

## Painful Ambivalence: Marxist Feminist analysis of Moral Anxiety Gendered Class Consciousness in “The Garden Party”

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### Abstract

*Through the utilization of Marxist feminist literary theory, the current article analyzes Catherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" to examine the interconnected themes of class consciousness, gender, social injustice. With a specific focus on the protagonist, Laura Sheridan, her gradually evolving awareness of class, the article examines the narrative's suburban New Zealand setting the social hierarchy between the affluent Sheridans their less fortunate neighbors. The luxurious garden party serves as a poignant reminder of the upper class's disconnection from society and their condescending attitudes towards individuals of lower status. In addition to this, the article delves into gender and its effects on the characters' experiences expectations. Its objective is to gain an understanding of the social realities of the time through the theoretical lens of Marxist feminism to address the pressing concerns of that era. Specifically, the article examines how Laura's representation of class consciousness reflects the societal power dynamics of the time, how the intersection of gender class influences Laura's mixed feelings about the class system in her social environment, how "The Garden Party" demonstrates the impact of class gender on social hierarchy's power structures in the early twentieth century. The article draws attention to the pressing social concerns of the time and demonstrates how the theoretical lens of Marxist feminism can aid in understanding the social realities of the past.*

**Keywords:** Class Consciousness, Gender, Marxist Feminism, Fiction, Short Story, Symbolism, Ambivalence, Social Context.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Catherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" presents a meticulous exploration of complex interrelationships between class consciousness, gender,

and social injustice. The story delves into the various frequently conflicting ways in which these themes interact and have an impact on the lives of the characters. To acquire an in-depth analysis of how the story reflects the social realities of its era, this research article analyzes the story utilizing the theoretical framework of Marxist feminism (Eagleton, 2003; Hooks, 2000; Marx, 1999). The analytical focus is on the portrayal of class consciousness, gender, social injustice in the narrative, how these themes interconnect with each other reveal more significant societal issues. The investigation is particularly concentrated on Laura Sheridan, the protagonist of the story, and her experiences in dealing with her evolving class consciousness. This introductory section provides a summary of the plot the primary characters outline the utilization of Marxist feminist literary theory in the analysis. The purpose of this research is to enhance the understanding of the intersections of class, gender, social injustice in literature, and their reflection in society through the story's central character, Laura.

Catherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" was initially published in 1922, it is set in a suburban area of New Zealand. The plot of the narrative is centered on the planning, hosting, and consequences of the Sheridan family's titular garden party. Laura Sheridan, the eldest daughter of the Sheridan family, is the protagonist, she is tasked with organizing the party. Symbolism is used to convey profound message's themes; the narrative is written in a realistic style that emphasizes the inner emotions thoughts of the characters. The story depicts the social hierarchy that exists between the wealthy Sheridans their less privileged neighbors who work for them (Bashir, Mir and Mehmood, 2019; Vieco, 2020). The luxurious nature of the garden party highlights the upper class's disconnection from the rest of society, serving as a representation of their insincerity shallowness. Furthermore, it demonstrates the privileges that the upper class enjoys as regards how they perceive those of lower status. Another significant theme explored in the narrative is gender and its impact on the characters' experiences expectations (Donovan, 2014). The story portrays Laura's struggle to balance her desire to participate in the party, societal gender norms, her evolving awareness of her neighbors' misfortune tragic end.

