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### Disclaiming Legitimacy, and the Stories of Katherine Mansfield

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**Disclaiming Legitimacy, and the Stories of Katherine Mansfield**  
by Matthew W. Mead, *The City College of New York*

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in the City  
College of New York at the City University of New York*

## Introduction and Critical History

New Zealand-born and Europe-adopted Katherine Mansfield is notable in the collection of early 20th century Modernist writers because she only wrote short stories and she died just as she was finding her greater powers as a writer. Noticeably influenced by the warm writing style of Anton Chekhov, by the bucolic ancient Greek poet Theocritus, by her forceful contemporaries (mostly D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf), by her tuberculosis, and, perhaps most significantly, by her early life in rural New Zealand, Mansfield's stories invite the reader to bear witness to small details and emotional responses to significant moments in ordinary but intensely experienced lives. According to her two main biographers, Jeffrey Meyers and Anthony Alpers, Mansfield is greatly responsible for the development and validation of the short story as an important literary genre. Mansfield's husband John Middleton Murry went to great lengths after her death in 1923 to make sure that her delicate and delightful prose form was very well known, and that he was well known for publishing it—what Jeffrey Meyers stingingly calls “Murry's Cult of Katherine” (Meyers 253). Vincent O'Sullivan, a fellow New Zealander who edited the five volumes of Mansfield's *Collected Letters* in 1996 and who more recently edited *A Norton Critical Edition of Katherine Mansfield's Selected Stories*, claims in his 1975 article titled *The Magnetic Chain: Notes and Approaches to K.M.* that “what Mansfield wanted her stories to do was to carry ‘that marvelous triumph’ when beauty holds the balance over the ugliness in life” (O'Sullivan 137). Mansfield achieves this goal with style that is as much daring as it is lovely, and her uncanny ability to harness authenticity of scene allows her to extract truth from the smallest details. For example, in *The Garden Party* after the pacified cook, still seeking

redemption for the haughtiness of Mrs. Sheridan, tells Laura and Jose to eat some of the fancy cream puffs, they get “that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream” (*Stories* 289). It is a phrase to which Arthur Sewall, responded, in his *Critical Essay* of 1936, “I do not know whether you feel there, as I do, the intense absorption that is partly the joy of eating whipped cream, partly too the fear of messing” (Sewall 43).

Mansfield’s best stories, the New Zealand-based *Prelude*, *At the Bay*, and *The Garden Party*, possess the strength and subtlety of Modernism in their complexity and their susceptibility to myriad contemporary criticisms. They also demonstrate a post-classic break with traditional narrative organization. And while they do not completely delve into a stream of consciousness, Mansfield’s narrator (singular since its essence is that of the dotting author) flies gracefully in and out of every character’s consciousness, occasionally finding somewhat magical senders or receivers of information (animals or infants). Because Mansfield was associated with and writing at the same time as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, and D.H. Lawrence, for instance, she is often overlooked or of thought as a lesser talent. Indeed, from 1921 to 1922, the *annus mirabilis* when Mansfield published *The Garden Party* (with other stories including *At the Bay*), Lawrence published *Women in Love*, Woolf *Jacob’s Room*, Eliot *The Waste Land*, and Joyce *Ulysses*. However, Mansfield is distinctive in the way her masterpieces weave the Modernist rebuttal against Romance, Realism and previous literary norms with the nostalgic narratives of her own psychologically fragmented childhood dream worlds.

Bloomsbury’s Roger Fry defined the Modernism of Post-Impressionists thusly: “They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life” (Fry 195). With its rejection of previous forms, Modernism necessarily subverts and undermines authority; it dispels the idea that power and taste and culture exist exclusively within a

predetermined model—the bourgeois class—and it attempts to blur such class lines. Mansfield’s Laura in *The Garden Party* doesn’t feel class, “not an atom,” of course showing both that youth is blind to such conventions but that ignorance is among the bourgeois’ privileges (*Stories* 284). But Mansfield’s personal critique of the bourgeois social order, as well as her discovery of literary footing through the creation of a real world of childhood, is more a look inward than outward. Her stories, like the upper-class of her youth, are superficially concerned with social assessment, but their more subjective study of fleeting youth might ultimately equal confession or, consequently, a pursuit of Modernist redemption.

Mansfield masquerades her memoirs as short stories, an idea quite familiar to today’s readers. I bring in the 2009 insight from *New York Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani that the motivating force behind the recent “memoir craze” is “the belief that confession is therapeutic and therapy is redemptive and redemption somehow equals art,” as a means of introducing the first part of my argument: *Prelude*, *At the Bay*, and *The Garden Party* seem to be written to atone for failings, crimes, deeds about which one (Mansfield) feels compunction.

Mansfield felt enormous guilt after her brother, Leslie, died when a grenade went off in his hand in World War I. In 1908, she abandoned her family and her father, not only by relocating to Europe but also eventually by writing and gaining fame under her maternal grandmother’s name. She felt guilt that her family was rich and bourgeois, employing a servant class for their leisure. All her New Zealand stories are highly judgmental of her family’s enjoyment of their status, and she herself went about her European life in near poverty. Most guilt-rendering of all, she felt false in terms of self-distrust and her “tendency toward detachment from life and escapism” (Meyers 95). Even when she was dying of hemorrhaging lungs, she believed “that the real cause of my illness is not my lungs at all, but something else. And if this

were found and cured, all the rest would be healed” (Alpers 352, quoting Mansfield’s *Journal*). This something else is something mystical—what she sees as her own falseness.

Her false personality may have been revealed by Leslie’s death, a deeply personal loss that also seems to be the cause of her greater powers as a writer. Short story writer Frank O’Connor describes her reaction to Leslie’s death as “immoderate,” and he struggles “to explain the violence of her grief, which sent a normally affectionate husband like Murry home from the South of France, ashamed of himself for thinking of a dead boy as a rival” (365). Aldous Huxley adds, in his social satire *Those Barren Leaves*, “She was proud of being able to suffer so much; she encouraged her suffering. This...was a sign of her exquisite sensibility. Mingled with her grief there was a certain sense of satisfaction” (Huxley 46). Jeffrey Meyers further analyzes this falseness, concluding: “Her attachment to Leslie, which seemed much stronger *after* his death, was rooted in her nostalgic and sentimental longing for childhood and adolescence, and was used by Katherine as a sexual and psychological [defense]” (Meyers 122). O’Connor sees Leslie’s death as a “religious crisis,” an event that Mansfield recognized as rife with upheaval, and so she consciously and perhaps unnaturally used it and grief to transform her attitude and career. Like Huxley describing her hyper-sensitivity, O’Connor seems to consider such a development to be inauthentic. But in discussing the tragedy of the false personality, he says Mansfield’s tragedy is on “the inside” (O’Connor 366).

Eventually, her obsessive suspicion that her personality was the cause of her despair and her poor health led her to seek help from the mystic George Gurdjieff in her final three months. Though these New Zealand stories represent a form of escape (to childhood), in some ways they are also an attempt to confront the truth or the real. The stories are meant to bring about deliverance for the characters and the author. They portray a flawed, fragmented family, one

stuck between romantic subscriptions and “something far different, something so new” (*Stories* 114). This indescribable state is the unknown, the Modern. These stories capture members of a family in a moment, but the implications and futures of each character are infinite and somewhat frightening.

The second part of my argument involves the critical respect that Mansfield is yet to be afforded. Though there is much critical response to Mansfield, it is mainly in the form of reviews of her collections as wholes. A significantly concentrated effort on her individual stories has not been made to date. The biographers and editors Meyers, Alpers, and O’Sullivan have provided extensive collections that combine contextual biographical information with just snippets of critical analysis. O’Sullivan primarily focuses on themes woven throughout all of Mansfield’s work. His aforementioned *Selected* collection of critics is extensive and well organized but when one delves into it, one finds only sparse fragments of analysis, mere parts of chapters that when carefully put together may resemble a limb of critical analysis. Though these approaches are understandable because most of Mansfield’s work is not only autobiographical but largely sequential, they suggest that critical attention has only just begun. What still seem to be lacking are diverse critical close-readings of single stories. A move toward that critical concentration is what this master’s essay attempts to provide.

I plan to present three perspectives that not only absolve Mansfield of her perceived falseness and other struggles of conscience, but also do so in critically distinctive ways that mirror my own progress as an analytical reader, the result of graduate studies. The following is a brief summary of my perspectives on each story and also of the few outside critical perspectives.

My perspective on *Prelude* delves right into dreams. Asserting that each character is more aligned with his or her dream world than with actual reality, it explores the differing textures and intensities of each character's dreams and finds they linger on everything from weekend plans to full-blown conscious hallucinations. The plot of *Prelude* features the Burnell family beginning anew as they're uprooted from the "giddy whirl of town" and relocated, by the energetic Stanley's design, to the New Zealand countryside (*Stories* 92). Mansfield is the small child Kezia, surrounded by self-absorbed adults and sisters, with only her imagination and curiosity to truly keep her company. This world of childhood is set when Mansfield's family moved from Wellington to the remote village of Karori, in 1893. Writing this story in 1916, Mansfield had not yet hemorrhaged, but Leslie was dead and one of the goals seems to have been to create a world where Leslie can return.

