn't* it darling?" The story ends with the two sharing this impression of a world beyond parties.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" opens on the morning that the Sheridan family is giving a party. Mrs. Sheridan, the family matriarch, has agreed to step aside and act as a guest while her daughters arrange and host the event by themselves. Laura Sheridan serves as the story's protagonist. Since she is considered to be the creative sister, it is up to her to set up the backyard for the guests.

The day of the party, the weather is perfect. It is warm, with no clouds in the sky, and the family's gardener has been up since dawn tending to hundreds of roses that seem to have bloomed overnight. The narrator comments that roses are the most important flowers at garden parties. They are sure to impress the guests, because often they are the only flowers that everyone recognizes.

Workmen arrive at the house to set up a marquee, and Laura is sent to instruct them on where to do this. She tries to look severe as she approaches the four workmen, who are standing on the garden path holding covered rolls of canvas. She is imitating her mother, and when she wishes them good morning she notices that her voice sounds overly affected. A tall, lanky, freckled man smiles at Laura. He has nice eyes: small but impressively dark blue. The other men smile at Laura as well. She suggests placing the marquee in the Lily lawn, but a chubby workman disagrees with her. Laura's upbringing makes her question whether it is appropriate for the workmen to speak to her so frankly. She makes a second suggestion of placing the marquee on the tennis court but then remembers that a band will be set up there. A pale man among the workers then suggests setting the marquee up in front of the Karakas trees, and Laura complies.

Three of the workmen leave to set up, but the tall, lanky man stays behind. He bends down, picks up a sprig of lavender and smells it. Laura is curious about him, since she has never known a man to have interest in such things. She wonders why she can't have workmen friends instead of the silly boys she sees now and thinks that she would get along better with men like the tall man. Laura finds the class distinctions absurd and feels that she is unaffected by them. As she stares at the tall man drawing on an envelope, she feels like a work girl.

A voice from the house calls Laura to the phone. In the hall she sees her father and her brother Laurie getting ready to go to the office. Her brother asks her to check if his coat needs to be pressed. She says she will do this and takes her phone call. It is her friend Kitty, who Laura invites over for lunch. Mrs. Sheridan interrupts the phone call with a message for Kitty to wear the hat she likes. Laura passes on the message and hangs up the phone.

As Laura watches the preparations for the party, the doorbells rings, and Sadie, one of the servants, comes downstairs to answer it. A florist is at the door with pots of pink

lilies. Laura crouches near them in delight as if they were giving off warmth but tells the florist that there must be a mistake, as no one has ordered the lilies. Mrs. Sheridan walks in and says that she ordered them. Laura jokingly reminds her mother that she had promised to leave the party decisions up to the girls. Her mother replies that she had bought them on a whim the day before, because she couldn't resist. The florist stacks the lilies on the porch.

In the drawing room, Laura's sisters Meg and Jose help another servant, Hans, move the piano and sofa. Jose instructs Hans on where everything should be placed. She loves giving orders to the servants, and they love getting orders from her because she makes them feel like they are taking part in some drama. Jose asks Hans to send Laura and her mother into the room. She also asks to hear the song "This Life is Weary" on the piano, " and sings along in accompaniment. Sadie walks into the room to collect labelling flags for the sandwiches, and Mrs. Sheridan says she will bring them to the cook in ten minutes. She tells Laura to write out the names on the flags for her. Then she orders Meg and Jose to finish getting ready and also asks Jose to pacify the cook, who is terrifying her today. The cook is not addressed by name but is simply called "cook." After Laura finishes writing the flags, she brings them to the cook and finds that Jose is there as requested. Laura notes that the cook by no means looks terrifying; as Jose compliments her on the variety of sandwiches she has made, the cook smiles while she cuts off the crusts.

Sadie enters the kitchen to announce that the deliveryman from Godber's has arrived to drop off the cream puffs that were ordered. Sadie brings the pastries in and the cook arranges them. She lets Laura and Jose each sneak one. The sisters know that it is improper to eat these so soon after breakfast, but they take them anyway. Laura then wants to go back outside to see how the marquee is coming, but finds that Hans, Sadie, the cook, and the Godber's man are blocking the door. The deliveryman is telling the others something, and by the expressions on their faces, it is undoubtedly bad news. The cook tells Laura and Jose that there has been an accident nearby, and the deliveryman continues the story, telling them that a carter named Mr. Scott from one of the nearby cottages had been thrown from his horse and killed that morning. He had a wife and five children. Laura tells Jose that they should stop the party. Jose is amazed and accuses Laura of being too extravagant.

The cottages are a group of small houses near the upper-class neighbourhood where the Sheridans live. Washerwomen and cobblers occupy them. The Sheridan children had been forbidden to go there when they were young, because their parents hadn't wanted them to be exposed to poverty and the foul language they believed would be used at the cottages. Laura and Laurie had ventured there anyway, though. They had found the area to be disgusting and sordid but had wanted to go everywhere and experience everything. Now, ass she thinks about the death, Laura is worried about what the band will sound like to the poor widow of Mr. Scott. Jose is annoyed with her sister and says that Laura's sentimentality will not bring the man back to life.

Laura tells her mother that there has been an accident. Her mother's first concern is that something may have happened in their garden, and she is relieved to find out that this is

not the case. Laura tells her about Mr. Scott and suggests that they cannot continue with the party under these circumstances. Mrs. Sheridan reacts the same way as Jose. She doesn't take Laura very seriously, and Laura is astonished at her mother's reaction. Mrs. Sheridan talks Laura into continuing the party and gives her one of her hats to wear. She places it on her head and passes her daughter a hand mirror, but Laura cannot look at herself. Mrs. Sheridan is losing her patience. She tells her daughter that people don't expect sacrifices from them and says that it would be unsympathetic to stop everyone's enjoyment.

Laura doesn't understand her mother's reasoning. She goes to her room, where she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror and admires the hat. Now she hopes that her mother is right, and thinks that maybe she *is* just being extravagant. She thinks of the poor widow and her children again, but now the image is blurred and seems unreal; she speculates that perhaps she will remember the image better after the party. At 2:30, the band arrives. Laura talks with her friend Kitty Maitland, and Laura's brother Laurie comes home and waves hello on his way to get dressed. When Laura sees him, she thinks of the accident again and wants to tell him about it. If he agrees with the others, then she will know everything is all right. She follows him into the hall, where he comments on her stunning hat; nothing is said about the accident.

Guests begin to arrive, and Laura greets them as the band plays. The party is a success, and everyone appears to have a great time. When the party is over, Laura and her mother stand side by side on the porch saying goodbye to the visitors. Once their company is gone, Mrs. Sheridan tells Laura to round up the rest of the family to have coffee in the marquee. Laura offers a sandwich to her father, who asks if they have heard about the accident. Laura's mother says that it almost ended the party, because Laura insisted on postponing it; Laura resents being teased about this. Her father mentions Mr. Scott's children, and an awkward silence surrounds the family. Laura's mother looks at all of the leftover party food that will go to waste and suggests that they make up a basket for the Scott family. Laura asks if that is really a good idea, feeling that the widow would resent a gift of their leftover party scraps. Her mother insists that Laura take the basket and tells her to go as she is, still dressed in her party clothes. She suggests bringing them some lilies too, but Jose points out that the stems will ruin Laura's dress.

Mrs. Sheridan follows her daughter to the bottom of the marquee. She begins to warn her by saying, "Don't on any account..." She stops herself, though, and when Laura asks her mother what she is saying, Mrs Sheridan refuses to tell her. It is beginning to get dark as Laura heads out. She closes the garden gate and follows the gleaming white road down to the quiet cottages, which are cloaked in deep shade. Laura flashes back to the party as she walks, remembering what a success it was. She crosses the road and starts up a dark, smoky lane, toward the cottages. She sees women in shawls hurry by and children standing in doorways. There are flickers of light and moving shadows in some of the small houses. Laura wishes that she had worn her coat and is embarrassed by her fancy dress and hat; she worries that people are looking at her and wonders if coming to the cottages had been a mistake; she realizes that it is too late to go back, as she has arrived at the Scott house.