The objective of analyzing the themes of class consciousness, gender, social injustice in "The Garden Party" is to understand the social realities of the time through the theoretical lens of Marxist feminism. Marxist feminist literary theory is a multifaceted method that integrates the critical principles of feminist theory Marxist theory, which respectively examine the gendered dimensions of social interactions the economic political systems that constitute society (Barrett, 2014). The application of this theoretical framework is instrumental in

deconstructing the intricacies of power oppression that permeate the narrative of "The Garden Party" provides an in-depth insight into the complex interplay of class consciousness, gender, social injustice. Furthermore, this approach elucidates the broader societal problems that are reflected in the story, thereby shedding light on the pressing concerns of the time (Ferguson, 2016). By examining the narrative through this theoretical framework, the connections between these themes and their reflections on more significant societal problems will be illuminated. Ultimately, this research contributes to the understanding of the intersections of class, gender, social injustice in literature and their impact on society. Specifically, this research article aims to address the following research questions, which are critical to understanding the text's theoretical socio-cultural significance:

1. How does Laura's representation of class consciousness in "The Garden Party" reflect the societal power dynamics of the time?
2. How does the intersection of gender class shape Laura's ambivalence towards the class system in her social context?
3. In what ways does "The Garden Party" illustrate the impact of class gender on social hierarchy's power structures in the early twentieth century?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Catherine Mansfield is regarded as one of the most important short story writers of the 20th century. Several literary elements, including modernism, symbolism, gender, have been extensively studied and analyzed in research studies of her work. Her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, which allows for a thorough understanding of the characters' thoughts emotions, has been the focus of a great deal of research on her literary production. Through this modernist technique, Mansfield explores the inner lives of her characters. This unique method of writing, often characterized by its fragmented disjointed nature, serves to capture the raw unrefined inner thoughts of the protagonist, exposing their deepest desires, fears, memories. It's a technique that adds a whole new level of depth to Mansfield's stories, allowing readers to immerse themselves in her characters' consciousness, experiencing their thoughts emotions in real time. Kaplan (2019), for instance, investigates the connection between Mansfield's contribution to modernist literature her challenges as a female author during the period of modernist experimentation with literary techniques including stream-of-consciousness.

According to Kaplan, the use of stream of consciousness in Mansfield's fiction is an enigmatic perplexing one, blurring the lines between objective reality subjective perception, pushing the boundaries of conventional storytelling. Her use of this narrative style technique offers a distinctive insight into the characters' inner turmoil, the quest for inner peace.

Another recurring theme in the works of Mansfield focuses on the female gender its socio-cultural realization in the early 20th century. Her characters, often women, are at the mercy of a patriarchal society that denies them the opportunity to be their true selves, instead forcing them into prescribed gender roles. Mansfield's use of free indirect discourse, shifting perspectives, stream of consciousness allows her to delve deep into the experiences of her female characters, exposing the inner turmoil struggles they face as they navigate the complexities of gender social norms.

Vieco (2020) argues that Mansfield's portrayal of women in her stories challenges traditional gender roles emphasizes the struggles of women in the predominantly patriarchal society of the late nineteenth early twentieth century. Characters like Laura Sheridan critique challenge social expectations around feminine gender the character's struggle to come to terms with societal norms around gender power relations. Vieco further argues that social conventions, class consciousness, the prevalent archetype of domestic femininity that dates to Victorian times indoctrinate bourgeois women like Laura Sheridan, forcing them into specific schematic gendered roles. According to Khan et al., (2022), her writing style captures the fragmented, disjointed nature of this experience, reflecting the confusion uncertainty faced by her characters as they try to reconcile their true human selves with the expectations placed upon them. With her signature style and a sharp eye for detail, Mansfield's works remain a poignant exploration of gender societal norms, offering a nuanced perplexing glimpse into the complexities of human experience.

The use of symbolism in the fictional writings of Katherine Mansfield serves multiple functions highlighting various themes in her work. Mansfield was a master of the subtle, but powerful, use of symbolism, her works are replete with complex intricate symbols that add layers of meaning to her stories. In her novels short stories, symbols serve to reinforce themes, such as the theme of gender social norms, which is a recurring theme in her work. For example, in "The Garden Party," the garden party itself can be seen as a symbol of the superficial emptiness of the upper-class lifestyle, as well as a symbol of the disconnection between the privileged and the working class (Trotter, 2013). Symbols also serve to enhance the emotional impact of Mansfield's stories, adding depth nuance to the experiences of her characters. For instance, in "Miss

Brill," the fur stole that Miss Brill wears is a symbol of her loneliness longing for connection, its gradual transformation throughout the story serves to reinforce the central theme of isolation disconnection (Pracha, 2016).

