L1S1, Short Story 3:
Internet Help & Extra Reading
for Katherine Mansfield’s “The Garden Party”

Contents:
1) A brief intro; 2) A more detailed analysis; 3) Literary criticism; 4) Intertextuality (Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway)

1) A Brief Introduction to “The Garden Party”
Source: http://www.enotes.com/garden-party

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 stream-of-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."

2) Toward a More Detailed Analysis of the Story
Source: http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides4/GardenParty.html#Top
The Garden Party
By Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)
A Study Guide

Setting

The time is early summer in a year in the first decade of the 20th Century. The story unfolds at the estate of a well-to-do upper-class family on Tinakori Road in Wellington, New Zealand (which was the real-life locale where author Katherine Mansfield lived beginning in 1898), at the nearby home of a poor lower-class family, and on the road between the two dwellings. Mansfield, grew up in Wellington, attended school there, furthered her education in England in 1903, returned to Wellington in 1906, and returned to England while still under age twenty to pursue a writing career. Her father, a prosperous banker, supported her move with a generous financial allotment.

Characters

Laura Sheridan: Pretty teenager who undergoes a conflict on the day of a garden party.
Laurie Sheridan: Laura's brother. Laurie could be a nickname for Laurence.
Meg, Jose: Sisters of Laura and Laurie.
Mrs. Sheridan: Class-conscious mother of the Sheridan children.
Mr. Sheridan: Husband of Mrs. Sheridan and father of the Sheridan children.
Mr. Scott: Cart driver killed in an accident. His family lives in a settlement of commoners down the road from the Sheridan home.
Em: Grieving widow of the cart driver.
Woman in Black: Sister of Em.
Kitty Maintland: Friend of Laura.
Florist: Person who delivers lilies to the Sheridan home before the garden party.
Man From Godber's: Man from a bakery who delivers pastries to the Sheridan home. While making the delivery, he reports the death of Mr. Scott and describes how he was killed.
Cook: The cook in the Sheridan home.
Sadie, Hans: Servants.
Four Workmen: Men who set up the marquee for the garden party.
Gardener: Worker who arose at dawn to cut the grass on the Sheridan estate.

Type of Work and Year of Publication

“The Garden Party” is a short story that was first published in the Westminster Gazette in February 1922. In May of the same year, it was published by Alfred J. Knopf, Inc., as part of a collection entitled The Garden Party and Other Stories.

Narration

Mansfield wrote "The Garden Party" in limited third-person point of view. It is limited in that the author presents the thoughts of Laura only. The personality and outlook of the other characters reveal themselves only through what they say and do.
Themes

Growth

On the grounds of the Sheridan home, beautiful flowers grow. One of them is Laura, a pretty teenager rooted in the traditions of her privileged family. Whether she flourishes depends on whether she can accept and understand the world beyond the Sheridan family's garden paradise. Two developments, one minor and one major, suggest that Laura can do so and thereby grow into a mature adult. These are as follows:

The First

When four workmen enter the grounds to set up the marquee for the garden party, Laura approves of their smiling faces. But after she suggests placing the marquee on the lily lawn, a workman rejects the idea, saying that she should place the marquee “where it’ll give you a bang slap in the eye.” Laura then wonders whether it is respectful of a laborer to speak to a girl of her upbringing in the crude language of the common people. However, Laura ends up approving of the men even though they are the ones who choose the location for the marquee—against the karaka trees. Thus, though failing to supervise the men with authority, Laura learns to overlook class distinctions in dealing with the outside world.

The Second

News of the fatal accident prompts Laura to suggest cancellation of the garden party out of respect for the grieving family. However, upon seeing how smart she looks in the hat her mother gives her, she agrees with her mother and Jose that it would be absurd to call off the party. After the festivities end and the family members gather in the marquee for coffee, Mr. Sheridan broaches the subject of the fatal accident, saying how horrible it must be for the wife and children to cope. The family goes silent. Laura thinks, “Really it was very tactless of father . . . ,” but does not finish her thought. Her mother then decides to send a basket of uneaten sandwiches and pastries down to the Scotts. Whether she sincerely wants to help—or simply wishes to get rid of the leftovers or assuage a feeling of guilt about the Scotts—is arguable. At any rate, Laura agrees to take the basket. After walking down the hill from her home, she crosses a wide road and enters the environs of the common folk. Here, Laura faces a severe test:

She wished now she had put on a coat. How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer—if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come; she knew all along it was a mistake. Should she go back even now?