People stand outside the house talking, but the voices stop when Laura nervously approaches. The group parts as though they expected her. Laura asks one of the people outside if this is the Scott house, and on learning that it is, she knocks on the door. She has just decided to simply drop off the basket and go when the door opens, and a woman dressed in black tells Laura to come inside. Laura says that she doesn't want to and only wishes to leave the basket that her mother has sent her to drop off. The woman seems not hear her though, and asks her to come inside again. Laura follows the woman into the house And sees Mrs. Scott sitting before a fire in the small kitchen. The woman who answered the door is the widow's sister. She tells Mrs. Scott that a young lady has come to see her. Mrs. Scott turns around, her face swollen with tears, and then turns back to the fire; her sister asks Laura to excuse her. Laura wants to get away.

Mrs. Scott's sister asks Laura if she would like to look at Mr. Scott; the way in which she asks seems to assume that Laura will want to do this. She tells Laura not to be afraid as she draws back the sheet that covers the dead man. Laura sees him and thinks that he looks peaceful, like he is sleeping. She considers that garden parties and dresses mean nothing to him, and she thinks that he is wonderful and beautiful. Laura thinks about how while the band played and they continued their party, this man had been brought here. He has a content look on his face that seems to say that all is well.

Suddenly Laura begins to cry and says, "Forgive my hat," once again embarrassed by her attire. She finds her way to the door and walks down the path past the people outside. Her brother Laurie is standing at the corner, and he calls to her. He tells her their mother is getting anxious and asks if the basket was all right. When she comes closer, he sees that she is crying and tells her not to cry. He asks if seeing the Scotts was awful. Laura says seeing Mr. Scott was marvellous. She begins, "But isn't life..." She is unable to finish her sentence. Laurie understands what she is saying and simply responds, "Isn't it?"

Analysis

Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" explores the pitfalls of class segregation during the late 1800's. The protagonist of the story, Laura Sheridan, recognizes the insensitivity and selfishness of the upper class to which she belongs when a party being thrown by her family is disturbed by a fatal accident that has occurred the same day in the poor part of town.

On the morning of the party, Laura speaks with some workmen who have come to set up a marquee in the Sheridan's garden. The narrator notes that Laura finds class distinctions absurd and feels that she is unaffected by them. At the same time, Laura's upbringing pulls at her. She wonders whether it is appropriate for the workmen to speak to her frankly. When Laura first approaches the men, she feels awkward and nervous. She tries to imitate her mother when she greets them but notices that the tone in her voice sounds too affected. All of this symbolises Laura's struggle with balance. On the one hand, she looks up to her mother and wants to be part of her social world. At the

same time, Laura thinks she would get along with the workmen better than she does with the boys she knows.

As the party arrangements get underway, Laura discovers that a man from the nearby cottages has died in an accident. Laura's first instinct is to cancel the garden party. She thinks it would be insensitive to continue, an attitude that is shown through her worry about how the band would sound to Mr. Scott's widow. Laura's mother and sister Jose, on the other hand, insist that they should continue the party. Mrs. Sheridan's selfishness and callous reasoning is revealed when she first hears about the accident and tells her daughter that people don't expect sacrifices from them. The statement also foreshadows her actions later on in the story, when she sends Laura to the Scott's cottage with a basket of leftover party food. Laura can sense that this may be an inappropriate offering, but her mother insists that it will be such a treat for the impoverished Scott children, that it will be well received. Laura's sister Jose shares the same attitudes as her mother. Jose is a character who is introduced as a girl who loves giving orders to the servants. Her insensitivity is also foreshadowed when she is testing the Sheridan's piano after she has had one of the servants move it. Jose asks to hear a song called "This Life is Weary," an ironic choice given Jose's comfortable life.

Mansfield's use of irony reaches a pinnacle when both Laura's mother and sister imply that wanting to stop the party is simply extravagance; to them, the choice to continue a lush party in spite of the fact that one of their neighbours has died is logical. Even though Laura recognizes that her views are different from those of the rest of the family, she feels the pull of her upbringing. After she asks her mother to stop the party, Laura goes to her room, where she becomes distracted by the mirror image of herself in her new hat. Upon seeing this, her vision of the distraught widow and her children begins to fade.

As the story winds down, Laura is asked to deliver the basket of leftover food to Mrs. Scott. This journey marks another instance in which Laura is pulled in two different directions because of class separation. Once she is near the cottages, she feels embarrassed by the way she is dressed. At the same time, she is uncomfortable around the mourners and wants to leave immediately. This last feeling is foreshadowed earlier in the story when the narrator describes Laura and Laurie's trips to the cottages. They are disgusted and frightened by the poor area of town but go there anyway because they want to see everything, all aspects of the world. When Laura finally sees the dead man, she is overtaken with emotion. All at once, she gains a new perspective, or so it seems. She looks at the man and realizes that things such as garden parties mean nothing to him. This moment of epiphany that makes her realize that there are more important things in the world than those that exist in the comfort of her own social environment. Laura tries to explain this to her brother but can't seem to get the words out. He understands her, however, perhaps because these are the only two siblings to have attempted to forge outside of their social world. Laurie's last statement is a vague question, "Isn't it?" This last line implies that Laura has just discovered something that Laurie already knows.

Characters

Cook

The Sheridan's cook is a nurturing figure, allowing Laura and one of her sisters to indulge in eating rich cream-puffs that have been delivered for the garden party just after they finish breakfast.

Mother

See Mrs. Sheridan

Jose Sheridan

Jose is Laura's class-conscious older sister. She takes a dim view of Laura's wish to cancel the garden party when she tells Laura that she "won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental."

Laura Sheridan

Laura Sheridan is an idealistic and impressionable young person who struggles with her own and her family's perceptions of class difference. Learning that a working-class neighbor was accidentally killed, Laura wants to cancel the garden party planned for that afternoon. The narrative centers on Laura's vacillation between feelings of empathy for the dead laborer and her vanity and class elitism. She unsuccessfully tries to convince her mother to cancel the party. However, her mother distracts her with the gift of a new hat, and when Laura sees herself in the hat, she no longer presses for cancellation of the party. By the end of the story, however, Laura has made an attempt to relate to the lives of the family's working-class neighbors, although the conclusion to the story is ambiguous. It is not clear what, if anything, she has learned or if the experience has changed her.

Laurie Sheridan

Laurie is Laura's older brother and closest family member. After viewing the body of the laborer who died before the garden party, Laura is comforted by Laurie. The conclusion is ambiguous— it is not clear if either Laurie or Laura truly understand their own feelings at that moment.

Meg Sheridan

Meg Sheridan, another one of Laura's sisters, possesses a manner and attitude similar to that of Jose and Mrs. Sheridan. The reader first encounters Meg as she comes down to breakfast with her freshly washed hair wrapped up in a green turban and a "dark wet curl stamped on each cheek." She refuses to go and supervise the workmen assembling the party tent because her hair is wet, so that responsibility falls to Laura.

Mrs. Sheridan

Mrs. Sheridan is Laura's mother. Like Jose, Laura's older sister, Mrs. Sheridan will not consider canceling the garden party because of the death of a laborer living nearby. In an attempt to appease Laura, however, she does suggest that Laura take the party leftovers to the widow of the dead man. She declares early in the story that she intends to leave the party preparations entirely up to her daughters, but it becomes clear that she is closely monitoring— and managing—every step.

Themes

Innocence and Experience

"The Garden Party" traces the psychological and moral growth of Laura Sheridan. The story presents her adolescent confusion regarding the social values of her family and her awakening to a more mature perception of reality after her exposure to poverty and death at the carter's cottage.

Laura's self-consciousness regarding her own youth and inexperience is evident whenever she encounters members of the working class. When sent to supervise the workers who have come to set up the marquee, she regards them as "impressive" because they carry their tools and work in shirt sleeves. In her initial dealings with them, she attempts to play the role of her mother—the adult— but soon loses her composure: "Laura wished now that she had not got her bread and butter, but there was no place to put it and she couldn't throw it away. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little shortsighted as she came up to [the workers]." Copying her mother's voice, Laura says greets the workmen but soon feels that she sounds "affected" and is ashamed.