In addition, symbols serve to illustrate the central conflict of Mansfield's stories, often highlighting the tension between societal norms and individual desires. For example, in "The Fly," the fly that the narrator encounters in his office can be seen as a symbol of the fleetingness of life, the futility of his work, the crushing weight of societal expectations. With symbolism, Mansfield illuminates the psychological emotional struggles of her characters and gives voice to the complexities of human experience (Drewery, 2011). The use of symbolism in Katherine Mansfield's fictional writings is an integral part of her artistic vision, serving multiple functions adding layers of meaning to her stories. Through her intricate subtle use of symbols, Mansfield enhances the emotional impact of her stories, highlights central themes, conflicts, gives voice to marginalized characters in society.

Several researchers have used a Marxist perspective to analyze Catherine Mansfield's literary works, concentrating on how capitalist social structures shape the lives of the characters how they navigate resist these restraints (Ahmad, 2019; Bashir et al., 2019; Kiziltaş, 2014; Kuch, 2021). These analyses offer points of view about the historical social issues and the more universal societal issues that the stories reflect. These interpretations of Mansfield's writings emphasize how oppressive social structures thwart people's aspirations for freedom autonomy. According to Kuch (2021), the works of Catherine Mansfield as interpreted by Marxists demonstrate how individuals can still confront oppressive structures protest injustice. Mansfield's characters, often women, face a range of issues related to gender, including restrictions on their education career choices, unequal treatment in personal relationships, societal expectations of appearance, behavior, motherhood. Through these characters, Mansfield highlights how gender norms limit women's self-expression hinder their personal growth development (Kiziltaş, 2014).

When Mansfield's works are analyzed through the lens of Marxist feminist literary theory, it becomes evident that the intersections of class, gender, economic systems play a significant role in shaping women's experiences. This critical framework allows for a deeper understanding of how Mansfield's works challenge the values of capitalism patriarchal power structures reflecting the class struggle power dynamics between the upper lower classes. Moreover, the Marxist perspective provides a useful tool for

examining how Mansfield's works depict the exploitation of women how gender class inequalities reinforce each other through intersecting power dynamics oppressive social norms. For example, Kaplan's (2019) analysis of Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and other stories explores the impact of characters' class consciousness on their perceptions of the world and their interactions with others. This analysis illuminates how the characters' class consciousness serves as a barrier that prevents them from recognizing the consequences of their actions and understanding the realities of the working class. As a result, the story exposes the hollowness superficiality of the upper class and highlights the vast disparities in wealth privilege that exist between the different social classes. Through Marxist feminist literary theory, we gain a better understanding of the societal power dynamics that shape the lives of the characters in Mansfield's works how these dynamics reflect broader societal issues.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The present article uses close textual reading as an analytical method, which involves meticulously examining interpreting a literary work by closely scrutinizing its language structure to uncover underlying themes meanings (Smith, 2016). This method is widely used in literary research involves reading the text multiple times, identifying pattern's themes within the text, establishing connections between various passages while also examining how particular words, phrases, symbols are used (Federico, 2015). Incorporating knowledge of the text's cultural historical context, the researcher develops a thesis or argument based on their analysis supported by evidence from the text their own interpretation. Finally, the researcher uses this justification or thesis to draw conclusions from the text to establish connections to broader literary, cultural, or historical contexts. This method provides a detailed exploration of the text's nuances complexities, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the literary work (Culler, 2010).