But she continues on, meets the family, and sees the dead man. The experience is not at all horrible, as she thought it would be. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. 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.
Laura learns that a common cart driver can be noble in death and that she and the “dark people,” though living worlds apart, share a common humanity unbounded class distinction. When twilight comes, the shadows fall on both worlds, and the night makes all men equal.

Isolation

Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan tend to isolate their children from the harsh reality of the mundane, workaday world. Entry to the estate is open only to the upper-class acquaintances of the family—the guests at the garden party, for example, or the friends of Laura, such as Kitty Maitland and the “silly boys . . . who came to Sunday night supper.” Mansfield compares the Sheridan children to the exotic karakas—“trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. Must they be hidden . . . ?” When Laura and Laurie were small children, they were confined to a “desert island” (the Sheridan estate), and their parents refused to allow them to visit the “disgusting and sordid” settlement of common folk down the road. When they were older and eager to break out of their isolation, “Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through” the settlement. “They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything.”

Transition

Laura struggles toward young adulthood, trying hard to think and act maturely but sometimes behaving capriciously. However, when she crosses the “broad road” at the bottom of the hill with a basket of food for the Scotts, she also crosses into the first stage of adulthood. When she sees the body of Mr. Scott—who has made the ultimate transition—she begins to understand the meaning of life and death in a world in which all human beings share a common humanity and class distinctions are nonexistent.

Climax

The climax occurs when Laura enters the Scott home and sees the grieving wife and the corpse.

Imagery: Light and Darkness

In "A Garden Party" the world of the Sheridans is bright, shining, and heavenly. The world of the Scotts, on the other hand, is dark, gloomy, and Cimmerian. Besides contrasting the two worlds, the imagery also reflects the conflicting moods of Laura as she perceives life around her.
Mansfield opens the story with descriptions of the weather—perfect, with a cloudless sky and a golden haze. She follows with a description of the garden, something of a demi-paradise where the grass “seemed to shine” and the rose bushes, heavy with budding flowers, “bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels.” The workmen set up the marquee against the karaka trees—“so lovely, with their broad, gleaming leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour.” Then a florist arrives with a “blaze of lilies.”
Mansfield darkens her imagery when first referring to the cottages of the common folk living down the hill from the Sheridans: “They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown.” She then mixes light and dark imagery when she writes that “The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans'
chimneys."

When Laura is in conflict over whether it is right to hold the garden party when a family down the road is grieving, she goes to her room wearing a fashionable hat her mother gave her, a hat whose hues reflect the conflict. Upon entering her room, the narrator says, "the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon."

When the guests arrive for the party, they are "like bright birds that had alighted in the Sheridans’ garden for this one afternoon, on their way to–where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy, to press hands, press cheeks, smile into eyes."

After the party, the imagery darkens, although there are a few glimmers of light. Following are examples:

It was just growing dusky as Laura shut their garden gates. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade.

The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls and men’s tweed caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings; the children played in the doorways. A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crab-like, moved across the window.

Then the door opened. A little woman in black showed in the gloom.

The little woman in the gloomy passage seemed not to have heard her.

She found herself in a wretched little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp.

**Personification and Onomatopoeia**

Mansfield frequently uses personification (a type of metaphor) and onomatopoeia to animate her prose. Following are examples:

The green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Bowing in deference personifies the bushes.

They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. *Proud* personifies the karaka trees.

The green baize door that led to the kitchen regions swung open and shut with a muffled thud. And now there came a long, chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors. *Onomatopoeia: muffled thud and chuckling.*

Little faint winds were playing chase, in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. *Playing personifies winds and spots of sun.*
"Tuk-tuk-tuk," clucked cook like an agitated hen.

Onomatopoeia: tuk and clucked.