This lack of assurance affects her at various moments in the narrative, particularly when she is called upon to make adult responses to events which are outside her childhood environment and experience. Her initial idealization of the workmen's natural camaraderie changes to feelings of unease and discomfort when she sees the real conditions of the working-class community—their poverty and their claustrophobic, dark kitchens. When she learns of the death of the carter and wants to cancel the party as an appropriate gesture, she is seduced by the hat her mother gives her and the privileged world the hat symbolizes. The sophistication of her more assured sisters and mother, who have no problem justifying the convenient pleasures of their lifestyle, contrasts sharply with Laura's awkward attempts to do the right thing by canceling the garden party.

Although Laura's responses are frequently childish, there are significant moments of growth in her character. She is always conscious, for example, of the limitations inherent in her class-conscious world and is open to alternate experiences even when she cannot always respond maturely to them. For example, she is genuinely concerned for the carter's widow. Her desire to cancel the garden party in order to spare the widow the sounds of revelry at her sad time is a sign of maturity in its consideration and empathy.

Journey

The theme of journey is used in this story to illustrate Laura's rite of passage from childishness to maturity. As the story progresses, Laura moves from the interiors of the Sheridan home, with its abundance of domestic detail, to the sunlit garden and, later, to

a region beyond this enclosed and protective space of primary identity. This journey starts in gathering darkness as Laura crosses the road to where the lane becomes "smoky and dark." She enters the cottage, travels down a "narrow, dark passage" to the claustrophobic kitchen, past the grief-stricken widow with "swollen eyes and swollen lips," to look upon the calm beauty of the face of the dead carter at the culmination of the journey. At the end of the passage, Laura gains an insightful vision of life and death.

Dream and Reality

Illusion and reality are central themes in "The Garden Party." The world of the Sheridans is consistently characterized as part of a dream that suppresses and excludes the working-class world. The sorrows of the real world are present here only in the pretty song that Jose sings before the garden party.

Laura buys into these upper-class pretensions. When she endorses the rituals of the garden party, for example, the reality outside of the party seems to be an illusion to her: "She had a glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper." Even when Laura travels beyond the confines of the Sheridan garden, the dream continues as she carries the sensations of the party with her—"It seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her."

Style

Style

Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Garden Party" employs a style that is distinctly modern in its use of impressionistic detail and stream-ofconsciousness narrative method. These stylistic features also characterize the works of Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and other innovative writers of the 1920s and 1930s.

The narrative begins in "the middle of things"— In *media res*. The narrative voice describes the scene in a casual and immediate manner which at once establishes an intimacy with the reader— "And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for the garden party if they had ordered it." The almost confidential presentation of such objective facts establishes the narrative voice as the central consciousness of the story—one that perceives and interprets experience and that also, for most of the story, melds with the character of Laura. As the reader is made privy to authorial confidences and interpretation, an appeal is made to identify with Laura's and the narrator's point of view. The reader is drawn into this "central" consciousness gradually, gaining access to Laura's sensibility through constant access to her perception and emotional responses. Most often, the alternation between a third-person narrative voice and Laura's own perception is demonstrated in single sentences, the transition occurring without narrative markers. A prime example of this happens before Laura meets the workmen who are to put up the marquee: "Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread and butter. It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors, and besides she loved having to arrange things," or "His smile was so easy, so friendly, that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue!"

This technique of focusing on the thoughts of a central consciousness is referred to by literary critics as stream of consciousness. Using this method to achieve a more truthful presentation of reality, Mansfield, like other modernists, saw it not as something independent of one's perceptions but rather as constituted by each individual's particular perceptions. In the "The Garden Party," for example, Laura's perceptions are immediately made available, frequently overwhelming what few realities reach the reader through a different source than the main character. At the start of her journey down to Saunders Lane, for example, her thoughts are filled with "the kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughters, and the smell of crushed grass"—memories of the party which at first obscure the actual journey down to the carter's cottage.

Appropriately, the linear narrative of the events surrounding the Sheridan garden party leads up to the climactic conflict of Laura's consciousness. Again, her perceptions at this climactic moment are articulated by the narrative voice, which almost speaks for her, moving from a third- to a first-person point of view. "There lay a young man fast asleep — sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far far away from them both. Oh so remote, so peacefu l. . . . What did garden parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to

him? He was far from all of those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane."

Symbolism and Imagery

Mansfield's descriptive language in this story presents a richly textured, suggestive world. Colors, shapes, and textures become a medium through which the scenes of the story acquire significance. The story begins with an impressionistic presentation of the interiors and gardens of the Sheridan home. The garden itself is presented as a space glowing with color and filled with the warmth of the roses, yellow karake fruits, and lilies. These fruits and flowers symbolize the mood of ethereal beauty that characterizes the Sheridan home. This sense of luminous calm is suggested perhaps most clearly by the following image: "And the perfect afternoon, slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed."

This scene of light and air visibly darkens as Laura leaves the brilliant garden to walk down the hill to the worker's cottages. The somber mood and lack of hope for the villagers is illustrated by the shade as Laura nears Saunders Lane. Similarly, the soft rustling breezes of the garden and the comfortable domestic chatter of the Sheridan house are replaced by silence and the ominous hum that Laura hears as she approaches the worker's neighborhood—" How quiet it seemed after the afternoon. . . . A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crablike, moved across the window."

The shadows intensify as Laura approaches the carter's cottage and is led through a "gloomy passage" by a "woman in black." Within the obscured interior of the cottage, Laura is exposed to death in the form of the young laborer, and the epiphany that she experiences as she looks upon the calm beauty of the dead face suggests a radiant revelation in this final setting.

Historical Context

Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" was written in 1922, during the period between the two world wars. In many ways it reflects the context of its creation. The 1920s saw enormous political and social disturbance throughout Europe. In the new Soviet Union, for example, the Marxist revolution was nearing completion. The Soviet Union's powerful leader, V. I. Lenin, had succeeded in wresting control from the Russian aristocracy and was establishing a system of agricultural collectivization in the rural parts of the Soviet Union. In parts of Europe, political groups were beginning to promote Fascism—a philosophy that supports a government of unlimited power, often ruled by a dictator. These changes alarmed many and prompted people every everywhere to discuss issues related to the class systems that existed during the period.

World War I and the political and social upheavals of the mid-war years had tangible effects on the arts and literature. Katherine Mansfield, like many others in England and elsewhere, felt the impact of the war, as her beloved brother was killed. Other writers and artists were similarly affected by the psychological and cultural fallout of the war. In his 1922 poem *The Waste Land*, for example, T. S. Eliot characterizes his sense of individual alienation and cultural uncertainty, having the poetic "I" of this poem remark, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." The fragments to which Eliot alludes are those bits of Western culture and the humanist tradition that may be used as shields against the new cultural disruption and uncertainty. In nonfiction, Oswald Spengler, a German historian, predicted the end of the hegemony of Western humanist values and culture in his now-classic work, *The Decline of the West*. Rather than a decline of the West, "The Garden Party" may be understood to depict the end of caste-ridden "garden party" civilization—the carefree gentility of pre- World War I Europe—in its representation of Laura Sheridan's struggle between the worlds of her parents and her working-class neighbors.

Critical Overview

Critical attempts to interpret the story's conclusion have led to many analyses of its overall structure. In his article "Crashing the Garden Party, I: A Dream— A Wakening," Donald S. Taylor perceives the story as a narrative of Laura Sheridan's awakening from the comfortable but shallow existence that she has been living. Taylor thus views the lyrics of Jose's song as a foreshadowing of Laura's eventual awakening. Taylor attributes much of the responsibility for this dream-world to Mrs. Sheridan, who, he writes, "keeps the daughters in the dream by giving her daughters the illusion of maturity" in planning the garden party.

In the critical analyses that examine the story Structurally—as a representation and negotiation of two worlds—Laura Sheridan is given much of the responsibility for her own growth or her own awakening. In this sense, "The Garden Party" is much like a *bildungsroman*—a story of individual growth and maturity. In his article "Crashing the Garden Party: The Garden Party of Proserpina," Daniel A. Weiss likens Laura's journey of self-awakening to Proserpina's journey to the underworld. In his reading, Saunders Lane is the underworld of death that Laura must journey to and return from as part of her initiation into life's ultimate mystery—death—and away from the dream world of her family.