The current article employs Marxist feminism as a theoretical framework to analyze character themes concerning gender class. Marxist feminist theory is a critical approach that combines the tenets of Marxism, which emphasizes how economic material conditions shape social relations (Marx, 1999; Marx, Engels, and Stedman, 2002), with feminism, which examines how gender influences these relations (Donovan, 2014; Holmstrom, 2002). This approach critiques literary works from the perspective of how they reinforce or challenge patriarchal structures of power how they represent the experiences of women other marginalized groups concerning class economic

systems. Furthermore, it examines how literature can function as a means of social change and how literary texts can reflect critique capitalist societies (Eagleton, 2003). The Marxist feminist literary approach argues that patriarchal structures of power are deeply embedded in capitalist societies that literature can both reflect reinforce these structures. This view regards literary texts not merely as artistic creations but also as social historical documents that can reveal how these structures have shaped continue to shape the experiences of women other marginalized groups (Hooks, 2000).

Utilizing Marxist literary theory to analyze Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" offers several advantages. First, it allows for an examination of how class economic systems affect the characters within the story. As the story takes place in an affluent household, the characters' class status significantly influences their lives behavior. Second, Marxist literary theory uncovers the story's reflection reinforcement of capitalist values ideologies, including the characters' materialistic focus, lack of empathy for the working class, self-absorption. These principles are representative of capitalist individualism consumerism (Marx, 1999). Third, the theory provides a critique of the story's reinforcement of patriarchal power structures. For example, the character Laura is constrained by traditional gender roles societal expectations of femininity pressured to prioritize others' needs over her own discouraged from challenging the status quo. Finally, Marxist literary theory highlights the story's portrayal of the class struggle the divide between the wealthy the working class, demonstrated through the contrast between the rich characters' luxurious lives the poverty hardships faced by the working-class community.

The focus of the current article is on the protagonist, Laura, who embodies traditional Victorian femininity and its associated power dynamics, while also exploring the effects of economic class distinctions on individuals within society. Laura's ambivalence toward the gender class systems in the story highlights the intricate relationship between identity, social status, individual choice in a conservative social context. By analyzing the story through Marxist literary theory, the article aims to reveal how class, gender, economic systems intersect shape women's experiences, challenging patriarchal power structures capitalist values. Ultimately, this approach emphasizes the importance of understanding how social structures of class, race, gender intersect shape literary representation its potential role as a tool for social change.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In "The Garden Party" by Catherine Mansfield, the character of Laura undergoes a significant transformation as she develops a heightened sense of class consciousness, a concomitant awakening of her sexuality. Laura serves as a symbol of the conflict's contradictions arising from the intersections of class, gender, social injustice. She is a complex dynamic character who struggles with her role as a gendered member of the upper-class Sheridan family. Throughout the story, she is presented as a young woman who is torn between her desire to be a part of the privileged world of her family her growing sense of discomfort with the superficiality emptiness of their lifestyle.

One of the key elements of Laura's character is her ambivalence towards the societal norms and class distinctions that shape her life. On one h, she is deeply invested in the traditional expectations of her family social class and is eager to participate in the gr garden party that is the centerpiece of the story. On the other h, she is deeply troubled by the social economic inequality that she sees around her and is increasingly uncomfortable with the superficiality of the world she inhabits. Laura, as a member of the upper-class Sheridan family, is seen attempting to mimic her mother's voice mannerisms while talking to a member of the lower class but feels ashamed for doing so: "“Good morning," she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, stammered like a little girl, "Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?"” (Mansfield, 2006, p. 251, all subsequent citations refer to this edition of "The Garden Party"). The fact that she stammers like a little girl further emphasizes her discomfort and lack of confidence in her own class identity. The way she speaks to the working men who have come to set up the marquee for the garden party in this affected manner highlights the power dynamics at play. As a member of the upper class, Laura holds a certain level of authority privilege over the working men, this is reflected in the way she speaks to them. This also serves to reinforce the class distinctions present in the society depicted in the story.