Jacques Lacan's linguistic developments of Freudian concepts play a role in this perspective. Lacan concentrates on "the unconscious as a language" and on dreams "as a form of discourse" (Murfin 86). This discourse, achieved through dreams, takes place between one's self and the world. Lacan argues that one constructs "one's own self as others view one" (87). One begins this construction during the mirror stage, which Lacan theorizes as the moment one gains a sense of wholeness by recognizing himself or herself in the mirror. However, this constructed self presents a false wholeness, as one never quite gets over being fragmented. Applying Lacan's mirror stage to *Prelude*, we see characters, who feel fragmented by their exterior circumstance, dream in order to access their imaginary whole selves. Mirrors are ingress into dreams. However, this behavior is often frustrating, as it requires one to be "always acting a part" (*Stories* 95).

There are major hints in *Prelude* that lingering too long in one's dreams leads to insanity—a complete disassociation with reality. In fact, the narrator of *Prelude* is so embedded

in the interwoven consciousnesses of these characters that it is hardly a separate entity at all. Mansfield seems to construct the narrator as an agent distinct from herself, but not from this world she has created, something like a mode she goes into when she delves into this version of her childhood. But considering her harsh portrayal of such a fragmented family, as the story unravels, Mansfield seems to stand at a considerable distance from her own characters and allows them to fail even on their own terms. Though one design may have been to recreate her brother, the egoistical isolation of each character suggests that Mansfield is marooning these characters in a realm where they don't have to haunt her.

Four years later, Mansfield returns to the Burnells with *At the Bay* and with a sense of reparation. But short story writer and critic V.S. Pritchett claims *At the Bay* lacks context, a place. He argues that for a writer so taken by the works of Anton Chekhov, Mansfield is missing “the sense of unseen characters, the anonymous people, what we may call ‘the others,’ from which the people of [Chekhov’s] stories are taken” (Pritchett 344). Besides the minor mystery of life and death, alluded to by the grandmother thinking of her dead son just before Kezia quizzes her about dying, Pritchett asks “What is the world [these characters] belong to?” (344). Pritchett’s point may be that they belong to no world, which is precisely the expatriated and bohemian circumstance Mansfield found herself in: belonging nowhere. Frank O’Connor responds to Pritchett by claiming that “to introduce a real country into *At the Bay* would be to introduce history, and with history would come judgment, will, and criticism. The real world of these stories is not New Zealand but childhood” (O’Connor 367).

My *At the Bay* perspective suggests that the reader helps create this real world of childhood, that with redemption in mind, Mansfield needs this world to exist so that she may enter it along with her dead brother and mother and the family she left in New Zealand. In a

noticeable update of *Prelude, At the Bay* provides a guide in the form of distinct narrator to ease a reader through the darker disturbances in an ordinary day. There are also several instances of hope, of almost entirely detached characters who come back to life, so to speak.

As previously mentioned, most of the critical readings of *The Garden Party* have been limited to one or two expository sentences. For example, David Daiches rather featurelessly observes in 1936 that, “one of the reasons for her success [in *The Garden Party*] is that the scenes described were real scenes” (Daiches 37). Jayne Marek does a little better, pointing out that the story “involves more than an adolescent’s personal epiphany or a clever critique of upper-class complacency” (quoted in Felber xiv). Indeed, at first pass, *The Garden Party* seems to be entirely about class. The story records Laura’s interpellation as a bourgeois subject, with the operative forces clearly set forth: clothes, beauty-as-a-commodity, and the pressures brought by the bourgeois family in the form of her admired brother.

Laura’s psyche is also overwhelmed by the gender affiliations of class. The upper-class is defined by femininity whereas masculinity and logic dwell in lower classes. Her girlhood at an end, Laura is at a *dually* significant precipice. On one side, Laura is poised to define her personality in terms of what she has seen of gender and class: embrace feminine upper-class entitlement or reject it in favor of class-blurring compassion. Mansfield is clearly desirous of this opportunity to redesign a personality; her perception of her own false 1921 personality was a major culprit of her misery. On the other side, Laura’s sexual emergence is at stake. Myriad hints of blossoming bombard Laura in the story and even the ebbing and flowing narrative beckons her adult arrival. As Laura prepares to awaken this woman, she will do so in terms of either upper-class snobbery or logical sympathy.

Laura's conflict regarding this choice and her eventual, unarticulated epiphany in the literal face of Death and love, bitterly suggests Mansfield's own incompleteness. By no means is *The Garden Party* unfinished or immature. No, rather while Laura may never have an answer for what life isn't (or is), Mansfield seemed more than able to convey such moments of profound encounters. In fact, for all her readers, then and now, the final (or most lasting) takeaway from Mansfield's narratives is the effortless delicacy with which she considers life's most challenging abstractions, an ability that caused critic Rebecca West to claim she was a genius and that led the censored, brash, and professionally envious D.H. Lawrence to insult her and demand that she wasn't; a talent that Virginia Woolf also envied, and one that evoked at least Jeffrey Meyers and Anthony Alpers to be quite obviously jealous of Mansfield's husband; a capacity that any reader would say assuages all of her faults.

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## A PERSPECTIVE on *Prelude*

### A Prelude to Dreams

While the New Zealand countryside of Mansfield's childhood may be the setting for *Prelude*, the true landscape explored is that of dreams. The Burnells' move from the city to the country is undoubtedly the change that drives the external events in the narrative. However, each character is motivated to a greater extent by events that take place within their own minds—their private and sometimes irrational ruminations—than by their roles in the external circumstances. After they move to the countryside, they find themselves much more isolated in their physical world. This invites the characters to purposefully or automatically find their unconscious minds no longer subdued, and they engage them. Freud argued that the ego must repress many of our desires, and dreams are symbolic fulfillments of what we cannot act out. For Mansfield's characters, however, dreams are not symbolic; they are a substitute realm in which other versions of their identities exist and carry out desires. And yet these characters do not retreat to their dreams and desires in order to “gain a sense of wholeness and identity” (Schwarz 99). To the characters, reality is more convenient if it, like Lacan's mirror stage is “essentially synonymous with individual perception;” if as a concept, reality is “irretrievably subjective and symbolic” (Ragland-Sullivan 19-20). They rely on their dreams to defy their exterior selves and to escape uncomfortable social roles and other unsatisfactory circumstances. But dreams do not prove reliable sources of refuge. In fact, characters' interior landscapes are shown to be as threatening if not more so than their exterior events. Indeed, at times, dreams appear to intrude upon characters' lives.

Exposure to the interiors of the characters is only possible through the narrative technique, which subtly shifts perspective from one consciousness to another. With this sort of multiple-perspective narration, a reader is able to watch each character experiencing the story's primary conflict: how to reconcile the tension between the interior world and external events.

In the case of this story and this analysis, dreams are not excluded to the thoughts, images, and events that roll through characters' minds during sleep. Dreams refer to characters' subjective interiors as well, including their hallucinations, delusions, and private aspirations.

*Prelude* opens in a distant stream of consciousness perspective of Kezia Burnell, the middle Burnell daughter, and quickly moves to the distressed, faltering perspective of the mother, Linda Burnell and then back again. This sort of rapid shift in perspective between mother and young daughter continues throughout the story, only occasionally allowing for brief interruptions from the other characters, most significantly the anxious, live-in sister-in-law, Beryl; but also from Stanley, Linda's husband; the servant girl, Alice; and Linda's mother, Mrs. Fairfield. For example, the opening:

There was not an inch of room for Lottie and Kezia in the buggy (Kezia's perspective). When Pat swung them on top of the luggage they wobbled (Linda's perspective); the grandmother's lap was full (Kezia) and Linda Burnell could not possibly have held a lump of a child on hers for any distance (Kezia and Linda). Isabel, very superior (Kezia), was perched beside the new handy-man on the driver's seat....

Lottie and Kezia stood on the patch of lawn just inside the gate all ready for the fray in their coats with brass anchor buttons and little round caps with battleship ribbons. Hand in hand, they stared with round solemn eyes, first at the absolute necessities and then at their mother (Linda)....

"Yes, everything outside the house is supposed to go," said Linda Burnell, and she waved a white hand (Kezia, noticing a part of her mother) at the tables and chairs

standing on their heads on the front lawn. How absurd they looked! (suddenly Linda) Either they ought to be the other way up, or Lottie and Kezia ought to stand on their heads, too. And she longed to say: "Stand on your heads, children, and wait for the store-man." It seemed to her that would be so exquisitely funny that she could not attend to Mrs. Samuel Josephs.

The fat creaking body leaned across the gate, and the big jelly of a face smiled (probably Linda *and* Kezia). "Dod't you worry, Brs. Burnell. Loddie and Kezia can have tea with my chudren in the dursery, and I'll see theb on the dray afterwards." (*Stories* 51-52, my parenthetical notations)

As the narrative drifts from the subjective points of view of each character; it rarely passes through a more objective consciousness, which might be attributed to Mansfield, the story teller. So without a set plot or structure, or even a stable narrator, this form of storytelling has a dream-like effect on the reader's experience. The plot is constantly distracted from, not just by the consistent arrival of new characters, but also by the narrator's infiltration of those characters' both trivial and significant motivations: Linda desires time alone with her "absolute necessities"—bags and boxes—but also wants to rid herself of her children (51). Due to the meandering nature of the plot, the reader follows and clings to these brief tangential episodes, putting a lot of stock into them as the collection of them seems substantive, just like a dreamer who clutches to the seemingly random associations in a dream.