In mapping out the mythic and autobiographical aspects of "The Garden Party," Anders Iversen compares Mansfield's story to a story written by Danish author I. P. Jacobsen. He sees the similarities between the two stories as structural; both deal with the contrasting worlds of rich and poor. These two worlds, Iversen argues, not only signify wealth and poverty but also life and death. While in Jacobsen's story there is no mediation between the two worlds, "The Garden Party" allows what Iversen calls a "moment of contact" between the world of life—the Sheridans—and the world of death — Saunders Lane. This moment of contact is made by Laura Sheridan, who alone ventures forth from what Iversen has characterized as her personal "garden of Eden" to what is beyond the garden—the world of the Scotts. Iversen understands this journey as a "rite of passage," one of the fundamental ingredients of the *bildungsroman*.

Rather than analyzing "The Garden Party" through the lens of mythic archetype, feminist critics such as Kate Fulbrook take a more psychological and political view of the story and of the character of Laura Sheridan in particular. In her essay Fulbrook presents Laura's struggle with the class values of her parents as a struggle with her own identity. She views Laura as caught between a sense of herself as an outsider within her own family and her vanity— particularly after she has seen herself in her black hat, when she thinks it impossible to cancel the garden party. Interestingly, Fulbrook interprets Mansfield's representation of Laura's moral confusion as an indictment of "the inadequacy of education of 'the daughters of educated men'"—an indictment, which, as Fulbrook notes, is "deepened by the story's account of the suffering taking place below the Sheridan's privileged hill."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Rich is an instructor of literature, composition, and gender issues at Marymount Manhattan Col lege. In the following essay, she examines ways in which "The Garden Party" uses contrasts between social classes to illustrate how the classes define each other.

Most criticism of Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Garden Party" concentrates on the story as a truncated *bildungsroman*—a story of the growth and maturity of a young idealistic character. Critics such as Daniel S. Taylor in "Crashing the Garden Party: A Dream, A Wakening," for example, see Laura's initiation as a passage from the "dream world of her parents and social class to the real world of the Sheridan's neighboring working-class." As Taylor notes, describing the symbolic signifi- cance of the garden party, "The garden party epitomizes the dream world of the Sheridan women, a world whose underlying principle is the editing and rearranging of reality for the comfort and pleasure of its inhabitants. Its war is with the real world, whose central and final truth is death." Similarly, Clare Hansen and Andrew Gurr, in "The Stories: Sierre and Paris," discuss Laura's evolution into adulthood as taking place in the context of a gulf between rich and poor—a gulf that is indicated by the Mansfield's oppositional descriptions of the world of the Sheridans and the world of their less fortunate neighbors:

Words such as "perfect," "delicious," "beautiful," "splendor," "radiant," "exquisite," "brilliant," "rapturous," "charming," "delightful," "stunning," convey the outward beauty of the Sheridan's life . . . In striking contrast are words describing the working people and Saunders lane: "haggard," "mean," "poverty- stricken," "revolting," "disgusting," "sordid," "crablike," "wretched."

Given that "The Garden Party" was written in 1922 at the height of Marxist movements across Europe and Russia—which, among other things, attempted to understand class structure and identity— it is necessary to explore the way in which "The Garden Party" presents a picture of class interdependence. Specifically, "The Garden Party" is interesting to investigate for the way it portrays families like the Sheridans as being dependent for their class—identity on their always nearby working—class neighbors. Thus, rather than conceptualizing the worlds of the Sheridans and the worlds of the Scotts as diametric opposites whose paths seldom cross, this essay will explore the way in which "The Garden Party" presents the two worlds as always meeting and clashing—defining one and the other through their continual juxtaposition.

"The Garden Party" is structured around the preparations for an early afternoon garden party. The sense of the Sheridans as inhabiting a dreamlike world is set out in the very first lines when the narrator comments on the ideal weather conditions for the garden party. "And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud." The family, and particularly its female members, seem to derive their life-force from the carefree atmosphere in which they live. In the story's first scene, Meg, one of Laura's sisters, is seen sipping coffee, hair washed, wrapped in a green turban. Jose, another sister, is

simply described as a butterfly who always "came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket."

Mansfield, however, does not allow this sense of early morning luxuriance to go uninterrupted. Immediately, those upon whom the Sheridan sisters' luxury depends burst in upon this scene of lazy breakfast-taking. Their entrance is signaled by a break in the narrator's description of the garden and weather: "Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the marquee." The now downto- earth tone of this sentence connotes linguistically a clash between the lives of the Sheridan sisters and the men who must come at dawn to put up the marquee for the party. This interruption is further signaled when Laura, the main character who throughout the story attempts to bridge personally these two ever-present worlds, runs out to meet the workmen with breakfast—the signifier of her "Sheridan" life—in hand. Significantly, Laura feels embarrassed still holding the bread and butter when she comes to meet the workmen: "Laura wished now that she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it and she couldn't possibly throw it away."

The reason for this awkwardness is precisely that the bread and butter, the piece of Sheridan life which she has taken with her, defines her to the workmen as not one of them but as opposite from them, and upper class. Laura attempts to mediate that duality by playing both roles—taking a big workman-like bite from her slice of refined Sheri- dan life while thinking of the "absurdity of class distinctions."

While Laura is exulting in her camaraderie with the workmen, one of them catches her attention. He seems somewhat apart from his compatriot—he does not share the general frivolity, and functions to once again remind Laura of their difference. Discussing the placement of the marquee, Laura remarks that there will be a band playing at the party. To this the workman replies, "H'm, going to have a band, are you?" After this remark, Laura notices that this workman "was pale," and with a "haggard look as his dark eyes scanned the tennis court." At this very moment, however, of a sense of mutual alienation, the workman picks and smells a sprig of lavender from the garden. Witnessing this, Laura feels their differences evaporate and "wonder(s) at him for caring for things like that—caring for the smell of lavender." Once again, then, a moment of antimony, of unmediated difference of "two worlds," is mediated by an action, this time on the part of one of the workmen rather than Laura.

This sense of similar class identities is shortlived, however, as the narrative continues with the continued clashing and jarring of the two worlds. In fact, during the rest of the story there is never a moment where Saunders Lane is forgotten. Even at the dreamiest point in the Sheridan world, Saunders Lane is suggested in some way or another. For example, after Laura has met the workmen, she settles down for a moment and listens to the sound of the house. As she listens she finds that the house is an airy delight, "every door seemed open . . . And the house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices." Even this momentary enjoyment of the house's heavenly comfort is interrupted by Saunders Lane. The interruption comes in the form of "a long chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors." Although we are

told that Meg and Jose are involved in moving the piano, it is the servant Hans's physical labor that Laura undoubtedly overhears.

A more humorous (if not satirical) moment of potential mediation between the two worlds of the story is Jose's absurd song with which she tests her voice. Jose has been earlier described as a "butter- fly"—a girl of cream-puffs and linen dresses, and of course garden parties. Yet, the song that she sings is decidedly not of this type: "This life is *Wee-ary,/* A Tear—A Sigh./A Love that *Chan- ges/This* life is *Wee*-ary." Rather than the expected moment of unity between the Sheridan house and Saunders Lane, the absurd pairing of an emotionally calloused character like Jose with a song of sorrow and desperation serves instead to remind the reader that it is precisely the weariness of others that makes possible Jose's butterfly-like existence. This antithesis of expression and experience is punctuated by Jose's actions at the close of the song,

But at the word "goodbye", and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile, 'Aren't I in good voice, Mummy?'

This mismatch of expression and character is underscored by the fact that this song is preceded by Jose giving orders to the servant, Hans, to rearrange the tables and to sweep the rug.

The garden party is itself not fully described in the story. We are only privy to certain snatches of conversation—and these tell us that it has been a success, with Laura the center of much attention because of her black hat. Before the garden party, Laura's mother, Mrs. Sheridan, had distracted Laura from thinking about the dead laborer and her wish to cancel the garden party by enticing her with a black hat. Laura had at first resisted this appeal to her vanity, but once she leaves her mother's bedroom, she catches a glimpse of herself in the hat in her bedroom mirror. What she sees startles her, and serves to obliterate the image of the dead laborer.