Additionally, the use of "copying her mother's voice" implies that Laura is still a young woman not fully formed in her class identity. This also implies that she is still trying to internalize societal norms expectations placed on women of her class, further emphasizing the gendered aspect of her class identity. This ambivalence is further complicated by Laura's gender, as she is repeatedly shown to be caught between the traditional expectations of femininity and the expectations of her class. For example, when she is first introduced in the story, she is described as "busy" "fluttering" as she helps her mother prepare for the party, a characterization that reinforces traditional



gender roles. However, as the story progresses, she begins to question these expectations and becomes increasingly assertive in her desire to understand the lives of those outside of her class.

Although Laura is initially uncomfortable nervous when she meets the working men who have come to set up the marquee for the garden party, as she becomes more relaxed friendly, she begins to see the working men as friendly kind, in contrast to her own privileged background. This is highlighted by her observation of the workmen's smiles, which she interprets as "cheerful" "friendly":

His smile was so easy, so friendly that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! Now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. "Cheer up, we won't bite," their smile seemed to say. How very nice the workmen were! (p. 251)

The narrative voice in the passage aligns with the perception of Laura who finds the working class as kind friendly people, the way Laura is looking at them through the lens of her upper-class privilege. This passage suggests that when people from different class backgrounds meet, they can have a different perspective of each other, but it also implies that class distinctions societal expectations are still present affect their interactions. As her interactions with the working men challenge her preconceptions make her question the societal structures that separate people based on their class gender, Laura begins to see them as more human relatable, noticing small details such as the tall man's enjoyment of the smell of lavender.

Laura's musings about wanting to have workmen as friends instead of the "silly boys" she typically socializes with highlight the societal expectations placed on her as a gendered member of the upper class: "Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for her friends rather than the silly boys she danced with who came to Sunday night supper?" (p. 252). The expectation for her to only associate with those of a similar social class status is reinforced, she is not encouraged to form genuine connections with those of different class backgrounds. The passage also highlights the difference in lifestyle access to luxuries between the working class the upper class, as evident by the fact that the working men have time to appreciate the smell of lavender while Laura is busy with preparations for the garden party.

Laura's growing class consciousness is also linked to her awakening sexuality, as she begins to challenge the restrictive gender roles expectations imposed on her by society. Throughout the story, Laura experiences a

transformation as she grapples with her sexual desires the societal anticipations placed upon her as a young woman. The story reflects the tensions complexities of adolescence and how societal norms shape constrain individuals' experiences of sexuality. Mansfield portrays the nuances of Laura's journey, highlighting the tensions between individual desire societal constraints, as well as the interplay between class consciousness sexuality. Through Laura's transformation, the story sheds light on the experiences of young women navigating the complexities of sexuality class in early 20th-century society. The narrative portrays Laura's growing sexual awareness which can be seen symbolically in the vivid description of pink canna lilies her highly sensuous response to the flowers:

Nothing but lilies—canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems. "O-oh, Sadie!" said Laura, the sound was like a little moan. She 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. (p. 253)

This description of the lilies symbolizes Laura's budding adolescent sexual consciousness as concomitant with her growing class consciousness. The lilies, with their big pink flowers that are wide open radiant, represent the emergence of Laura's sexuality. Pink is often associated with femininity the blooming of the flowers can be seen as a metaphor for her sexual awakening. The phrase "almost frighteningly alive" suggests that Laura is both excited and scared by these new feelings. The action of her crouching down as if to "warm herself" at the flowers growing in her breast further emphasizes the idea that she is experiencing a new, powerful sensation. The lilies can also be seen as a symbol of the power of nature the cyclical nature of life, death, rebirth which is also related to Laura's awakening as she attempts to reconcile her affluent upper-class life with misery, poverty, death around their house.