The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken.

Poverty-stricken personifies smoke.

Symbols

The following may be interpreted as symbols in "The Garden Party:"

Karaka Trees, Desert Island, Marquee: The narrator says that the karakas “were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. Must they be hidden by a marquee?” The Sheridan children, of course, are somewhat isolated on their parents’ estate, protected from the outside world. Therefore, the trees would be the children, the desert island the Sheridan estate, and the marquee the overprotection of the parents.

The Lilies: They may represent the purity, innocence, and vulnerability of Laura, who “crouched down as if to warm herself at that blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.”

Laura’s Hat: When Laura asks her mother to call off the garden party out of respect for the grieving Scotts, Mrs. Sheridan places a fashionable hat she had bought for herself on Laura’s head. “The hat is yours,” she says. “It’s much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture.” Then she tells Laura that the party will go on as scheduled, saying, “People like that don’t expect sacrifices from us. And it’s not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment as you're doing now.” Laura then goes to her room, disconcerted. However, as soon as she looks in her mirror and sees how chic she looks in the new hat, she thinks that perhaps her mother was right about the party and decides not to bother herself about the Scotts until after the party is over. The hat, thus, appears to symbolize Mrs. Sheridan’s worldview—including her class-consciousness—which she has now passed on to Laura.

The Hill: The Sheridan estate is on a hill, suggesting that they are of good birth and high social standing.

The Road Down the Hill: This appears to represent Laura’s journey toward maturity—and the outer world from which she has been protected by her parents.

The Wide Road: At the bottom of the hill is a wide road across which is the settlement of common people. It appears to represent the class barriers between them and the Sheridans.

The Garden: Throughout the story, the garden appears to represent the growth of the Sheridan children as well as a kind of Eden in which their parents confine them.

Study Questions and Essay Topics

1. If Laura had finished her question at the end of the story, what would it say?
2. What passages in the story suggest that Laura is on her way to becoming more mature?

3) Literary Criticism

“Class-Consciousness and Self-Consciousness in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Garden Party’”

by Jayne Marek, Pacific Lutheran University

Source: http://www.unca.edu/postscript/postscript7/ps7.4.pdf
In the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, her characters act out their selfishness, self-delusion, and naivety in settings ranging from the lawless wilderness of New Zealand to the most proper of social situations. One of her most famous short stories is "The Garden Party," which one might call a quintessential "Mansfield story" (Banks 73). It is a study of what appears to be the social and artistic awakening of a young, upper-class girl, Laura Sheridan, whose family's annual garden party happens to occur on the day a local workingman has met accidental death. Laura's response upon hearing of the death is to feel that the party should be cancelled out of respect for the bereaved, and the reader senses that the girl's youthful outlook on life will be modulated by this intrusion of harsh reality. Laura's family does not share her empathy, and the party comes off as planned, Laura herself being mollified by the chance to wear a special hat. Afterwards, Laura takes some of the leftovers to the dead workman's family, views the body, and experiences a heightened empathy which seems to lift her out of her class-bound role—she experiences beauty in what others view only as inconvenience, or as disaster. As Gilbert and Gubar put it in No Man's Land, Laura experiences a "moment of being" in which she is "mysteriously empowered" by a meditation on a dead man (1.95). In Saralyn Daly's words, Laura has achieved an "incoherent insight": "As death and the party have existed side by side, so her exaltation and her tears . . . the menace has merged with and become beauty" (121, 1(0). The story ends upon an apparent note of harmony between Laura and her brother Laurie, when Laura tries to express the effect upon her of her empathetic vision. I find, however, that Laura's moment of empathetic bliss is profoundly ambiguous and that, upon reflection, the reader is left uncertain as to whether anything has really changed. It seems to me that what Mansfield is working out in the story involves more than an adolescent's personal epiphany or a clever critique of upper-class complacency, as well presented as these themes may be. Mansfield's thematic manipulation also expresses her own anxieties about her "colonial" background, and one may also find suggestions of anxiety over the tensions between the demands of the artistic temperament and the problems of the "real world." Class consciousness here takes the form of a critique of the hypocrisy and futility of privilege, which informs a self-conscious examination of deeply personal issues of love, integrity, and delusion.