There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long velvet black ribbon. Never had she imaged she could look like that. . . . Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed so blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper.

The hat thus functions at this moment to reinforce more than ever the division between the world of the Sheridans and the world of the Scotts. Suf Suffused with vanity as a result of the hat's charm, Laura forgets the tragedy down the hill, and more than ever desires to continue with the garden party. Even when confronted with her brother, Laurie — the family member with whom she is most emotionally intimate—Laura decides not to tell him of Scott once he has complemented her on her hat.

Ironically, the hat—after the garden party—is a catalyst for a moment of understanding/connection between Laura's world and the world of the Scotts. After the party, Laura's mother suggests that Laura take a basket of party scraps down to Scott's

widow. At first, Laura questions the appropriateness of this gesture, but is soon convinced. Mrs. Sheridan also insists that Laura "run down just as [she is]"—in party dress and hat. Arriving at Saunders Lane, Laura soon feels awkward because of the way in which she is dressed. This awkwardness, I would argue, signals a moment of insight for Laura into the lives of the workers who live on this lane. She is disturbed because of the brightness of her frock and the extravagance of the famous hat: "how her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer—if only it was another hat!" Noting the difference between her dress and that of the laborers—tweed capped men and shawled women—Laura realizes the life absent of carefree happiness that the inhabitants of Saunders Lane must endure. A bright frock and an extravagant hat have no home here. Like the bread and butter episode, this piece of Sheridan life reveals to her the almost unsurmountable disjuncture between her life and the lives of these workers.

The hat also functions to create another moment of insight for Laura when she is alone with the body of the laborer. When Laura enters the Scott home, she is immediately confronted with the sorrow- ravaged face of the laborer's widow. Although Laura tries to escape as soon as it is possible, the widow's sister insists that she view the now-peaceful body of Mr. Scott. Laura is soon overwhelmed by the peacefulness of the expression on the laborer's face; particularly she is overcome by the remoteness of his appearance. "He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane." Laura feels that she can not leave Scott without saying something that would indicate the affect that he has had on her— "She gave out a loud, childish sob . . . 'Forgive my hat,' she said."

Although her plea is undoubtedly comical and absurd, it also carries within it a significant moment of understanding. As we have seen, the hat has heretofore functioned as a prime signifier of the division between the two worlds—earlier, the hat had caused Laura to forget the tragedy just down the hill. By apologizing for her hat, Laura is also apologizing for what it represents—class snobbery, selfishness, and the almost unsurmountable psychological and social division between the world of the laborers and the world of the Sheridans. The hat, then, here facilitates a moment of connection—of class similarity—through its very significance as a symbol of division and antimony. The story concludes with Laura meeting her brother, Laurie, in Saunders Lane. Her demeanor with him indicates that she has been touched by the universality of death and life—both know neither class borders nor garden parties.

Source: Jennifer Rich, "Overview of 'The Garden Party,'" in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Satterfield discusses the importance of irony in "The Garden Party."

All of the writing on Katherine Mansfield's most anthologized story recognizes or implies that "The Garden Party" is a fable of initiation. The general interpretation argues that Laura goes from her Edenic world to one in which death exists, and that archetypically she loses her innocence, thereby acquiring knowledge and reaching a point of initiation. Laura has a great discovery, true; but because of her inability to make any kind of statement about it that would serve to clarify its meaning, critics disagree on whether she will go on to learn more about life and death or whether she will retreat into the sanctuary of the garden world. Much of the disagreement can be resolved, I believe, by a close examination of the irony—which has been largely ignored—and the function and effect of that irony upon the events of the story. Also, "The Garden Party" contains two types of initiation, a fact mostly overlooked, and the initiations are not compatible, as the details of the story make evident.

Irony is the keynote. The central character of "The Garden Party," Laura Sheridan, is protected from the exigencies of life and is unable to view reality (even death) except through the rose-tinted glasses provided by a delicate and insulated existence. Laura's world is a world of parties and flowers, a pristine world of radiant, bright canna lilies and roses, a precious and exclusive world. Laura's sister, Jose, is early described as a butterfly—and what creature is more delicate than a butterfly? That Jose chooses to sing a song about a weary life, obviously something she is unacquainted with, has to be ironic: in the Sheridan family, weariness and sorrow are merely lyrics to be mocked.

Mansfield's exquisite use of imagery is as telling as her irony. For example, the flower imagery throughout the story serves to keep the reader reminded of the delicacy of Laura's world. The flowers are splendid, beautiful, and—what is not stated—short-lived. Laura, too, is beautiful, radiant, flower-like. But even the afternoon is likened to a flower: "And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed." Laura, her vision attuned to the superficial, can see only the beauty and not the dying of the flower, and she cannot see that, in many ways, she is very much like a flower herself.

The symbolism of Laura's hat as well as her name (from *laurel*, the victory crown) is apparent. Marvin Magalaner adroitly sums up the signifi- cance of both: "When the mother thus presents her daughter with her own party hat in typical coronation fashion, she is symbolically transferring to Laura the Sheridan heritage of snobbery, restricted social views, narrowness of vision—the garden party syndrome." Surely this is the case, although Laura may not be aware of it. Hence here is an initiation that is true and subtle.

But the strong irony of this story results from the contrast between the way Laura sees herself and the way the reader is led to see her. Laura has very little—if any&mdashinsight, a fact made manifest throughout "The Garden Party." Her dealings with the workmen illustrate her lack of awareness: she sees them as "extraordinarily

nice," apparently not realizing that their "niceness" is more than likely due to their roles as subordinates, mere hirelings. Laura does not even seem to realize that what to her is a delightful party is simply toil to the workmen. Selfabsorbed and narcissistic, she takes the superficial at face value because both she and her perceptions lack depth. "She felt just like a work-girl" is stingingly ironic because the reader knows that Laura has absolutely no concept of the life of a work-girl, just as she has no idea of what lies behind the friendly veneer of the workmen. For her to imagine that she would "get on much better with men like these" rather than the "silly boys" who come to her parties is an indication of how little general comprehension and self-understanding she possesses.

The other obvious contrast in the story is between the gaiety on the top of the hill and the sorrow below. The death of a man intrudes upon Laura's affected sensibilities and she discusses the possibility of canceling the party, but, as we suspected, her conscience is easily assuaged (and by the symbolic hat, a distraction that serves to fix Laura permanently in her world). Nothing, positively nothing, is permitted to spoil the party; even the weather is described as "ideal"—a "perfect day for a garden- party."

In the Sheridan world, suffering and misery cannot take precedence over well-ordered but mundane social functions, and will not be allowed to interfere. Consequently, Laura, with uncommon self-centeredness, blots out the death of a common man until a more convenient time: "I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided." But even then, for her to realize that she is actually going to the house of the dead man is difficult because "kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else." Unmistakably she has room for little else than parties, and the closer she comes to the house of the dead man the more she realizes her mistake, for here is a reality she does not want to face: it is so much easier to commiserate from the top of the hill—and then to go on with one's fun. When she actually views the dead man, she can see him only as she sees death, as something remote, far, far away. (In addition, she has no more understanding of why she is there than does the dead man's wife.) Death is so removed from Laura's insular life that it is unreal; it cannot really be experienced, much less coped with, so she sees it as she sees everything else, as something marvelous and beautiful. Just as Laura is unable to pierce the facade of the workmen, she is equally unable to see beyond the face of death, the stark reality of which is transformed into dream, and she sees the dead man as sleeping, happy, content.

Any initiation into the mystery of life and death is incomplete, whereas the installation of Laura into the Sheridan tradition is certain. That Katherine Mansfield could present two types of initiation, one profound and the other shallow, is a tribute to her consummate skill: the fact that the protagonist opts for the shallow in no way detracts from her art but serves to increase the poignancy of her tale and to mark its realism.