Laura's sister Jose is preoccupied with the planned execution of the titular garden party, which serves as a symbol of the superficial emptiness of the upper class. She is also portrayed as being dismissive of the working-class neighbors in their struggles, exemplifying the disconnection lack of empathy that often arises from a privilege. Her character serves as a foil to the protagonist Laura, whose moral qualms about the party its disregard for the death of a neighbor contrast with her sister's single-minded focus on the event:

Oh, Laura!" Jose began to be seriously annoyed. "If you're going to stop a b playing every time someone has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous life. I'm every bit as sorry about it as you. I feel just as sympathetic." Her eyes hardened. She looked at her sister just as she

used to when they were little fighting together. "You won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental," she said softly. "Drunk! Who said he was drunk?" Laura turned furiously to Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, "I'm going straight up to tell mother. (p. 258)

Jose's reaction to Laura's suggestion to stop the garden party due to the death of a poor working man in the neighborhood illustrates the disregard lack of empathy the upper class holds towards the working class. She dismisses Laura's concern calls her "extravagant" for suggesting canceling the garden party, showing how she views the life of a working-class person as insignificant. She also refers to the deceased man as "drunk," which is a stereotype often used to dehumanize demonize the working class. Jose's dismissive attitude assumption that the man was drunk reflects the upper class's tendency to stereotype dehumanize the working class. On the contrary, Laura's empathy, willingness to put the needs of the working class before her own pleasure is a challenge to this attitude the class distinctions it reinforces. This interaction also highlights the gendered dynamics at play, as Laura is portrayed as being more sensitive empathetic than her sister, which reflects societal expectations of women to be more nurturing caring. Further, the use of the phrase "I'm going straight up to tell mother" also highlights the power dynamics within the family the patriarchal nature of the upper class. Laura, as a woman, is not given any agency in decision-making, she must resort to telling her mother to have her voice heard.

On the other hand, Laura's reaction shows her awareness of class distinctions their injustice. She recognizes the insensitivity of the upper class, their disregard for the lives of working-class people. Her attempt to stop the party her anger towards Jose's dismissive attitude towards the death of the working man shows her solidarity with the working class her rejection of class distinctions. This serves to highlight the internalized class distinctions societal norms that Laura is struggling to come to terms with. As she grapples with the class-based realities of her life, Laura fails to see any female gender role model for herself that she could identify with reassure herself about the justification of her feelings towards members of the lower classes.

As another foil character to Laura, her mother Mrs. Sheridan is depicted as being highly concerned with the details of the garden party, including the invitations, decorations, food. She is also shown to be deeply invested in maintaining the appearance of propriety respectability, as seen in her insistence that the party goes ahead despite a death in their immediate

neighborhood. Mrs. Sheridan asserts her position as a member of the upper class when her daughter Laura expresses discomfort about the party the neighbors' death. Laura's mother, like her sister Jose, is dismissive of Laura's concerns about the poor man who has died instead focuses on the importance of maintaining the garden party, which serves as a symbol of the family's wealth status:

To Laura's astonishment, her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to bear because she seemed amused. She refused to take Laura seriously. "But, my dear child, use your common sense. It's only by accident we've heard of it. If someone had died there normally—I can't understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes—we should still be having our party, shouldn't we?" Laura had to say "yes" to that, but she felt it was all wrong. (p. 258)

Laura finds her mother's response even more unbearable than that of Jose because she treats her concerns about the death of a neighbor as the musing of an innocent child. Laura is denied a voice in the family as she dominates her opinions. Mrs. Sheridan symbolizes the superficiality of the upper class, their detachment from the reality of life. She is portrayed as someone who is primarily concerned with maintaining the appearance of propriety respectability, rather than truly understanding empathizing with the struggle's difficulties of those outside her social class. The mother's comment about how she "can't understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes" further reinforces the idea that the upper class is detached from the reality of the poor their struggles. This detachment allows them to continue with their luxurious lifestyles without feeling remorse or any sense of responsibility towards the less fortunate. The mother's comment also reinforces a capitalist idea that the poor are responsible for their own conditions, it is not the responsibility of the upper class to help them. This highlights how the capitalist system perpetuates the oppression of the working class by the ruling class, how the ruling class is often unable to see the reality of the lives of those beneath them because they are so entrenched in their privilege.