The character of Kezia, who is understood to be the manifestation of Mansfield as a child, possesses one of the narrative's dominant perspectives as well as one whose consciousness is the most troubled. As she patiently observes the events of the afternoon, Kezia plays out a staple theme of Modernism, the act of watching and being watched. Lacan expresses the importance of the gaze saying, "In the first instance [the gaze] makes us beings who are looked at... The spectacle of the world, in this sense, appears to us as all seeing... The world is all-

seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too” (Lacan 75). As she waits for the storeman to come take her to her new home, Kezia knows she is being watched and feels pressure against it. “She couldn’t have cried in front of those awful Samuel Josephs” and she catches a tear that slips down “before any of them had seen” (Mansfield 53-54).

More than any other character, Kezia’s mother Linda lives in an interior world. The first glimpse at Linda’s consciousness shows her at odds with proper participation in the exterior world and her struggle to fulfill her expected role in it. She has decisions to make, children to be responsible for and all she can think is how the world seems much more proper upside down. In fact she is so taken with this absurd notion that Mrs. Fairfield has to take over Linda’s motherly duties. At times, Linda seems to be able to access day dream or fantasy at will. It requires only “tables and chairs standing on their heads” or “the high grassy bank on which the aloe [is resting]” for her to embrace her true self (52, 90).

Linda is fascinated with parts; she notices things like “the big red hand” of her husband (Mansfield 60). This is a childlike quality of hers, and one that is inherent in Kezia. Linda collects parts and constructs her own wholes, subjectively inventing the entire world around her. And, like a child, she quickly gets bored with her own inventions and sets her imagination to task again and again.

Lacan “holds that the ego (which in Freud’s view is as necessary as it is natural) is a product or construct. The ego-artifact, produced during the mirror stage, seems at once unified, consistent, and organized around a determined center. But the unified self, or ego, is a fiction” (Murfin 88). In the mirror stage, the infant, whose previous perceptions of self were fragmented arms and legs, recognizes the image in the mirror as the total—also other—self, and puts the

fragments (falsely, Lacan says) into a unified whole. Mansfield's characters reenact the mirror stage with their interior selves serving as their reflections or false unified wholes. Due to loneliness and disenchanting isolation, in dreams they develop and become this separate self. And though their others are only present in their minds, the characters regard these fictional identities as their real selves.

Evidence of Linda's struggle to grasp reality lies in her unresolved and often downright contradictory views of certain important aspects of her life—the principle conflict being how she views her husband: his animalistic sexual advances versus her ambiguity. In Jeffrey Meyers's introduction to *Stories*, he describes Linda as a “delicate, sensitive invalid who sometimes hates her sexually aggressive husband” and who views things exclusively as she wants to (Meyers viii). Linda calls him her “Newfoundland dog” that she is “so fond of in the daytime” (*Stories* 90). But then reversing her opinion she claims “for all her love and respect and admiration she hated him” (91). She further loses herself when she dreams that the aloe tree is a great ship rowing (escaping) “far away over the top of the garden tree,” she then wonders “how much more real this dream was than that [she] should go back to the house where the sleeping children lay” (90). However, her recognition occurs when she gloats ironically on the absurdity of life and questions “this mania of hers to keep alive at all” (91). This line may or may not literally refer to keeping herself alive; however, this question does hint at a very sinister aspect of completely submitting to living a world of dreams: mental illness, insanity. Perhaps most interesting is that Linda is actually conscious of this possible outcome, and her day-dreams represent her toying with the point of no return, seeing what's behind the door labeled “abyss.”

In Linda's case, the elements in her dreams often serve as symbols representing her circumstance in her exterior life. The dream that Linda has the morning after the family moves

into their house puts a slightly fantastical veil on top of what's actually going on around her. She dreams of birds, a classic metaphor for escape and freedom. In the dream, she is a young girl walking with her father. However, the birds young Linda hears and sees are loud and tiny. After stroking a tiny bird until "it had become a baby with a big naked head and a gaping bird mouth, opening and shutting" she wakes, adult, to see her gleeful husband and thinks, coldly, of leaving (64). This demonized version of the bird metaphor shows that her desire for literal and figurative flight is impossible and has been replaced by her children, and likely by a new pregnancy. As the bird mouth opens and shuts, it suggests its own demand or Desire. Language is also implied and "Lacan makes sense of the observation that both language and Desire are marked by a sense of seeking" (Ragland-Sullivan 172).

Linda's dream while pregnant is a complex meeting of Lacan's revisions of Freud, especially considering that Stanley is in the room. According to Lacanian scholar Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "law ('no'), Desire, and language become indissolubly linked in conscious associations whose relational links reside in the unconscious" (55). This would be pregnant Linda dreaming she is a young girl experiencing a figurative and demanding pregnancy. "Law" is Lacan's "Law of the Father," which is the child being told "no" and understanding. Thus a child's entry into language coincides with the oedipal stage. In his introduction to psychoanalytic criticism, Ross Murfin says the in oedipal stage "linguistic order is essentially a figurative or Symbolic order; words are not the things they stand for but are, rather, stand-ins or substitutes for those things" (Murfin 87). Words thus make retreating into an imaginary world more difficult. They become buffers, the gatekeepers of reality. When Linda remembers her dream she remembers the birds and how "they seemed to swell out with some mysterious and important context" (Mansfield 66). Phonetically, "birds" and "words" are not far off, but while symbolic words haunt Linda's

unconscious and plague her physical reality, the birds seem to be more than symbols of her exterior life—they are themselves threatening because they are a part of her increasing madness and distance from reality.

Strikingly similar to her mother, Kezia finds herself retreating to her interior world and also feeling threatened by what she finds there. Linda “had always hated things that rush at her” (91) and when the store man explains what a ram is, Kezia states, “I hate rushing animals like dogs and parrots. I often dream that animals rush at me—even camels—and while they are rushing, their heads swell e-enormous” (57). Kezia also seems to prefer distortions to real things. She explores her old house one last time and goes to squares of colored glass in the dining-room to have “one more look at a blue lawn with blue arum lilies growing at the gate.” Through the yellow window she sees “a little Chinese Lottie” come out on the lawn. Because her distortion has become so occupying she’s suddenly not sure if it *is* really Lottie, and she has to look “through the ordinary window” (54). Reality however, represented by the “snuffling and howling” of the canine wind—reality like Stanley, like a dog—frightens her and sends her darting out of the house, out of her old life that lingers in fragments (55).

While facing an interior life that is increasingly sinister, Kezia also traverses the usual challenges of growing up. As she transitions “from childhood innocence... to greater awareness of evil in human life,” she acquires the clues she needs to escape these evils (Meyers vii). Death is introduced to her when Pat, the driver and handyman kills a duck as the children watch. At first she is shocked then she naively pleads with him to reverse the circumstance. Frank O’Connor, who argued, that Mansfield’s stories “are written in a complete hypnotic suspension of the critical faculties,” commends Mansfield’s ability to “describe the scene without horrifying us,” claiming that he “can read it almost as though it were the most delightful incident in a

delightful day” and that “no naturalist has ever been able to affect [him] like this” (O’Connor 367, 368). But in making the scene analogous to “the Garden of Eden before shame or guilt came into the world,” he indicates what he means by suspension of critical faculties (368). He sees the scene as devoid of ethical concern. The gardener/executioner is involved in either education or a kings-of-Ireland fantasy, or both, and the children do not feel the pull of death’s gravity. It is not until they take their summer at the bay that Kezia questions her grandmother about death and, and even then, as was previously discussed, such concerns are quickly forgotten. The duck scene, while set up and described rather “delightfully,” chillingly foreshadows a tuberculosis hemorrhage with its “long spurt of blood where the head had been” (*Stories* 84). Mansfield, who had her first hemorrhage almost two years after *Prelude* was written, certainly wished for her own circumstance to be reversed. In the story, Kezia’s distress is soon erased by the discovery that Pat has earrings. While pirate-like men ought to provide ample fodder for adventurous imaginings, what is important here is that Kezia seems to undergo a sort of disillusionment. She has an absent father and an incapable mother. She seems to be raised by random episodes with stranger and stranger authority figures. Unlike *The Garden Party*’s Laura, who we will see succumbs more fully to insensitivity and self-preserving delusion—though teenage Laura has also made it out of childhood in tact—Kezia seems poised to give up her external preservation and follow her falsely-whole other toward fragmentation.

In this same vein, during her long romp through gardens of the new house, Kezia thinks of a game of pretend that she and her grandmother play and realizes that the new garden has enough flowers to allow her to play the game indefinitely. When she emerges from the garden, the reader witnesses the one and only interaction Linda has with her children as Linda tells the curious Kezia that the aloe, in the island of their front lawn, does indeed flower but only “once

every hundred years” (73). This myth about the aloe (which is actually an agave plant) is just that, a myth. The agave “is remarkable for the long interval between its periods of flowering” in colder climates but it flowers about every 20 years (Grieve 27). Nonetheless, Linda’s answer could ostensibly occupy Kezia for a century. Linda, with fantasy masquerading as wisdom, thinks the best answer to a question put by one of her children, who she thinks of as tiresome inconveniences and fragmented others, is one that disregards the paradigms of reality. But this scene contains a more troubling suggestion that it may be possible to live fully within a fantasy or a dream—without any real exterior action. The dormant aloe is a symbol of this.