Mansfield's own position as a New Zealander in England strongly affected her artistic development and her sense of identity. Born in 1888 in New Zealand, the young Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp spent pan of her youth in one of the best houses in Wellington, and another pan in the family's large rural home at Karori. At the age of 14, she and her sisters went to boarding school in London, where Kathleen displayed almost equal obsessions with music and writing and felt herself separate from the English girls around her. In her Journal later, she wrote about her school that "Nobody saw it, I felt, as I did. . ." (qtd. in Alpers 55). She made a few friends, one of whom, Ida Constance Baker, was to be her companion off and on for most of the rest of her life. In 1906, Katherine Mansfield, as she now chose to call herself, was taken back to New Zealand with her family,
but after eighteen months she persuaded her parents to give her a small allowance and let her return to England permanently. She had felt constricted by what now seemed to be the limitations of a complacent colonial society. However, this return to England brought with it an abrupt change of circumstances for Mansfield, a change into poverty, unsettledness, and loneliness which haunted the rest of her life.

Daly notes that Mansfield's independent "Bohemian" life in London, begun in 1908, proved as painful as her life back in New Zealand had been, and strengthened the feeling of homelessness which is a recurrent theme in Mansfield's writing (22). Vimala Rao agrees, calling Mansfield "a son of inverted colonial" and suggests that Mansfield's disillusionment with things English led her to appreciate, from a distance, the well-ordered life and values she had had in New Zealand, although she never hesitated to point out the "rot" within her nostalgic recreations (163, 168). Indeed, one finds in Manfield's life a nearly perpetual exile. Her personal history is woven of removals to new addresses and travels between England, France, and Switzerland; the former due to poverty, bankruptcy, and "immorality" (since she was not married to most of the men she was involved with); and the latter two due to her attempts to deal with her debilitating illnesses. This created a pattern of expatriation and loneliness which Mansfield herself characterized as "en voyageant et en ecrivant," that is, "wandering and writing" (Daly 17).

Rao has characterized some of the "colonial" aspects of Mansfield's writings, which do not deal with overt political disaffection or with racial concerns, as do some colonial literatures. Rather, Mansfield's New Zealand stories treat the incongruities of colonial life which result in social problems (Rao 161-62). Because Mansfield in London was living in a society stratified like her own, her experiences and literary investigations lack a sense of confrontation, but rather take the form of ironic observation. One can easily see how this pattern, of examining human behaviors in situations in which the participants' social expectations differ, appears in a high proportion of Mansfield's oeuvre.

Rao believes that Mansfield's colonial background particularly led her to see the world according to class divisions (163). In colonial patterns, dominance and condescension characterize the upper class, while the lower classes are characterized by the suppression of true feelings beneath complaisant or even obsequious attitudes. In a sense, Rao notes, colonial writers are torn between the need to find cultural roots and their internal rejection of what those roots might involve. This can result in "the split personality of the exile"(Rao 168), even at home.

Many of Mansfield's early stories demonstrate a sense of personal alienation which is linked to a character's literal expatriation, for instance in the tales which make up In a German Pension (1911) and the stories "Epilogue" and "The Little Governess," which appeared in two of the magazines (Blue Review and The Signature; 1913, 1915) that Mansfield edited with John Middleton Murry. In the first, the Germans are variously portrayed as gross, militant, stupid, and exploitative, whereas in the later stories the French are portrayed as uncaring people who take shameless advantage of a traveling girl. In these stories, Mansfield's utilization of
point of view gives the reader a sense of superiority and a feeling of disgust about the "foreigners'" behavior, including condescension over the protagonist's own occasional stupidity. In "The Garden Party," a later story, we at first seem to see the opposite happening. Laura, a naive but sympathetic character, attempts to overcome class differences, first through her encounter with the workmen before the party, later through her wish to abandon the party out of respect for the dead man's family, and finally through the moment of empathy which she feels upon viewing the body. All of Laura's responses involve her conscious ambivalence about class distinctions, the dimensions of which she can barely imagine. While Laura enjoys and understands the refined social world represented by her mother, she still catches glimpses of the lives of the "tenants"--those serviceable people whose lives begin at the periphery of privilege. Mansfield's own history of movement from her pampered life in Wellington to the persistent poverty of London provided her with a basis for understanding these two social poles and gave her mixed emotions about each. Early in the story, one can tell why Laura's nature will be both titillated and unsatisfied by the life which the garden party represents. The first paragraph is written in a breathless style so as to echo Laura's own appreciation of the morning's beauty, as "if [the family] had ordered it." The reader discovers that Laura is the "artistic one"--a quick glimpse of Mansfield's irony, for in this case it means Laura is chosen to do the job no one else wants, that of supervising the workmen in putting up the marquee. Laura accepts this without question, since she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else" (534). But her feeling of well-being fails its first test, as Laura comes face-to-face with class division as she, a young girl, must direct the four "impressive"-looking 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. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them. "Good morning; she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, "Oh--er--have you come--is it about the marquee?"