Mrs. Sheridan's response to her daughter's objection to holding a party when their neighbor has died is to put the expensive hat on her head reinforce her position as a member of an upper-class family: "Darling!" Mrs. Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her, she had popped it on" (p. 255). This highlights how class distinctions are reinforced through material possessions, specifically Laura's hat. The hat is described as "sweet" and is associated with a specific day, indicating that it is a fashionable expensive item. Later in the story, the mother specifically asks for this hat to be

worn by Laura at their garden party: "Mrs. Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. "Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had last Sunday" (p. 254). The fact that Mrs. Sheridan specifically requests Laura to wear the hat at the garden party suggests that it is a symbol of Sheridan's wealth status that they want to flaunt it to the guests. The hat also symbolizes the societal pressure on Laura to conform to upper-class expectations reinforces the idea that material possessions are a means of reinforcing class distinctions.

The mother's emphasis on the importance of appearance, as demonstrated by her insistence that Laura wears a "sweet hat" her comment about the hat being "made for you," further reinforces the idea that upper-class women are valued for their aesthetic appeal rather than for their moral character. Additionally, the fact that Laura's mother is the one dictating what she should wear further emphasizes how gender class intersects, as Laura is expected to conform to societal expectations of upper-class femininity. The use of the word "sweet" to describe the hat also implies a certain infantilization objectification of Laura, as well as a focus on her appearance over her individual identity.

Later in the narrative, feeling her expensive black hat is out of place at the poor house of the dead man, Laura feels apologetic about the contrast between her opulent life the poverty of the Scotts. She could only say: "Forgive my hat" (p. 259). The fact that Laura feels the need to apologize for her appearance at this moment, that the hat is described as a source of shame, highlights the societal expectation that women from privileged backgrounds should not flaunt their wealth privilege, but rather should be modest humble. Further, Laura's encounter with the death of the poor Scott, who seems to be sleeping peacefully, highlights the contrast between the extravagance of the garden party the harsh reality of poverty, death, class differences. It also highlights Laura's consciousness of her privilege her ambivalence towards it, her guilt, her realization that there is a bigger picture than just the garden party the class distinctions:

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 peaceful. He was dreaming. His head was sunk into the pillow... He had given up on his dream. What did garden parties' baskets lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. (p. 260)

Laura encounters the dead body of a poor Scotts man is struck by the contrast between the lavishness of her own life the poverty of the man's. The

imagery used to describe the dead man, such as his peaceful sleep remote beauty, highlights the disconnect between the lives of the wealthy the lives of the poor. The passage also suggests that while the wealthy are occupied with trivialities such as garden parties, the poor are facing a reality that is far removed from such concerns.

Laura experiences a profound sense of emotion discomfort after she encounters the dead body of the man leaves Scott's house. This encounter serves as a turning point in her development, as she is forced to confront the stark realities of life death, the deep divide between the upper lower classes. The experience is both unsettling and transformative, as Laura is suddenly confronted with a harsh reality that is at odds with her privileged upbringing. This encounter causes her to question her own values, beliefs, her place in the world. She is overwhelmed by a sense of sadness, confusion, emptiness as she grapples with these new emotion's experiences. As she encounters her brother after she rushes out of the Scotts' house, Laura feels speechless to describe make sense of her experience inside the house:

Laurie put his arm around her shoulder. "Don't cry," he said in his warm, loving voice. "Was it awful?" "No," sobbed Laura. "It was simply marvelous. 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. (p. 261)