Stanley seems to be the sturdiest character of the story and while he is, dreams besiege him too. Far from the level of Linda’s projections, Stanley’s dreaming is relegated to planning what he wants to do on the weekend and fantasizing about his wife. Quite often they combine, as evidenced by his thoughts as he rides home from work for the first time. “He began to plan what he would do with his Saturday afternoons and his Sundays” (*Stories* 74). Stanley’s plans consist of his physical prowess, his reputation, or Linda. Then he absurdly begins planning to plan. “[Linda] was on his arm and he was explaining to her at length what he intended doing at the office the week following” (74). Such seems the life of the paterfamilias, even thinking about work is an escape.

Stanley’s ideal, subjective portrayals of Linda in his day-dreams call into suspect all of his interactions with her. Not only does she say to him just what he wants to hear, she calls him “Mr. Business Man” and tells him “yes, clasp me” as they fall asleep, but she also says exactly what he predicts she will, “Hullo! Are you home again?” (62, 75). Is she really speaking these things to him or are they just extreme—in this context—projections of his desires? If we’re

willing to trust Linda's interior explanation, it seems Stanley's consciousness is uniquely readable to Linda, and thus she acts out his desired projections to both torture and satisfy him.

"You look like a big fat turkey," said she.

"Fat. I like that," said Stanley. "I haven't a square inch of fat on me. Feel that."

"It's rock—it's iron," mocked she. (65)

Alice, the servant girl, embodies Lacan's mirror stage, basing her understanding of herself wholly on how others perceive her. She is "a mild creature in reality, but she had the most marvelous retorts ready for questions that she knew would never be put to her" (86). She fantasizes by forming menial outbursts against her status. With these secret treasured comebacks and her secret reading of the *Dream Book*, Alice desires defiance and recovers her temper only by falling into a dream where she can act out her true self, a self that no one expects.

Mrs. Fairfield primarily engages with what *was* instead of what she hopes will be while Beryl exists very much in the present and yearns to be elsewhere faced with a different, more glamorous set of circumstances. Mrs. Fairfield seems perfectly based in exterior reality, even picking up the slack of those in the family like her daughter, Linda, who seems intent on slipping out of touch with what's real. However, when alone Mrs. Fairfield falls into memory, and her recollections of Beryl as a little girl are so powerful she has to "[catch] her breath remembering" (68). Beryl is different than the rest due to the level of deception within herself. In a 1978 article, Cherry Hankin states: "If Katherine Mansfield chose to focus the final episode of her long narrative on Beryl, who is less important than Kezia or Linda, it is probably because Beryl, in the closing pages, is depicted as... putting on an act for herself just as she habitually does for others" (Hankin 189). Whereas Kezia is just being introduced to a world where dreams can defuse or circumvent an often uncomfortable reality, and Linda has reconciled the notion that reverie and reality can cohabitate in a singular conscious, Beryl, who believes her sister "lives a mile away,"

is still in-between what she wants and who she is. (Mansfield 93). This suggests that Kezia may not have to become her dream-besieged mother. Beryl's still unresolved circumstance, while not ideal in terms of stability, does offer some alternative that is based in reality.

Beryl, unmarried and living with her sister, is the only character to sit in front of a mirror in the narrative, and she does it "half-unconsciously, half-consciously" because, in the private of her room, her real self converges with her "flippant and silly" other self (94). In the mirror she sees not Lacan's false unified self, but rather a completely fragmented display of her parts.

Taken by the exaggerated loveliness of each feature, she lets her guard down and reveals that it has been her other self looking at her real self. The other tells her, "my dear, there is no doubt about it, you really are a lovely little thing" (95) But she quickly responds, "Oh God, there she was, back again, playing the same old game. False—false as ever" (95). The pressures of external societal expectations seem to bring on this fundamental identity crisis. And Beryl logically works out, "If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be" (95). Beryl equates her other self with real failure and it scares her. However, perhaps she is simply not brave or creative enough to experiment internally like Linda does. She also does not articulate her desires (love) until a similar scene in *At the Bay*. And her faith in the happiness myth seems wholly inappropriate, especially considering the examples that surround her, all obvious and seemingly predictive examples of the mirror stage.

Mansfield populates this world of her childhood with essences from her past and suggests that what lies beneath the relatively quiet and benign, yet wealthy and hegemonic existences are major sinister conflicts and personal crises of consciousness. The achievement, which will be advanced in *At the Bay*, is that the radical presentation comes out of the episodic structure and dissociative narrative technique.

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### Who Do We Listen to Now?

When we encounter the first page of Katherine Mansfield's *At the Bay*, it is likely—whether in our immediate or distant reading histories—preceded by our completion of *Prelude*. The experience of reading the sequel is an altogether different one from reading the first story. Aware that *At the Bay* concerns the same group of characters as *Prelude*, we begin with some assumptions about what is to come. But as we become reacquainted with our former selves, as agents who were previously addressed by a narrator (even if our reading of these stories is one directly after the other, the somewhat formal circumstances of story completion and story beginning invite a shaking off of one reading perspicacity and the donning of another), we may sense some subtle changes in the characters, narration, and setting—the elements of the story itself. We may wonder whether the subtle changes have intentionally been made by Mansfield or whether the differences are the result of changes in our own perceptions and associations. Many readers may also feel compelled to ignore such differences entirely, to link these stories together seamlessly, and to consider them one, despite the fact that they were written four years apart under somewhat different circumstances.

Mansfield completed *Prelude* in 1916, less than a year after her brother, Leslie, had died in World War I. In many ways, *Prelude* represents Mansfield's attempt to create a real world of childhood, one in which Mansfield might bring her brother back to life. This world, as Frank O'Connor states, "has something in common with the fairy tale" (O'Connor 368). At that point, her own fate was less certain. It wasn't until 1918—two years after *Prelude* was written—that Mansfield experienced her first hemorrhage as a result of tuberculosis, the telltale indicator that

death was on the not-so-distant horizon. (That was also, incidentally, the same year *Prelude* was published, by Virginia and Leonard Woolf.) In the years after she knew her death was certain, Mansfield searched desperately and for a cure to her ailing body and experienced many other related miseries: the isolated Chalet des Sapins, in Montana, Switzerland; an increasingly estranged husband; exhaustion; invalidism; and the dreadful awareness of life's small remainder.

The fact that Mansfield returned to the Burnell family to write *At the Bay* in 1921, at the end of her life, seems to suggest a desire to resolve something in the story—and, perhaps, in her own life. With *At the Bay*, in particular, O'Connor continues, Mansfield tries “to make the printed page not a description of something that had happened but a substitute for what had happened, an episode as it might appear in the eyes of God—an act of pure creation” (369). Such creation, however, requires the reader's help. He or she must be enchanted and must make connections between the two texts, showing that the world continued when we weren't reading it and when Mansfield wasn't writing it.

Certainly, the Burnells' fates are ultimately left unresolved after both *Prelude* and *At the Bay*. However, there are some subtle yet significant differences between the two stories that suggest an effort by Mansfield to show greater character progress in *At the Bay*. In this way, Mansfield added a measure of hope to her past, at a time when her present situation was at its most bleak.

So as we, the readers, approach *At the Bay*, after having read *Prelude*, we confront our own impulses to return to our former familiarity, our previous interpretation of the world of the Burnells. And while this desire may be a parallel to Mansfield's own impulse to return to something that is known, readers must remain open to the discernible differences in *At the Bay*. Doing so helps Mansfield preserve the innocence of her upbringing.

## Regarding the Title

As a sequel, initial impressions of *At the Bay* may be disappointing. A prelude to what, a day at the beach? Of course, the fact that there is a sequel means we immediately look to validate our suspicions about *Prelude*'s meanings. If it was a prelude to Kezia's (and thus Mansfield's) maturation—not complete development, but something along the lines of increased perception—we find evidence in her improved patience with her younger sister, Lottie. Kezia waits “on purpose” for Lottie to figure out the animal game in the washhouse even though the other children are harassing Lottie (Mansfield 124). Kezia is also newly fearful and curious about death. To her grandmother, she demands, “‘You couldn’t leave me. You couldn’t not be there.’ This was awful. ‘Promise me you won’t ever do it, grandma’” (117, *note the Kezia-aligned narrator’s interruption*). Eventually, Kezia is tricked through tickling into ceasing her incessant questioning about death and pleading with her grandmother not to die. The moment of maturity happens when she “lay still thinking this over. She didn’t want to die. It would mean she would have to leave here, leave everywhere, for ever” (117). The scope of this fear is a rather grown-up notion, as is not comprehending it, which the grandmother’s avoidance of Kezia’s pleading also suggests. Another sign we as readers may be searching for is the status of Linda’s mental health, which seemed unstable in *Prelude*. In this case, too, there is evidence of progress. Linda’s character shares a surprisingly touching moment with her infant child (discussed later) that, while still vague and interior, grounds her and seems to make her cherish reality.