Laura is not without sensitivity, but her sensitivity is subordinated to the comforts and trappings of the Sheridan way of life. She is young and inexperienced, and she has been shielded from the harsher aspects of existence. Even after facing the reality of death, however, she is unable to view it realistically and transforms it into a dream, into

something wonderful and happy, something that will fit into the tableau of her resplendent world. The ironic tone has been too clearly established for the reader to take Laura's encounter as profoundly affecting. In this regard, "The Garden Party" asserts itself as not just another story of the loss of innocence, but an alteration of a mythic pattern.

The intimations of mortality are only vaguely perceived, and the story closes on a final note of irony: Laura apparently thinks that she has discovered something new about life, not an awesome truth, but something deep and ineffable, something she attempts to explain to her brother, but cannot. Unlike the emperor Augustus, who would sometimes say to his Senate, "Words fail me, my Lords; nothing I can utter could possibly indicate the depth of my feelings," Laura seems more confused than moved, and her inability to articulate her feelings to her brother is a result of her failure to understand, her inability to grasp the full significance of what she has witnessed. "No matter. He quite understood." That is, he understood as much as Laura. They both will in all likelihood remain in the refuge of their bright house on the hill and continue giving expensive, gay parties and toying with the surface of things until the petals of their own lives are closed.

Source: Ben Satterfield, "Irony in 'The Garden Party,'" in *Ball State University Forum*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Winter, 1982, pp. 68-70.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Hanson and Gurr explore issues of class conflict in "The Garden Party."

Into her narrative, Katherine Mansfield weaves a series of contrasts and parallels which unobtrusively carry forward her theme at the same time as they unify the different elements of the story. "The Garden Party" is a great story and a complex one because in it . . . we are presented simultaneously with several distinct yet interlocking levels of meaning. There is the social meaning provided by the real-life framework; the emotional and psychological overtones of the events in which Laura plays a central part; and the broader, philosophical signifi- cance of the total experience Katherine Mansfield lays before us.

The fact that the rich can avoid (or attempt to avoid) the unpleasant realities of human existence, even summon up beauty and elegance at will, is conveyed in the very first paragraph of the story. This opening paragraph is redolent of the fullness and richness of life, indeed of birth, since the rose bushes are bowed down as if "visited by archangels" in the night. At the same time, there is an unreal, artificial quality to this beauty which the personification of the roses underlines. And so the scene is set for the contrast which is integral to the patterning of the narrative: the contrast between the essentially artificial, almost unreal world of the Sheridans and the quite different but real world of the Scotts. While the Sheridans' money brings them life in its fullness, the Scotts' lack of money confers on them only hardship and death.

The world of the Scotts dominates the ending of the story, the world of the Sheridans the first part. Rich and poor alike have their social rituals, and the ritual being celebrated by the Sheridans is the garden party, which at once allows them to display their wealth and fulfill the obligations of hospitality. Convention governs the attitudes, the behaviour and even the voices of the Sheridan women. Laura's conscious attempt to copy her mother's voice, fol- lowed by her realisation that she sounds "so fearfully affected," indicates the artificiality of the Sheridan manner of talking. Laura, who despises "stupid conventions," cannot act a role; but her mother and sisters do. Jose, for example, delights in the artifi- cial. She loves "giving orders to the servants" and making them feel that "they were taking part in some drama." Emotion is something she simulates but does not feel. Practising her song, "This Life is Wee-ary, / Hope comes to Die," Jose sings of a tragic feeling only to break into a "brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile." Behaviour is learned, not something spontaneous, in this sheltered world of wealth; and the Sheridan reaction to events taking place outside the family circle is dictated by what is expected. Thus Laura's instinctive feeling that the garden party should be cancelled because a death is being mourned nearby is rejected by her mother and sister in virtually identical words. Jose tells Laura, "nobody expects us to," and this is echoed by Mrs Sheridan: "People like that don't expect sacrifices from us."

It is principally through Laura's perceptions that we glimpse the quite different world of the workmen. The distinguishing characteristic of these ordinary people is their

naturalness and spontaneity. Whereas feelings are assumed, disguised, or restrained by the Sheridan women, they are expressed freely by the working class. Instinctively, Laura is attracted to the warmth and friendliness of the working men who come to erect the marquee; and the sensitivity shown by the man who smells a sprig of lavender makes her compare these men and the boys of her own social class. "How many men that she knew would have done such a thing," she thinks. "Why couldn't she have workmen for friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper?" Laura is searching for an identity of her own when she inwardly voices her dislike of the "absurd class distinctions" and "stupid conventions" which pervade the Sheridan world and prevent her from having friendships with such men. She tries to legitimise her attraction to the workmen by pretending to be "just like a workgirl." But the class barriers cannot be broken down, and it is with her brother, Laurie, that she shares her own warmth. "Suddenly she couldn't stop herself. She ran at Laurie and gave him a small, quick squeeze." Responding in a "warm, boyish voice," Laurie echoes the warm voices of the workmen.

Tension in the story is generated by the underlying conflict between Laura, who cannot fully accept the artificial Sheridan conventions, and her mother. Because she is close to the natural world, the girl empathises with the feelings of the working people who are themselves part of that world. With Laurie, Laura had explored the forbidden territory where "washerwomen lived in the lane. . . . It was disgu sting and sordid. . . . Bu t still one must go everywhere; one must see everything." If Laura is something of a rebel, out of tune with her mother and sisters because she needs to include knowledge of the real, outside world in her perception of life, she is also set apart because she is "the artistic one." So long as her imagination functions usefully in the context of the Sheridan life-style, all is well. But when she imaginatively experiences the horror of the working man's death and, forgetting the distinctions between the different social worlds, wants to stop the garden party, she is condemned as "extravagant."

Laura's inner division is central to the working out of "The Garden Party" On the one hand her naturalness draws her to find out about life as it is lived outside the confines of the Sheridan household; on the other her artistic temperament causes her not only to respond to beauty but to cast over it a special imaginative colouring. The world of illusion is as precious to her, although for different reasons, as it is to her mother and sisters. It seems to be Laura who feels that roses "understood that [they] are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties," who registers the noise of the piano being moved as a "long, chuckling, absurd sound," who imagines that "little faint winds were playing chase" and that "two tiny spots of sun . . . [were] playing too." Knowingly, Mrs Sheridan appeals to the imaginative side of her daughter's personality when she cleverly distracts the girl by placing her own hat on her head. "I have never seen you look such a picture," she says admiringly. As Laura gazes at her own beauty in the mirror and decides to forget the death until after the party, the attractions of illusion triumph over the demands of reality. And for the duration of the party, illusion holds sway.

But the magical perfection of the garden party, indeed the whole story, is enclosed within a philosophic framework which reminds us that everything has its opposite. There

is a hint of birth in the opening paragraph; in the final section death asserts its presence. In contrast to the frivolous party given by the Sheridans, the gathering at the Scotts' is for the funeral rite of death. Instead of the artificial drama enjoyed by Jose, a real-life drama must be endured in Saunders Lane. And, while sadness and deeply-felt emotion are kept at bay by the Sheridan women, the dead man's wife mourns, her face "puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips."

Emphasising the gulf between the rich and the poor is the descriptive language of the story. Words such as "perfect," "delicious," "beautiful," "splendour," "radiant," "exquisite," "brilliant," "rapturous," "charming," "delightful," "stunning," convey the outward beauty of the Sheridans' life—and its artificiality. In striking contrast are words describing the working people and Saunders Lane: "haggard," "mean," "poverty-stricken," "revolting," "disgusting," "sordid," "crablike," "wretched." In the domain of the Sheridans, mutability can be warded off so long as the outwardly beautiful appearance of things is preserved. This unattainable ideal of permanence, or stasis, is symbolised by the word "picture." In their ordered perfection, the garden, the roses and the canna lilies resemble pictures. When Mrs Sheridan places her hat on Laura's head and says, "I have never seen you look such a picture," she is in effect framing the young girl's beauty, giving it the semblance of permanence. There is a different kind of picture which Laura briefly visualises: that of the poor woman in the lane and her dead husband. "But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper."