Her statement "Isn't life, isn't life-" is an expression of her confusion realization of the inequality injustice in the society she lives in. Her brother, who is also from a privileged background, acknowledges her confusion but doesn't fully understand it himself, which further highlights the disconnection lack of empathy of the upper class towards the working class. This encounter with the poor Scotts' man's death the contrast with her privilege has shaken Laura's understanding of the world she is trying to find ways to reconcile her privilege with the suffering of others.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The above analysis shows that Katherine Mansfield's literary art challenges social, ideological, gender-based schematic structures in her contemporary society. However, she abstains from providing a clear resolution or conclusion to the events themes presented in the story, leaving the ending open for interpretation. The ending thus raises many questions but leaves interpretations up to the reader. This is achieved using subtle hints, ambiguity, and the presentation of multiple perspectives. The story raises many questions

about class, gender, social injustice, but it does not offer clear answers. Instead, it invites the reader to contemplate the complexities of these issues and their impact on the character's society. This open-ended nature of the story contributes to its enduring appeal relevance, as it encourages the reader to draw conclusions and think critically about the themes presented. It also allows for multiple interpretations that make the story relevant to different readers cultures as they interpret it according to their contextual realities around gender, class, socio-economic divide, individual feelings emotions.

Barrett's (2014) argument regarding early twentieth-century English fiction highlights the trend toward plotless open-ended narratives that were influenced by writers such as Anton Chekhov. This form of storytelling challenged traditional narrative structures and provided a more complex portrayal of social issues. D'hoker Eggermont (2015) also emphasized the importance of the open-ended story form in late nineteenth early twentieth-century fiction as it allowed for a nuanced exploration of class gender ideologies. By denying straightforward plot structures closure of narratives, authors were able to explore the complexities of social issues present them in a more realistic thought-provoking manner. This approach provided a fresh perspective on social issues, which were often ignored or marginalized in earlier literary works. In this way, the open-ended narrative form served as an important tool for addressing social injustices promoting critical thinking about societal norms values.

Analysis of the current article also shows that the character of Laura Sheridan in "The Garden Party" serves as a representation of the struggle to reconcile privilege with reality, the internalization of societal norms class distinctions. Laura is a member of a well-to-do upper-class family. Throughout the story, Laura is a dutiful daughter who is eager to please her family to uphold their societal status. However, as the story progresses, it becomes evident that Laura is struggling to reconcile her privileged upbringing with the reality of the world around her. As the eldest daughter, she is tasked with helping her mother plan to organize the garden party, an event that is designed to showcase the family's wealth status. Laura is fully invested in the party, her mother's approval is important to her, yet she is also aware of the superficiality of the event, the disconnect between the upper-class lifestyle of her family and the poverty of their neighbors.

Laura's struggles to internalize class distinctions societal norms form the central tension of the story. Through her journey, Mansfield presents a nuanced critical examination of how gender, class, societal norms shape our experiences interactions, how these forces can lead to feelings of isolation disconnection. As Kaya (2011) notes in her analysis of gender roles in

Mansfield's fiction, the female characters in the story are subject to the same class distinctions as the male characters, but they are also subject to gendered expectations limitations. This exploration of gender-based stereotyping continues in contemporary western postcolonial fictional production (Khan et al., 2020). Kaya suggests that Laura's position as the eldest daughter and her involvement in planning the garden party reflect her mother's expectation that she will assume a domestic role in the family. This tension is only heightened when she encounters the dead body of the poor Scotts man, further emphasizing the class distinction disparity in society. Through Laura's character, Mansfield offers a critical examination of how societal norms, class, gender shape our experiences interactions.

Further research could delve into the wider societal context of the story, specifically exploring the historical background cultural norms surrounding class distinction gender expectations in early 20th-century New Zeal, where the story is set. An examination of Mansfield's writing style themes could also be a valuable area of study, as well as a comparative analysis with other works of literature from the same period that deal with similar themes. Additionally, an investigation into Marxist feminist literary theory its application to the study of works of fiction could deepen the understanding of the analysis presented in the current article by focusing on reclaiming agency for women in a patriarchal social setting (Khan et al., 2021). Moreover, it would be interesting to examine the impact of colonialism imperialism on the development of class consciousness in the New Zeal context of the story to explore the representation of indigenous peoples in works of literature from the same period.

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