The prepositional construction of title suggests a lack of authority and permanence. It is a temporary label for a moment in time. Obviously, the significance of that moment is at stake here. The absent antecedent to the title’s consequent phrase might be: “That one time... at the bay.” A vacationer might use it this way in linking to a specific event to the geographical

location. In contrast, a historian might read the phrase to imply a past-indefinite construction: “Life was always like this at the bay, year after year.” Substantiation of the historian’s reading occurs when Alice, the Burnell’s servant girl, is charitably “invited” to tea with Mrs. Stubbs, the local convenience store’s owner and namesake. Outside the shop is a notice for a “LOST! HANDSOME GOLE BROOCH,” which takes up a visually significant, offset portion of the page, and apparently the store window as well. While grammatically connecting with Alice’s servant world and also likely with Mansfield’s own solidified images from childhood, the notice is said to have “been [there] from time immemorial” (119). Such a permanent posting implies the history of the store and the characters who have always entered the store, and also shared the experience of reading the sign, an experience the reader has now also shared.

The historian’s approach helps create the world; the world exists continuously, forever. The vacationer creates a world too, but by looking forward, anticipating future times at the Bay or elsewhere, more sequels, which exist in *The Doll’s House* and perhaps *The Garden Party*. The dependency of the phrase, “at the bay,” like the noun *Prelude*, implies a spatial lack of completeness, of meaning, a call to be complemented, one that the reader feels bound to answer.

### **The Emergence of a Distinct Narrator**

Like *Prelude*, *At the Bay* presents the familiar temptation of dreams. However, here it seems to be a transitional device and not an invitation to psychoanalysts. Before the reader encounters any main characters, the presence of new peripheral characters—at first the shepherd, then the cat and dog, and especially the outdoor and otherly setting of these presences—suggests another unfamiliar presence in the highly-internal stories of the Burnell family: the narrator.

The first episode of *At the Bay* is meaningful as a specific point of reference. That reference is nature and location. We see the mist covering the morning hills of Crescent Bay. We

see a woolly mass of sheep pattering. We see the big gum tree outside of Mrs. Stubbs' shop, the little whare where the milk-girl lives, and the shepherd stopping at the sunrise to light his pipe. We see things as they always are. This opening introduces something *Prelude* never offers, a consciousness outside the Burnell's. This can only be Mansfield, descendant from the realm of narrators, obsessively recreating this world. This time, however, she is allowing it a permanence that lingers beyond the Burnell perceptions. On the first page, we are warned that "it seemed like some one was listening" (*Stories* 97). The nature and location in this opening don't directly affect any character but rather seem to be important on their own. With the exception of Florrie the cat, none of the "characters" appear again in the story—not the old sheep dog, the shepherd, Leila the milk girl, or even the mist and the sheep. When Florrie suddenly speaks and calls the dog a "revolting creature," we may suspect it's all a dream and perhaps Kezia will awaken charmed by her talking cat, but the dog's dismissal of Florrie's female silliness assuages that persuasion without foreshadowing much to come.

A striking incongruity regarding Mansfield's recent publication history is an apparent misprint in the popular 1991 Vintage Classics Edition of *Stories*. The section immediately following this unique, ethereal opening begins, "A few *months* later..." instead of "A few *moments* later" (*Stories* 100 vs. *Selected* 252 and others, *emphasis mine*). At first, this difference seems major, the 1991 edition seems to completely isolate the opening section and increase its irrelevance on the main story. However, one realizes that the opening scene is happening both months before *and* moments before. It is perpetual, spun in such an infinite way as to always precede the Burnells' return to our experience, or vice versa.

## **An Authorial Agenda: In Dialogue with Lawrence**

In *At the Bay*'s second section, we are introduced to the character Jonathan Trout, the husband of Linda's unnamed sister. Trout causes quite a disturbance in the morning and mindset of our vigorous paterfamilias, Stanley, who is interrupted during his early morning swim by his despised brother-in-law. Stanley angrily wonders, "Why the dickens didn't the fellow stick to his part of the sea?" (100). Though far from equal in each other's eyes, Stanley and Trout, according to the narrative, "a match for [each other]" (100). The two principal men, presumably naked, are each negatively affected by the presence of the other and unsure as how to act.

This subtle yet complex interaction, which sets the tone of *At the Bay*, can be interpreted as Mansfield's challenge to the artistic and personal assertions made by her close friend, D.H. Lawrence, particularly when viewed alongside Lawrence's novel *Women in Love* and its famous nude wrestling scene. Lawrence completed that novel in 1916, when he was living with Mansfield and Murry near the tip of Cornwall. Lawrence based one of the titular *Women*, Gudrun, on Mansfield, and it was not a flattering portrait. Indeed, Gudrun represented Lawrence's criticism of Mansfield's supposed falsity; she was what Mansfield biographer Jeffrey Meyers describes as a "gross exaggeration of the negative aspects of Katherine's character" (Meyers 93). For example, in *Women in Love*, Gudrun has a habit of "dispatching of people and things in a sentence," and, Lawrence's narrator claims, "it was all such a lie" (Lawrence 258). To Lawrence, Mansfield's personal life included a ridiculous, sentimental marriage to Murry (Lawrence sent Mansfield books by Carl Jung on mother-incest constructions in marriage), a constant fear of her disease, and, perhaps most damning, a predisposition for escape and detachment from life in her stories.

Near the end of her life, however, Mansfield was on her way toward addressing these falsities. She was certainly aware of them by 1919, when she wrote, “I long to be more *in life*—to know people—even now the desire comes. But immediately the opportunity comes I think of nothing but how to escape” (*Letters* 315-316). Her battle with falseness nearly outweighed her battle with tuberculosis. And on top of this she felt continually drawn into battle with Lawrence.

Mansfield and Murry read *Women in Love* in 1921, just days before Mansfield completed *At the Bay*. Her reaction to that novel was not the first time she had taken issue with certain aspects of Lawrence’s characters. In an earlier review of Lawrence’s *The Lost Girl* (1920), Mansfield had described Lawrence’s characters as “animals on the prowl,” as submitting “to the physical response,” as “non-human” (*Letters to Murry* 620). A year later, after reading *Women*, she wrote, as quoted by Mansfield’s other biographer Antony Alpers, “L. has got it all wrong... It’s my belief that nothing will save the world but love. But his tortured, satanic demon love I think is all wrong” (Alpers 341). In *At the Bay*, her more civilized but still psychologically complex nude combat scene revises Lawrence’s in order to point out his own denial of life and also, potentially, to spite him. A letter from Lawrence in 1920 called Mansfield “a loathsome reptile,” wished her to die, and claimed she revolted Lawrence by “stewing in [her] consumption”—the same disease of which he died in 1930 (Meyers 98).

*Women in Love*’s nude wrestling scene occurs only a few pages after Lawrence’s condemning portrait of Gudrun (Katherine) in his novel. In that scene, Birkin, a character based on Lawrence himself, attempts to intimately connect with his friend Gerald (thought to represent Murry) through “gladiatorial” means in order to provide his friend an intimate fulfillment that his relationship with Gudrun lacks. They do wrestle; however, Gerald’s dominant masculinity prevents him from submitting to Birkin. A similar, albeit much subtler, standoff takes place

between Stanley (a representative of Murry in this context—otherwise of Mansfield’s father) and Trout (potentially a stand-in for Lawrence). As Stanley tries to swim away from their awkward meeting, Trout follows and the two male characters in Mansfield’s story have a small swimming challenge though it is in neither of their interests. Indeed, like the nude wrestling scene, it is nothing more than a contest of masculinity. They can barely communicate. Trout “had an extraordinary dream last night”; Stanley has “work to do this morning,” which at this moment consists of his bathing (100). Stanley and Trout end up ruining each other’s morning swims; Stanley’s is ruined by Jonathan’s presence, and Jonathan’s is ruined by waiting too long in the water to ruin Stanley’s bathing.

If Lawrence’s scene is a triumph (or holdout) of masculinity, Mansfield’s seems to be a diffusion of it and of other themes. By no means is Mansfield’s battle a finale; in fact, it begins the short story. In its ambiguity, it seems to be a triumph of reality. These characters are neighbors and near relations; their struggle of pragmatism versus existentialism will continue indefinitely. It is therefore not a moment or narrative scene, but rather a layer which further complicates this world.

Stanley and Trout may also stand for *Mansfield* and Lawrence, respectively, given that the latter spoils the former’s day and peace of mind, but by doing so, ruins his own. Additionally, Trout’s final moments in the water suddenly turn to tuberculosis imagery: “He ached all over; it was as though someone was wringing the blood out of him” (*Stories* 101). And while this moment is likely indicative of Mansfield’s own discomfort while writing, it may also represent a final revenge on Lawrence.

## A Note Further Contextualizing Mansfield's Discomfort

Certain critics have argued that Mansfield's writing possesses a figurative discomfort that is the key to her prose style and place within Modernism. Angela Smith labels it disruption of conventional realism but she goes to "Mansfield's friend Virginia Woolf" for explanation ("Writing" 417). Woolf says, "'an ordinary mind on an ordinary day... receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday'" (417). These ordinary things, according to Smith, are "disruption that signify disturbance," the "conflicting sensations" that lack "a necessary order of significance" (417). She gives the example of the aloe in *Prelude* as a "nebulous but haunting symbol" and claims "no two readers interpret it in the same way" (418). Smith compares Mansfield to Woolf in that they both use symbolism without definite meaning (the lighthouse in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*), which invites "the reader to speculate about the luminous details in their fiction" (418). Indeed, Woolf once said to Roger Fry, "I meant *nothing* by *The Lighthouse*" (418, Smith quoting from Woolf's letters to Roger Fry).