Laura is the central character in "The Garden Party" from whose point of view the story is essentially told; and it is she who bridges the contrasting worlds of the Sheridans and the Scotts. Her personal dilemma is that she must reconcile a sympathetic understanding of the poor, and an awareness of reality, with an imaginative attachment to the almost unreal, magical beauty which sweetens the lives of the rich. Her ordeal comes at the end of the story when she must physically cross the boundaries between her house and Saunders Lane, and in doing so face up to that other, "blurred, unreal" picture. When she enters the cottage of the dead man, the story comes full circle. Just as she had done previously, the girl empathises emotionally with the working people and echoes their grief with a sob. Earlier in the day, her emotional identification with the workmen had been deflected towards her brother: again, it is Laurie who "put his arm round her shoulder. "Don't cry", he said in his warm, loving voice." Laurie, whose warmth links him with the workmen, helps his sister emotionally to transcend the barriers between the classes. The unchanging love of brother and sister, moreover, makes bearable the cruelty of life, the heartlessness of human beings, the "Love that Changes" of Jose's song, and the knowledge of mutability"; of the inevitable ending of a "perfect afternoon," and the ending of life.

But the crucial philosophical problem in "The Garden Party," the problem that Laura shares with all sensitive human beings, is how to encounter ugliness and death yet retain a personal vision of beauty and hope. In this closing scene, Katherine Mansfield contrives an answer. She brings together the contrasting pictures of beauty and ugliness in a picture whose beauty appears truly permanent, "a marvel." The sister-in-law of the dead man tells Laura that "'e looks a picture"; and Laura, the artistic one, agrees that he is indeed "wonderful, beautiful." Imaginatively, she is able to forget the

suffering inflicted by his death and think only that, "while they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. "In her writing, Katherine Mansfield, too, has come full circle. Nothing, in her youthful stories, tempered a young girl's initiation into the harshness of adult life. At the ending of "The Garden Party" she allows Laura to retain her illusions. If we are left with the uneasy feeling that she has let her character off too lightly, we nevertheless accept the emotional rightness of the ending. For there is a sense in which Katherine Mansfield has granted us, too, a reprieve; has assuaged both our guilt about social inequalities and our haunting anxiety about death.

Source: Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, "The Stories 1921- 22: Sierre and Paris," in *Katherine Mansfield*, St. Martin's Press, 1981, pp. 95-139.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Walker examines the characterization and the conflict between characters in "The Garden Party" and concludes that the story's conclusion is vague and uncertain.

The most frequently anthologized of Katherine Mansfield's works, "The Garden Party" has long enjoyed a reputation for near-perfection in the art of the short story. Its characters are deftly drawn with quick Chekhovian strokes; its action moves along at a vigorous pace; its central situation, richly textured, suggests both antecedence and aftermath; its dialogue, especially the internal debate, is psychologically apt and convincing. And yet, for all its undeniable strength and beauty, "The Garden Party," often leaves readers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a vague sense that the story somehow does not realize its potential. The difficulty, I think, is a structural one: the conflict has a dual nature, only part of which is resolved effectively.

"The Garden Party" is a story concerning the most common form of character development, if not the easiest to portray: the process of growing up. Viewing the changing reaction of the protagonist to an incident that threatens to upset an upper class social occasion, one is aware that throughout the whole story there is a groping toward maturity, and that at the end Laura is indeed more mature than she is at the opening. The incident is the accidental death of a relatively unknown man, but for Laura it brings the first real consciousness of the phenomenon of death. Shocked at first, she comes eventually to see life and death in a new perspective in which death is not as unlovely as she had imagined. One aspect of the conflict, then, and seemingly the more important one, is the struggle between fear of and acceptance of death. That death is different from what she had anticipated, that it is beautiful in one respect is the new awareness, and this, climaxing a story about a young person, can be considered a maturing experience.

But there is another aspect of the conflict that immediately engages the attention of the reader, one which is less fundamental but surely not unimportant: the clash of basic social attitudes represented by Laura and by her mother. This adds a dimension of irony to the story, for on the surface Laura attempts to ape her mother socially by taking charge of the arrangements for the party; she even affects the mannerisms of Mrs. Sheridan, "copying her mother's voice" when she first addresses the workmen and trying "to look severe and even a bit shortsighted" as she comes up to them. Beneath such trivia, however, there is a profound difference. The sensitivity of Laura for the suffering of others is set over against the callousness of Mrs. Sheridan, and the two attitudes struggle for dominance in the child's mind. What she strongly feels to be right is pronounced wrong by the person she imitates, and Laura wavers and is understandably perplexed. Open hostility between the two forces breaks out over the propriety or impropriety of going ahead with plans for the party after it is learned that a near neighbor has been killed. Laura insists that the noisy affair— a band has been employed for the event&mdashmust be cancelled. The mother, at first amused ("She refused to take Laura seriously"), finally loses all patience with her daughter. Mrs.

Sheridan implies that Laura is being immature and calls her "child" in the argument that ensues. Here, then, is another criterion for maturity, one in the realm of human rather than cosmic considerations.

Whether it is maturity that is involved or something else, the reader, from the opening paragraphs, identifies himself with Laura, is sympathetic toward her point of view, and is himself antagonized by the values of Mrs. Sheridan. This is true even before the accidental death of Scott, a carter, brings the issue to a crisis. When, for example, Laura realizes that laborers are really fine people after all and remarks, in the internal dialogue, on their "friendliness" and on the "stupid conventions" that have kept her from seeing this before, the reader is less amused at the ingenuousness of her observations than annoyed at the parents responsible for a social orientation that would make necessary such an elementary discovery. It is even more true when mother and daughter argue, and the reader's passive agreement with Laura's humane stand turns into empathic support. Mrs. Sheridan is hopelessly alienated from the reader, and everything she says makes her appear worse. In an attempt to soften the incontrovertible fact that one of the indigent cottagers is dead, she remarks, with heartless logic, "'I can't understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes.'" In refutation of Laura's statement that the party should be postponed out of deference to the bereaved survivors, she says, "'People like that don't expect sacrifices from us.'" It is with no surprise that we learn that the Sheridan children have been brought up to scorn the cottages of the laborers:

They were the greatest possible eyesores, and they had no right to be in that neighborhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens, and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was povertystricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys.

The Sheridans, who see this rural slum adjacent to their estate as "disgusting and sordid," apparently never make any effort to alleviate the condition of the wretches living there, or even to extend moral support to them. Laura, on the other hand, overcoming the snobbery of her upbringing, is acutely concerned about their feelings.

A resolution of this second aspect of the con- flict seems to be suggested obliquely by the use made of hats—hats in general, and one hat in particular. Hats are used functionally in the plot and acquire symbolic value within the framework of the story as they come to represent the whole social milieu of the Sheridan class with its leisure, its conspicuous consumption, and its caste distinctions. In an opening scene, "Father and Laurie stood brushing their hats ready to go to the office." Immediately after this mention of male headwear, Mrs. Sheridan tells Laura to ask Kitty Maitland, with whom Laura is talking on the telephone, to be sure "'to wear to the party that sweet hat she had on last Sunday.'" When Laura is badly upset by the death of the carter, Mrs. Sheridan diverts her attention from the tragedy by giving her a bright jewel from her glittering social world, a "black hat trimmed with gold daisies and a long black velvet ribbon." Laura is thus enticed, for the time being, from her better feelings. One last spark of humane concern flares up that afternoon when Laura encounters her brother Laurie, home from

work now. Perhaps Laurie, who of all the family is the only one who even begins to understand Laura, will agree with her on the undesirability of going on with the party. In her confused state she relies on Laurie to provide an ethical touchstone for testing the validity of her opinion.

She wanted to tell him. If Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right. And she followed him into the hall. "Laurie!" "Hallo!" He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura, he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled his eyes at her. "My word, Laura! You look stunning," said Laurie. "What an absolutely topping hat!" Laura said faintly "Is it?" and smiled up at Laurie, and didn't tell him after all.

Her last resistance overcome now, the spell of society is upon her, and Laura does not escape its influence throughout the ritual of the party.