(535)
The reader is allowed to see at once the sort of division that is to grow more acute within Laura--her discomfort with the privileges of her class (simply shown in her bread and butter and her "affected" voice) juxtaposed with her idealized view of the working life (characterized by the strength, the blue eyes, and the smiles of the men). It is a mild case of the "exile's split personality." For the sake of one workman who is "haggard and pale: Laura asserts that there will be "only a small band" for the party, as if her privilege were an affront to his situation. Laura feels reassured when another workman picks a sprig of lavender and sniffs its fragrance; this act seems to confirm Laura's belief that beauty and appreciation are the things that are valuable in life, after all:

Just to prove bow happy she was, just to show the tall fellow bow at home she felt, and how she despised stupid conventions, Laura took
a big bite of her bread-and-butter. ... She felt just like a work-girl.

(536)

Of course, Laura's easy, imaginative solution is part of the equation which Mansfield is building. Laura's desire to have things remain in perfect order allows her to fool herself into thinking that simple sympathy is all that is needed to establish rapport, to understand others, and to fulfill oneself. Here, Mansfield introduces the important connection between Laura and her brother, Laurie. When Laura is called to the telephone, she passes her brother Laurie in the hall and gives him a hug, saying, “Oh, I do love parties, don't you?” His reply in this instance is “Ra-ther: before he tells Page 39

her to “Dash off to the telephone, old girl.” It is part of Laura's delusion that she shares a fine rapport with Laurie as well as with the workmen. In the following pages, however, the reader sees Laura successfully giving orders to the family's servants. Clearly Laura finds this comfortable, and just as clearly her ambivalence about class distinctions does not extend to them. When the cook invites Laura and her sister Jose to sneak a cream puff, the complacency of class privilege is given a perfect emblem. The two girls are left with “that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream” (541). This comment certainly respects the point of view of one who knows the delights of indulgence, and yet in this scene Mansfield also indicted the shallowness of any “inward look” such people might take.

When the news of the workman's death reaches the Sheridans' house, Laura is shocked. Her response is merely postponed by her mother's persuasion and by Laura's glimpse of herself in a lovely hat, which leads her back to the party in a mood of self-satisfaction. But when Laura nervously takes the remaining party food down to the workman's family, her glimpse into the strange reality of poverty shocks her in the same ways did the news of death; she senses the enormity of her self-delusions about working-class life. It is just at this moment, when Laura must face the collapse of this particular preconception, that her moment of imaginative empathy occurs. She sees:

a young man, fast asleep--sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away. ... Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. ... What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. ... Happy. ... happy. ... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content. (548)

The solution of believing in contentment--that is what appeals to the agitated Laura. In fact Mansfield's technique suggests that Laura has projected her own wishes onto the dead face in order to create an artificial peace in which her mind can rest. If this were simply a story of adolescent awakening, or of the imaginative power needed to conquer class differences, the story might well have ended here.