It is possible Mansfield's critics simply want to lump her together with the more famous Bloomsbury writer. However, Mansfield's symbols are actually carefully chosen: Stanley's missing stick in *At the Bay* (see discussion below), the fruitful but obscured karakas tree in *The Garden Party* (see discussion much later), and the lamp in *Prelude*, whose significance as an object that represents an "understanding between women and girls" is explained by none other than Angela Smith ("Capture" 423). While Mansfield may display a discomfort with her disruption of the ordinary, she doesn't seem to do it randomly; her conscious symbolic choices

illustrate her limiting of the world to what is most meaningful. This technique actually makes her writing more accessible than Woolf, for instance.

In fact, Mansfield's discomfort seems more about the lack of real vitality in much of her contemporaries' writing, namely Forster and occasionally Woolf. Mansfield criticized *Howards End* (1910) by saying, "It's not good enough. E.M. Forster never gets any further than warming the teapot. He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea" (*Journal* 121). About Woolf's novel *Night and Day*, Mansfield wrote, "It positively frightens me—to realize this *utter coldness*" (*Letters* 381). Passion and vitality, and sometimes vulgarity, were the aspects she most admired about Lawrence's writing; she criticized him only when his passion fell short of humanity. These are the aspects that she tried to conjure in her own writing, but she also sought to imbue her fictional life/lives with the consciousness of death, an aim made very clear in *At the Bay*. Smith is right on when she points to this darker characteristic of Mansfield's disruptions. She describes it as "when the world as a character believes it to be is disturbed by a darker vision, as it is when Kezia confronts the possibility that her grandmother will die" (Smith "Writing" 415).

### **On this New Narrator's Use of Color, Particularly Blue**

After his spoiled swim, Stanley arrives in the living room wearing blue, the color of his eyes and of his children's jerseys. They all match the dominant color of the morning; there are seven blue things in the first six pages, some natural (the grass), some manufactured (the handkerchief, the clothes), some both (the shepherd's smoke). These blues of the family and of the detached, natural morning serve to ease the narrator back into close association with the Burnell family through the narrator's use of similar descriptors and the readers' envisioning of all things similarly hued.

However, we, the readers, accustomed this new omniscient guide, won't concede a complete embedding into the Burnell consciousnesses. From our hybrid narrator, we see the familiar quick exclamations of character-aligned reactions and expressions. Kezia's perspective is represented in the exclamations, "What had she done now?" and "how unfair grown-ups are!" (*Stories* 103). We also have a new sensation of ownership for these characters. Whereas with *Prelude*, the narrator was constantly and effortlessly within the character's minds, now, because of the introduction, we are in the presence of a confirmed, separate narrator. As readers, we prefer to be in this reading circumstance. We are no longer the only outsider, awaiting the whims of the characters and narrator. In fact, we may feel the narrator has finished the prelude and come out to find us, to bring us into the world, so that when Beryl is with Mrs. Harry Kember and feels like "she was being poisoned by this cold woman, but she longed to hear," it is we the reader, as much as the narrator, as much as Beryl, who exclaims "how strange, how horrible!" in Beryl's defense (111).

The frequency of blue is a symbol of cohesion and order, similar to the role of the new narrative voice. A continuing "blue" mention associates us with Kezia, Mansfield's child representative. Because Kezia wears blue, she appears more significantly connected to Stanley and nature and thus to Mansfield. But again, this is false alignment. Though Kezia, with her blue sunbonnet, travels, with her sisters, whose bonnets range in color, "up that sliding, slipping hill," she goes there "to have a good stare at who was there already" (106). This transparent ruse really allows the narrator a chance to survey the upcoming scene and introduce more characters. However, this obvious narrative move does not suggest languor on Mansfield's part. The highly judgmental act of choosing one's beach company may be in Isabel's, the oldest daughter's, capacity, but it is certainly beyond Lottie's and the freshly sympathetic Kezia's—who helped

poor Lottie over the fence despite Isabel's insistence that she not do so. Instead the reader understands there is a fourth presence on that hill, one that will linger long enough for the scene to be described. Again, this is our narrator.

### **Men as the Ultimate Burden and the Path to Transcendence**

Throughout *At the Bay*, the three males—Stanley, Trout, and Linda's newborn son—seem to represent the ultimate burden for women, particularly for Linda. But despite their burdensome qualities and Linda's inability to understand them, it is through her interactions with the three males that she achieves the most progress.

The tangible burden of Stanley is evident in his first scene with the Burnell women. "He's gone!" "Has Stanley gone?" "Gone?" "Gone!" These are the respective cries of Beryl, Linda, Mrs. Fairfield, and then perhaps all the women in the house after Stanley goes to town for the day (104). Before providing such relief, however, Stanley searches the house for his misplaced "stick." After accusing each of the women, with the exception of his wife, and the children of taking it, Stanley is hurt by Linda's lack of sympathy—by her "vagueness" (103)—to his trouble. He punishes her by refusing to give her a proper good-bye—an act that immediately leads him to feel guilty. The men are, in fact, metaphorically drowned by the "reckless" servant girl, Alice, while washing the dishes: "'Oh, these men!' she said, and she plunged the teapot into the bowl and held it under the water even after it had stopped bubbling, as if it too was a man and drowning was too good for them" (104-105).

The reason why Stanley's stick holds importance for him and not for Linda, is related to what it represents. The object, which is never to return, is a symbol of both his virility and his authority in the family. The fact that it is missing shows that it has been made a sort of generational tribute. Indeed, it seems he has traded his stick, for his newborn son, the new and

future man of the Burnell house. In effect, Stanley has finally produced a son and thus no longer needs his manhood. Linda's complete indifference to its absence indicates that the stick will not be missed.

In addition to being the new center of the family, Linda's newborn son represents the most recent male burden in her life. As in *Prelude*, Linda has but one interaction with her children in *At the Bay*, and it is with her son. In both stories, the scene in which Linda engages her children is buried in the story's central chapter, suggesting the centrality of the mother-child relationship in the life of the family, both as a burden and a source of hope. In *Prelude*, it is Mrs. Fairfield who indicates Linda's indifference to her children: "I wish you would go into the garden and give an eye to your children; but that I know you will not do." In contrast, in *At the Bay*, Linda is more open about her feelings, admitting, "she did not love her children" (70, 113).

Perhaps it is this candid admission that allows Linda to experience the moment of transcendence that follows. To begin, the boy interrupts her stream of consciousness: "She was so indifferent about him that as he lay there... Linda glanced down. The boy had turned over" (114, verbatim punctuation). But the boy's disturbance differs from other disturbances in a significant way—the effect it has on Linda's mind. Typically, Mansfield's characters are, to recall Angela Smith, "disturbed by a darker vision" (Smith "Writing" 415). Here, the boy disrupts Linda's possible nonchalance toward infanticide with "a wide, toothless smile, a perfect beam, no less" (*Stories* 114). At this interruption, Linda exudes a new emotion: she is "astonished at the confidence of this little creature." She then admonishes herself to be even more truthful: "Ah no, be sincere. That was not what she felt; it was something far different, it was something so new, so... The tears danced in her eyes" (114). This unarticulated, fleeting moment of pure love is unnoticed by the infant boy: "by now the boy had forgotten his mother."

And, in a rather abstract narrative move, the perspective plunges into the boy's consciousness as he tries in vain to grab his mother's newly caring, teasing hand. This pivotal scene brings back Linda, seemingly the most doomed character, from her escape from life, from "the cold breath [that] had chilled her through and through on each of those awful journeys" of childbirth (113). The undeniable optimism here transcends *At the Bay's* plot. Linda is a tragic character in these New Zealand stories, and in many instances, her descent to madness seems inevitable. Her one other motherly interaction—a fantastical vision of the aloe with Kezia from *Prelude*—is replaced here with energy and human connection.

Later, when Jonathan stops by to opine about how it is "imbecile, just as infernal... to spend the best years of one's life sitting on a stool from nine to five," a conversation he has likely had with Linda many times—"They knew each other well—" Linda exhibits a sensible reaction, responding with the appropriate degree of judgment, not exactly the audience Jonathan was looking for (127). Jonathan equates himself to "an insect that's flown into a room of its own accord;" and it does "everything on God's earth, in fact, except fly out again... and there's this vast dangerous garden, waiting out there, undiscovered, unexplored" (127). Linda revises and demotes him when she observes, "He is like a weed" (129). She also asks, "What was the matter with Jonathan? He had no ambition," and she concludes, "she saw him, for the first time, not resolute, not gallant, not careless, but touched already with age" (129). This is a Linda who, for perhaps the first time, is in touch with reality. And when her apologetic husband finds her in the garden, "she was still smiling" (130).

What *The Garden Party* will continue in developing human sympathy, *At the Bay* begins and remedies from *Prelude*. Linda's progress toward hope is but one of the remedies *At the Bay* provides. By the time of *At the Bay's* writing, the character of Linda had taken on a purpose

similar to the infant boy and to Laurie in *The Garden Party*, both of whom represent Mansfield's dead brother Leslie *and* are meant to allow him to live on in this created world. Mansfield's mother, Linda's model, had died in August of 1918, just one month after copies of *Prelude* were sent out from Hogarth Press. And now, in 1921, Mansfield knew she was near the end of her own life and nothing could prevent it—Alpers titles the penultimate section of his biography, in which he talks about her writing of *At the Bay*, “In Search of a Miracle” (Alpers 352). Kezia's slight maturation is another remedy, especially when combined with Linda's hint of rootedness. But mostly, though much fragmentation and dysfunction still linger, what *At the Bay*'s distinct narrator remedies from *Prelude*, with evidence of real human love, is the near total isolation that each character and the reader experience(d). *Prelude* begins and ends with disillusioned Kezia out of place and desiring to escape her circumstance. *At the Bay* ends with nature and an independent narrator “waked out of a dark dream” (*Stories* 134). For that matter, the reader is also partially relieved of such dark disturbances, and the world of Mansfield's childhood remains.