She is the official hostess, according to plan, thus assuming the position the mother would ordinarily have held, welcoming guests, helping them solicitously to refreshments, and receiving their compliments—for her hat. Finally, the party over and the guests departed, the Sheridans sit down to rest, and Mr. Sheridan contributes to the conversation what he mistakenly thinks will be news to the family: the information about the carter's death. His wife, secretly exasperated at the necessity for renewing a debate she had thought won, rallies with "one of her brilliant ideas." Still completely unmoved by the plight of the widow and her five children, Mrs. Sheridan realizes that now Laura will have to be placated on the issue, and so she suggests that they gather up a basketful of the left-overs from the party and send them to the grieving family, much as one might pick out scraps for a pet sow that had hurt its foot. Laura, quite appropriately, is appalled to think that this is the best they can do for people in trouble, but she goes along with her mother's suggestion, the only concession she has been able to gain. She starts for the cottage of the deceased with the basket, and only when it is too late to turn back realizes how inappropriate is her hat, which by now has become an emblem of the mother and her hard-shelled world. "If only it was another hat!" she admonishes herself. Then comes the incident in the Scott cottage, during which Laura sees something quite peaceful and serene in death. But, significantly, the only thing she says to the dead man is "'Forgive my hat.'" She has not, it seems, succumbed permanently to the enchantment of her mother's world after all.

Here at the climax of the story, then, a decisive stage has been reached in the respective struggles between two sets of opposing forces: 1) youthful fear of death vs. some kind of acceptance of death, and 2) Laura's social attitude vs. her mother's. There is no doubt about the resolution of the first issue:

There lay a young man fast asleep. . . . He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. . . . All is well, said that sleeping face.

About the second part of the conflict, however; there is considerable doubt, for the problem is suddenly dropped, and no further reference is made to it. Does Laura now

switch to her mother's view of the matter, and does she now feel that her previous concern about the cotter's family was as unwarranted as the fear of death that accompanied it? Or has her plea "Forgive my hat" indicated her irrevocable commitment to a position opposed to that of Mrs. Sheridan? If so, will she not now have to reorient her feelings toward her family? We never find out, for no hint of an answer to this dilemma is to be found in the conclusion.

To make matters still more vague at the end, in comes Laurie, who she thinks will understand her. He had failed to sense her difficulty before the party, however, when she had depended on him to do so, for he too had made the social genuflection to the sanctity of the hat. Now Laura hopes that he will grasp intuitively the feelings she is unable to articulate. But does he? The scene at the cottage was "wonderful, beautiful. . . . this marvel" to her, but Laurie seems to think that it must have been otherwise. "'Was it awful?"' he asks. And then a moment later when she says, "'Isn't life . . .'" (mysterious, or surprising, or something else), he answers, "'Isn't it, darling?"' Does he really understand what she is talking about? One wonders. One wonders whether he even understands the significance of the death to her; one is morally certain that he never suspects the inner turmoil she has undergone in defending to herself, as well as to the family, her benevolent sensibility.

Source: Warren S. Walker, "The Unresolved Conflict in 'The Garden Party,'" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. III, No. 4, Winter, 1957, pp. 354-58.

Adaptations

"The Garden Party" was adapted as a film in 1974. It is now available on video through AIMS Multimedia.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the literary movement of Modernism in the 1920s. You may want to consult sources such as *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers*, by Hugh Kenner (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), and *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth- Century Thought*, by William R. Everdell (University of Chicago Press, 1997). What contributions did Katherine Mansfield make to the then literary avant-garde? What were some of other modernist innovations in poetry, in art and in music?

Research one of the major historical topics of the 1920s and before: World War I, the rise of fascism, the spread of Marxism, British imperialism, the European and American stock markets, unionism, feminism, gay life. How did these events affect the rich? In what ways did they affect the poor differently?

Investigate Katherine Mansfield's correspondence and journals. Consider the connections between their subjects of concern and the concerns of her fiction, especially "The Garden Party."

Compare and Contrast

1920s: With the advent of the modernist movement, writers, artists, and musicians struggled to express the alienation they felt toward Western culture.

1990s: Cultural commentators are still drawing inspiration from the disconnection they perceive with their values and popular culture. A term "Generation X" has been coined to describe a whole generation of people that is thought to feel alienated from the rest of society.

1920s: Stalin establishes himself as dictator of the Soviet Union and proceeds to purge his people of dissent.

1990s: The Soviet Union has deteriorated into a debt-ridden Russian Republic. Democratic institutions are weak but existent.

1920s: Harold Ware demonstrates mechanized farming to the Soviets. He also takes volunteers and $150,000 of equipment and seed to a 15,000 acre demonstration farm near Moscow.

1990s: America helps Russia avert a food shortage by loaning it money to buy American grain. The grain, which would otherwise have been dumped, is being bought at a price higher than its current market value.

What Do I Read Next?

Bliss and Other Stories (1920), The Garden Party and Other Stories(1922), *The Doves Nest and Other Stories* (1923), *Something Childish and Other Stories* (1924) were all written by Katherine Mansfield. The collections of stories listed above are crucial to examine for Katherine Mansfield's narrative innovations and for the diverse number of subjects and characters that her stories concern. These are also prime examples of literary modernism in the 1920s.

The Tunnel, a collection of twenty-four vignettes by Dorothy Richardson, was written in 1919. Dorothy Richardson was a great influence on Katherine Mansfield, especially in regards to Mansfield's stylistic innovations. While different in content and subject-matter, these pieces are interesting to read as examples of early twentieth-century female modernism.

To the Lighthouse, Virginia Woolf's most famous novel, was published in 1928. Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield were friends and were great influences on one another. After Mansfield died, Woolf noted that she was the only writer of whom she was jealous. *To the Lighthouse* is a masterpiece of stream-of-consciousness narrative, and, as such, it shares similarities to Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party".

Mrs. Dalloway, by Virginia Woolf, was pub lished in 1922. Similar to "The Garden Party," Mrs. Dalloway is structured around an evening cocktail party. It pairs Mrs. Dalloway, an uppermiddle- class wife of a government official, with Septimus Smith, a mentally-ill veteran. The narratives of the two intertwine throughout and serve to comment upon the other. As such, it is a striking indictment of complacence and snobbery.

The Letters of Katherine Mansfield, by Katherine Mansfield, was published in 1928. Katherine Mansfield was a prolific correspondent and many of her letters include commentary on her own fiction as well as other writers of her time.

The Journals of Katherine Mansfield, by Katherine Mansfield, was published in 1927. These journals are an invaluable source for understanding Mansfield's political and social beliefs and the aesthetic and non-aesthetic influences upon her writing.

Women in Love, by D. H. Lawrence, was published in 1920. One of the main protagonists of this novel, Gudrun, is based on Katherine Mansfield. The novel is structured around the friendships and marriages of two couples—as such it is loosely based on Mansfield's and John Middleton Murry's friendship with Lawrence and his wife, Frieda.

Further Study

Fulbrook, Kate. "Late Fiction," in *Katherine Mansfield*, Harvester Press, 1986, pp. 86-128.

In this feminist critique, Fulbrook argues that Mansfield satirizes female ignorance in "The Garden Party," and that she attacks the "inadequacy of education" that fosters such calloused social perceptions.

Iverson, Anders. "A Reading of Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party,'" in *Orbis Litterarum*, Vol. 23, 1968, pp. 5-34.

Iversen looks at the symbolic and mythological structure of "The Garden Party." He examines the way in which the story can be read as an allegory.

Taylor, Donald S. "Crashing the Garden Party, I: A Dream—A Wakening," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 4, Winter, 1958-59, pp. 361-62.

Taylor views "The Garden Party" as a story of Laura Sheridan's awakening from the false dream-like world of her family and their garden parties to the world of labor, sorrow and death.

Weiss, Daniel A. "Crashing the Garden Party, II: The Garden Party of Proserpina," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 4, Winter, 1958-59, pp. 363-64.

Weiss likens Laura's experience to archetypal myths about initiation and awakening. He particularly compares Laura's journey to the cottager's houses to Proserpina's journey out of Pluto's underworld.

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Fulbrook, Kate. "Late Fiction," in *Katherine Mansfield*, Harvester Press, 1986, pp. 86-128.

Hanson, Clare, and Andrew Gurr. "The Stories 1921-22: Sierre and Paris," in their *Katherine Mansfield*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, pp. 95-139.

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Walker, Warren S. "The Unresolved Conflict in the 'The Garden Party,'" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. III, No. 4, Winter, 1957-58, pp. 354-58.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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