But Laura's movement between the two social levels has not come to a satisfactory conclusion. At the end of the story she is, quite literally, left in the middle ground. Her final question reaches out to her brother Laurie to see whether his understanding will confirm the primacy of what Laura feels is beautiful and true:

Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. ... Was it awful?”
"No," sobbed Laura. "It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie--" She stopped, she looked at her brother. "Isn't life: she stammered, "isn't life—" "But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

"Isn't it, darling?" said Laurie. (549)

His response again carries an ambiguity that Laura does not catch. His words seem to be placatory, but they actually conceal Laurie's true opinion. One can see that the net effect is to seal off the rapport Laura thought she had, by implication denying the rapport she felt at the dead man's house.

The reader senses that Laura will remain caught by her social role, through the way others see her if not by her own ambition. She will either be forced to continue to fool herself, or to accept the isolation brought about by her "artistic" ability to imagine such human rapport--indeed a double bind for a sensitive person. Thus has Mansfield used an interrogation of class identity to explore related, but very personal, issues of self-delusion and the integrity of artistic understanding. Her personal life sheds some additional light on the harmonics these themes struck in her mind.

The issue of class privilege in this story can also be read as Mansfield's critique of the collective and private delusions in English society which led to the Great War, and of the mental gyrations by which those "at home" were able to fool themselves--for a while--about what the war "meant: ignoring, the real suffering experienced far away. Mansfield, who lost her beloved younger brother Leslie Heron Beauchamp in that war, wrote in a 1919 book review about an author's ironic "salvation" of a young man from an awkward social situation via the declaration of war:

Hurrah for August, 1914! He is saved. Off he goes to be honourably killed. Off he goes to the greatest of all garden parties--and this time there is no doubt as to his enjoying himself. War has its black side, but the lessons--the lessons it teaches a man! Where else shall a man learn the value of brotherly love, the wisdom and friendliness of the generals at the Base, the beauty of Mr. Lloyd George's phrase 'the War to end war,' the solid worth and charm of a London restaurant, a London club, a London theatre? (Novels and Novelists 80-1)

Coming from a person who had lost an extremely important "brotherly love" in that war, and who during her adult life knew the strain of poverty and social anomie, this passage understates Mansfield's fury over the self delusions of the upper classes, their "solid worth and charm" that are easily able to deny the "black side" of war in favor of emphasizing empty ideals.

It may also be that "The Garden Party" is a parable about Mansfield's feelings of guilt over the way she used her "artistic privilege" to create a stable base in her difficult exile life. It was not her long-term relationship with John Middleton Murry which provided that basis; rather, it was her reliance upon her old friend Ida Baker which gave the greatest security to Mansfield's life and which also occasioned some reprehensible behavior that made use of exactly the self-assured class-consciousness which Mansfield holds up to question in this story.