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### Women and Working Men

Katherine Mansfield, like most women in her class, was raised by women and supported by a largely absent working father. Even though it was her father who became convinced by Katherine of her talents as a writer and allowed her to leave New Zealand permanently to “make good in the real world of letters”—in his *Reminiscences and Recollections* of 1937 he wrote, “Work she had done showed undoubted promise. There could be no standing in her light”—he and Mansfield’s younger brother Leslie were the only significant men in Mansfield’s early life (Beauchamp 90).

In this trio of related New Zealand stories, *Prelude*, *At the Bay*, and *The Garden Party*, Mansfield writes about her youth. This was when Leslie was a baby and Harold Beauchamp, her father—Katherine Mansfield is a pen-name—was constantly busy upgrading the family’s social status and living situations first as board member then as chairman of the Bank of New Zealand. Considering the presence of probably exclusively women (four sisters, a live-in grandmother and two aunts, and at least one servant girl) Mansfield came to align her family’s social status with the feminine gender.

In *The Garden Party*, her main character and autobiographical representative, Laura Sheridan has exited the childhood of Kezia, for instance, and is an adolescent on the verge of becoming aware in various theaters of her life. At this intersection of naiveté and understanding, she is filled with the abstract conceptions of the life she is supposed to lead. She is pulled by her familiarity to the sophisticated feminine leisure class, exemplified by her mother and her upbringing, and yet she is attracted to the “impressive” severity of the working class. While a

more thorough examination will follow, the events of the garden party provide Laura with an opportunity, perhaps her first, to apply the abstract notions from either the upper-class or lower-class and gain the ability to articulate not only who she is but also what life is. And while we root for Laura as a youth, as a woman, as a human, her inability to triumph shows just how conflicted she has become.

Laura's indecisiveness is clear from the first words of the narrative, which begins with her perspective mid-thought: "And after all the weather was ideal" (*Stories* 282). This sort of unfinished, breathless narrative quality, which continues throughout the story, is thematically appropriate given that Laura is not able to come to a complete understanding of the events in the narrative, nor does Mansfield suggest that complete understanding is possible. As mentioned, Laura's primary force of influence is her mother, who Laura's "upbringing" suggests she should strive to be like. This comfortable, superficial existence seems quite pleasant in the naivety of youth. Laura has a telling moment when a workman suggests the marquee go "somewhere where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye." Her automatic reaction is to "wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye" or to make suggestions at her at all (283). From this example the central theme of pitting an upper and highly feminine class against the working and undoubtedly masculine class appears, and Laura is in the middle. The latter force of influence seems to be a growing infatuation with the "extraordinarily nice" workmen, an excited appreciation of the flower man, and her intuitive and imaginative sympathy for the dead man's family. Through these thoughts, Laura shows that she is perfectly willing to consider and even align herself with this class.

The equation of what is feminine to what is upper-class is important to unpack. The very notion of a "garden party," a celebration for no purpose at all beyond superficial pleasures, could

only take place in the female-dominated upper class. The primary concerns of the Sheridan women in the story are decisions related to flowers, cream puffs, marquees, and other rather frivolous details of the party. The Sheridan women, however, do not labor in any conventional sense; they have servants to do the heavy lifting. They are free to make decisions that allow them to maximize their experience of aesthetics and sensory pleasures. Laura herself, “the artistic one,” is extremely sensitive to aesthetics to the point of being utterly overwhelmed at times (282). When the flowers are delivered they are “nothing but lilies—canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frightening alive on bright crimson stems.” Laura crouches “to warm herself at that blaze of lilies.” “‘It’s some mistake,’ she said faintly. ‘Nobody ever ordered so many’” (286).

These circumstances and strict gender roles stand in great contrast to those of the working class, whose day-to-day concerns must be far more practical. Members of the working class—men and women—do not have time to worry about the superficial dilemmas of the Sheridan purview. The gravity of their day-to-day decisions is embodied by the story’s both central and peripheral event, the accidental death of a young man who lives in the shabby cottages at the bottom of the hill. While the garden party demonstrates the great gulf that separates the circumstances and priorities of the upper class from the working class, the set up for the event allows members of the two classes to intersect. The contrasting values of the two classes are on full display in Laura’s interaction with the workmen as she helps decide where to hang up the marquee. The “bang-slapping” workmen want the marquee against a group of karakas trees. Laura, however, is primarily concerned with maximizing the overall aesthetics of the garden and does not wish to conceal the karakas—which she describes as “so lovely, with their broad, gleaming leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit” (284). Laura’s appreciation of the workmen is

rather trivial. While she boasts about being unaffected by “absurd class distinctions,” she manages only to consider the workmen in an aesthetic, superficial way, the same way she does the flowers and the sky: “What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue!” (283, 284). She appreciates the way one workman pauses to smell a sprig of lavender as evidence of a charming “niceness” she finds lacking in other men. What she fails to realize is that the workman is likely savoring the pleasures of a lifestyle to which he has not regular access.

The two men in Laura’s life, her father and her brother, while mirroring Mansfield’s own significant male relatives, do not contradict the paradigm of the feminine upper class; in fact, they reinforce it. Though Laura’s father Mr. Sheridan is away working throughout the story, he is contributing to the feminine home life of the Sheridan family by earning the income that enables it. In his role as party host, Mr. Sheridan represents the leisure typically enjoyed by his wife and daughters, earned from long-hour capitalist endeavor at “the office,” a vague world untouched by Laura and the youth-bound narration. Additionally, his fortune seems dependant on the training of his son, Laurie, who spends the majority of his time off the page in this shadow of his father, “brushing their hats” and presumably learning the tools to perpetuate the family’s privileges (285).

Laurie, Laura’s beloved brother and confidant, whose name isn’t even a fully masculine version of Laura and seems to be some combination of Laura, Leslie and Lawrence, only appears three times in the story. Each time he shows up, he is given an opportunity to complete Laura’s thought and to challenge Laura’s value system, which has been shaped by their mother. But rather than providing her with any such insight, he merely platitudinously confirms that of which she is already aware. When Laura excitedly pants to her brother, “Oh, I do love parties, don’t

you?,” Laurie gives a “ra-ther” incoherent reply before urging her to answer the telephone (285). Later, when Laura approaches him to tell him about the young man who has been killed at the bottom of the hill, Laurie’s odd behavior and changing of the subject, complimenting her hat, causes Laura to withhold the information.

He suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled his eyes at her. “My word, Laura; you do look stunning,” said Laurie. “What an absolutely topping hat!”

Laura said faintly (notice this is the second thing she’s said ‘faintly’) “Is it?” and smiled up at Laurie, and didn’t tell him after all. (292, *my parenthetical commentary*)

Laura appreciates her brother not for his masculine qualities but for his more feminine ones, such as his “warm, boyish voice” (285). This sensitive side appears in the form of sympathy for his sister and for youth, both of which he is close to and likely fears pulling away from. It is Laurie’s lingering youth and innocence that allows him to relate to the rich, party-and-women dominated world of full privilege indulgence.

Laura doesn’t seem aware of the roles played by her father and brother in bringing about her bourgeois status. This lack of awareness is key to understanding that Mansfield also equates the upper class with youth, especially upper-class girls. Indeed, the other upper-class men in *The Garden Party* seem both abstractly feminine and childlike when Laura describes them as “the silly boys she danced with” (284). In contrast, the working men are described as “impressive,” and in their presence, Laura attempts to emulate them by looking “severe and even a little short-sighted” (283).

It seems Laura’s childhood was filled with much more disparaging views of the working class, especially the “far too near” cottages that “were the greatest possible eye sore, and had no right to be in that neighborhood at all” (290). In a thought that seems to occupy both Laura’s and her sister Jose’s mind, the Sheridan’s childhood upper-class conditioning is recalled. “They were

forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting language and of what they might catch...” What might they catch? sympathy? reality? “The very smoke that came out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridan’s chimneys” (290). Of course, Laura is beginning to doubt the appeal of this conditioning, of this fantasy world. “Since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and sordid... But still, one must go everywhere; one must see everything” (290). This line represents progress from judgment to discovery, a progression that should transform the judgment.