When Mansfield wrote "The Garden Party" in 1921, she was recuperating
in the relative comfort of Montana-sur-Sierre, Switzerland, in a state of
stability she had not known for some years. Murry was there, as was Baker,
who was keeping house for them as she often had in past years. The
relationship between Baker and Mansfield was problematic; Baker was
dedicated to Mansfield, but to many readers it appears that Mansfield used
Baker as an anchor, a servant, and foil for her many moods. A. L Barker
introduces Baker's memoirs by writing,
Ida was born to be a helpmate, a woman who loved to serve. . . .
[She] was willing to defer a life of her own and live joyfully,
painfully, and to the full on the periphery of another. .. Certainly
[Katherine] made use of Ida, a whole range of uses, objective and
subjective, for loving and hating, nursing her in her sickness,
keeping her night-fears at bay, cooking the lunch, fetching the
bathwater, settling the cat, any of the troublesome, trivial, life-supporting
tasks which Katherine could not do for herself. (xi -xiii)
It cannot be denied that Mansfield's illnesses and poverty forced her into an
unsettled life in which she was greatly dependent upon a few good friends,
Baker foremost among them, and Murry rather notably not. Through the
years, Mansfield had taken Baker's money, had demanded that she send
things or drop everything for a trip, and then had sent her away during
periods of reconciliation with Murry. Baker herself writes:
So often people have passed judgment on the way Katherine
behaved to me, saying "She made use of you." But if she did make
use of me, it was because I saw to it that she did .... Katherine
believed that one should try to live perfectly, down to the smallest
detail . . .. If she asked much of others she asked far more of
herself, and felt strongly that, if you wished to be a fine artist, you
must discipline yourself and learn to live finely. (60)
This is as gracious an explanation as one could hope for such a situation.
Baker sees Mansfield's demands for "perfection" and comfort as
instrumental to the realization of her genius, a notion which Mansfield
encouraged. Nevertheless, this rationalization cannot mask a relationship
which put Baker in the servant's role through Mansfield's manipulation of
her love. It is as if Mansfield needed to assert her power over someone in
order to mitigate some of the difficulties of her life; and it is telling that she
took this particular privileged role. Baker even writes at one point that,
because she had trouble managing servants, "We decided they would much
rather take their orders directly from [Katherine], so I became a member of
the staff" (130).
Mansfield's letters reveal a profound split within herself over her
treatment of, and attitudes towards, Baker. She recognized that, in order to
write, she must be taken care of; but her pain and fear often led her to be
domineering in ways she herself disliked, and which she later regretted. She
was quite aware of the extremities of demands she put on Baker, yet her
letters show that she tried to explain herself rather than apologize:
We are being unfortunate in our meetings. . . . The truth is that for
the time being my nature is quite changed by illness. You see I am
never for one single hour without pain . . .. This, plus very bad
nights, exasperates me and I turn into a fiend, I suppose. . . . All
the same, and knowing and realizing this as I do, I still ask you to come to Hampstead—until I am better. For the sake of all that has been I ask that of you. I know I shall get better there and quite well again, but see me through these next few months will you? Oh! it is . . . incredible that one should have to explain all this. I always feel that the great high privilege, relief and comfort of friendship was that one had to explain nothing. But I have sinned against friendship that's why. (qtd. in Baker 122-23)
The "privilege" of friendship invoked here involves Baker's total acquiescence to Mansfield's needs and preferences. Certainly unequal, this relationship manifested itself in what amounted to class division between the privileged "artist" and the obedient "servant":
I can't devote myself to [work] if I have to look after the house and my clothes and so on. It's impossible. At the same time I must do it without delay. I can pay you between £10-£12 a month. . . . Can I ask you to do just simply what is necessary--i.e. what I should do if I hadn't a profession. In a word, can I feel, payment apart and slavery apart and false pride apart—that you are mine? (qtd. in Baker 170).

In her long and troubled relationship with her friend, Mansfield created in herself an emotional battle between her manipulative assertion of power and her idealized dream of a life of artistic creation. One can see in Mansfield's letters the same struggle that Laura felt, between a stubborn reality and a transcending wish for effortless rapport and insight, in these words closing one of the letters to Baker: "In this imperfect, present world we have failed each other, scores of times, but in the real unchanging world we never have nor come down from our high place" (qtd. in Baker 123).

In reading "The Garden Party" with these biographical materials in mind, it becomes clear that, along with the themes involving personal awakening and social concern, Mansfield in this story is using class relations as a paradigm for examining alienation and the problematics of personal integrity. She demonstrates, through a naive but sensitive character, the difficulties of arriving at a sincere and positive way of coping with the problems and hypocrisies of the world. The deeply ironic tone of Mansfield's writing gains poignance and power when one considers her inability to make this "transcendent vision of harmony" work in her own life. 

"The Garden Party" may be read as an expression of Mansfield's disillusionment with the power of art to teach us about ourselves, even as the story itself is a consummate piece of literary craftsmanship.

WORKS CITED
• Barker, A L. "Introduction." Katherine Mansfield: The Memories of LM. By Ida Constance
4) Intertextuality: The Opening Lines of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)


**Question:** Which similarities do you find (in tone, characters and themes) between the introductory lines in *Mrs Dalloway* and Katherine Mansfield’s “The Garden Party”?

MRS. DALLOWAY said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer’s men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, “Musing among the vegetables?”—was that it?—“I prefer men to cauliflowers”—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace—Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished—how strange it was!—a few sayings like this about cabbages.

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnell’s van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. THERE! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can’t be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people’s eyes, in the swing,
tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War was over [...].