Mrs. Sheridan, Laura’s mother and chief female role model, as Laura may be beginning to suspect, no longer feels apart of this youthful upper-class world, “forget that I am your mother,” she says (282). She is attempting to maintain that world for Laura, though her inevitable failure to do so weighs on her. Laura can’t help but poke holes in the fantasy world, though she seems both bravely surging forward and easily gained back. Matching, and perhaps causing Laura’s pitching are the obvious and intentional vacillations of logic by Mrs. Sheridan. For example, Mrs. Sheridan breaks her promise to not interfere with the production of party by ordering an obscene amount of lilies. Mrs. Sheridan tells Laura, “my Darling child, you wouldn’t like a logical mother, would you?” (286). With this line, Mrs. Sheridan equates motherhood with illogic and establishes an unusual relationship between mother and child that Laura must believe in without understanding. Interesting in terms of proximity, immediately after posing this question to Laura, Mrs. Sheridan says “here’s the man,” referring to the flower man bringing still more lilies. Using implied logic, we see she means possessing logic is the mark of masculinity. By not possessing it, Mrs. Sheridan is feminine, young, and ranked. And yet when Laura is suggesting they stop the party due to the death of the working-class man, her mother tells Laura,

“my dear child, use your common sense” (291). Later, Laura’s mother is getting anxious and wants the cloud of the man’s death to dissipate. She sends Laura down the lane to his widow’s cottage with a “heaped” basket of party leftovers. Before Laura can leave Mrs. Sheridan says, ““And Laura!’—her mother followed her out of the marquee—‘don’t on any account—’” (294). This unfinished thought may be a motherly “don’t look at the body;” it may be a tactful “don’t wear that hat;” it may be completely illogical advice. Instead, she finishes, or rather the narrator finishes with, “No, better not put such ideas into the child’s head!” (294). The point is Mrs. Sheridan avoids the dispensing of logic, but also avoids the potential evil of the situation, though she is clearly aware of it. This vain attempt to preserve her false sense of purity may represent Mansfield’s own criticism of a weak femininity that’s riddled with illogic. It is precisely this instability that seems to define Mrs. Sheridan and any grown woman who, by social design, must still inhabit the youthful feminine realm of the bourgeoisie. It is no wonder, with these back and forth signals, that Laura’s understanding of life stops at “isn’t life...isn’t life—” (297).

*The Garden Party* pays full attention to feminine spaces and the secret erotic and other fancies that such domestic interiors can nurture. Laura’s contradictory experiences with gender and class coincide with her subtle but ever-present sexual awakening, which has as much an effect of making her a sympathetic human as a sexual being. She begins to sympathetically separate from the others once the dead body is mentioned by Godber’s man. ““They were taking the body home as I come up here.’ And he said to the cook, ‘He’s left a wife and five little ones’” (289). Laura’s feelings of sympathy are admonished by her mother and the rest of her family. However, before Laura even learns of the death of her neighbor, her pleasures are engaged.

When the workers totally dismiss and overrule Laura and put their marquee wherever they damn well please, she silently objects that they've obscured, in the process, a beautiful and fruitful tree. This carefully chosen symbolism—an anti-Woolf move—quite obviously represents Laura's own blossoming, and the constant obscurations and distractions (in this case from the working classes), which confuse, and prevent or rather delay it.

For a moment in the morning she takes in the sounds and ambiance of the house. The house seems to be a body that Laura is within, at last; it is a new experience, and she scans the fluidity of things. Sexy images of vitality surround her and she seems to notice them for the first time.

She was still, listening. All the doors in the house seemed to be open. The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. 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. But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase, in at the tops of the windows, out at the door. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm little silver star. She could have kissed it. (285)

But before Laura can do anything about the warmth, the faintness, the muffling, the stiff castors, she is distracted the pealing bell of the front door. The feeling doesn't vanish, however; it simply lessens. It rises again when Laura sees the lilies. "She felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast" (286). This is perhaps the most obvious insertion of Mansfield's own idiosyncrasies. Mansfield once wrote to John Middleton Murry, even "flower pictures affect me so much that I feel an instant tremendous excitement and delight" (*Letters* 501). But again, before anything "tremendous" can come from the flowers, Laura interrupts herself. This time it is with logic and, of course, her mother. "Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find

mother,” she says thereby quelling her sexual emergence and keeping the narration on task (*Stories* 286).

The most significant disturbance to Laura’s pursuit of sympathy and humanity is the mother’s tactic of aesthetic appeal, a hat. The news of the death of the “young chap... name of Scott, a carter” pitches another wave at Laura and thus the narrative (289). According to Jeffery Meyers, though she feels “for the bereaved family and does not want to disturb their mourning, [Laura] is bribed and distracted by her mother’s gift of a new hat that symbolizes the moral corruption of her mother’s values” (Meyers x). The moment Laura puts the hat on, she is able to consider her sympathy “extravagant” and is willing to relegate it and the working class to the outskirts of her consciousness. The hat undoubtedly symbolizes membership to an adult feminine community—and to the upper class. At least initially, Laura, as she stares in awe of her own stunning appearance, is tempted by the hat to accept her mother’s values. This distraction—ultimately a main function of all head coverings throughout the story—allows Laura to forget the dead body until “after the party’s over” (*Stories* 292).

After the party, Laura experiences a hint of self-consciousness as her victorious mother teases Laura about her earlier sensitivities. Mrs. Sheridan wants Laura to be dismissive of “people like that” (291). As Laura’s self-consciousness grows, her perception of the details of her environment becomes more acute. Objects become shadows, lights become flickers and all the feelings of the garden party are “somehow inside her” (294). Her foreign status and fears worsen until she is led to the body of the “wonderful, beautiful” dead man (296). Here Laura, who has been, as Edward Wagenknecht describes most of the Mansfield (or Beauchamp) children, “striving pitifully and vainly to adjust [herself] to a coarse world,” experiences a

converse self-consciousness (Wagenknecht 27). Her compassion comes back into the forefront of her mind, and immediately she realizes she does not believe in the values she is representing. The evidence of this realization and consequent stark reversal is made clear in her apology. “Forgive my hat,” she begs of the dead man (*Stories* 296). This recognition, coupled with the fact that she does not remove the hat, insinuates that she is coming to terms with the duality of her presence there, and anywhere. She is at once leisure and superficiality and also feeling and demanding of life’s knowledge.

In a 1936 lecture which assessed many of her works, Mansfield’s husband, John Middleton Murry suggests that Laura’s profound witness to the complacency of death represents “the death of Laura’s happiness” (“Katherine” 65). But it is not in fact Laura’s happiness that dies. If anything dies, it is her childish selfishness. Murry was notorious for unnecessarily dramatizing Mansfield’s stories and for his exploitation of their partnership. Many of Mansfield’s contemporaries like D.H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley, and her biographers, especially Jeffery Meyers, accuse Murry of “egoistic enshrinement of his wife” (*Darker* 254). Meyers’s most stinging judgment claims that Murry “always confused the ‘writer’ with the ‘spirit’, emphasized her ‘purity’ at the expense of her genuine qualities, bathed the reality of her life in pathos and pain, distorted her actual achievement and inflated her reputation” (258). In his lecture, Murry sentimentally characterizes his deceased wife, which only reinforces the masculine role he seems intent to play in his relationship with Mansfield. This role is best exemplified by the gravestone he provided her: “Katherine Mansfield wife of John Middleton Murry.” In most of his introductions and writings on her work, he is forthcoming and mournful with an embroidered sincerity that actually seems to falsify his and Mansfield’s relationship. In fact, at the 1936 lecture given at the University of Michigan, Professor Clarence Thorpe, who felt

something of a connection to Murry since they had both written extensively about John Keats, wound up asking, “How could a literary man discuss his wife in such a way in a public lecture?” (Lea 227). Jan Pilditch points out in the notes to her compilation which includes Murry’s lecture, “this study is his only full appreciation of her in existence” (Pilditch 53). Even then it is not a very careful one. For all his authority on and access to her, one cannot help but suspect he understood her work in life the same way he honored her in death, barely.

So what about Laura? To complete her youth, Laura must choose between alliance to the “extraordinary niceness” of the masculine working class and the comfort and snobbish nonchalance of the feminine upper class. At certain points throughout the narrative, Laura seems to discover that by replacing her selfishness with sympathy, she can exist in one and be mindful of the other. However, this realization is incomplete—or at least incompletely articulated. Indeed, as Lynette Felber points out in her introduction to the 2005 edition of *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, there is no consensus among critics about precisely what Laura experiences when she looks at the face of the dead workman and that this lack of consensus is what sets the story apart from previous social satires and makes it modern. Felber refers to Mansfield’s oft-quoted explanation of the story’s subject matter. Mansfield claimed it was about “the diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything. Death included. That is bewildering for a person of Laura’s age.” The author’s interpretation, Felber writes, “speaks to the complexity of her protagonist’s experience... yet the actual effect of the story exceeds any summary of it. Whatever Mansfield’s intentions, the story ends with a perfectly poised ambiguity which does not reveal whether Laura is inarticulate because she lacks insight and maturity or because the experience she has had is beyond words, beyond articulation” (Felber xiv).

Laura's faltering may have another cause. *The Garden Party's* narrative swells in waves of feeling and realization throughout, never defiantly reaching a peak. Laura's most humanistic sympathies and her sexual self are thus urged by her surroundings and the text to awaken, a campaign we've seen directly opposed by her mother, by distraction, and by logic. In her encounter with the dead workman, she manages to get away from those familiar diversions and plunge into the unknown in terms of both class and life. The final swell that promises resolution is brought upon by Laura's question and the potential answer. And yet, with the use of the negative in "Isn't life—," Laura is not trying to explain what life *is*. Even her syntax displays an inability to approach an understanding. Resolution will not come once again and Laura's feminine identity is still rather untried. However, she has gained a validation of her sympathy. Although she cannot express what she feels, her mindfulness has earned her a vision of something "wonderful, beautiful... just as it should be" (*Stories* 292). This triumph of humanism *is* something that Laura, the reader, and even loving Laurie can quite understand.

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