



## Cultural Capital and Social Mobility in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party': A Bourdieusian Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on short story "The Garden Party" by *Katherine Mansfield* by applying the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu cultural capital, symbolic capital, and habitus to discuss how the text portrays and criticizes the issue of class distinction. Although a lot of work has been done on the modernist style and application of symbolism in Mansfield, little has been done to systematically study how her narrative represents social inequality through cultural and symbolic mediums. The problem of the research is the continuation of privilege that is not merely the economic phenomenon, but the cultural and symbolic order that is perpetuated by taste, aesthetics and social rituals. The research has three aims, which are to examine the cultural representation of class distinction using cultural practices and symbols, to determine how cultural and symbolic capital operates to uphold hierarchies, and to examine the limits of empathy used by Laura Sheridan to confront established structures of the class. The study focuses on a qualitative method and is based on Bourdieu theory of practice in which the primary text is read and analyzed using the textual analysis technique and the secondary criticism as the secondary sources. The findings shows that cultural practices like the garden party preparations act as performances of the cultural capital whereas the items like the hat that Laura wears represent both cultural and symbolic capital that facilitate the perpetuation of social inequalities. Besides, the fact that Laura temporarily realizes the inequality demonstrates a conflict between personal empathy and the limitations of the habitus that finally states the limits of privilege. The study also finds that "The Garden Party" dramatizes cultural and symbolic reproduction of class alongside a revelation of the limits of personal sympathy concerning the interruption of structural inequality thereby engaging Mansfield scholarship and the wider field of literature.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

#### Sociological Understandings of Cultural Capital

The original arguments by Pierre Bourdieu concerning the nature of class, capital, and the reproduction of the society form a critical perspective on which to analyze literary works. Bourdieu refers to cultural capital as non-economic resources which facilitate the rise in the social ladder and preserve class hierarchies: knowledge, mannerisms, education, tastes, language and

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style of speech (Bourdieu, 1986). He identifies three types of cultural capital, which are embodied (dispositions, mannerisms), objectified (cultural goods) and institutionalized (qualifications) and claims that they act in synergy to reproduce inequality between the generations (Bourdieu, 1986). Other sociologists like Lamont and Lareau (1988) focus more on the fact that cultural capital plays a key role in continuing social exclusion because it acts as highly distributed, high status signals that guide the delineation of group membership (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). Habitus as a component within the Bourdieuan model (internalized dispositions formed through early socialization) makes class distinction nearly unseen to its practitioners and even makes class privilege taken-for-granted (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 2011). This theoretical grounding is the basis of the analytical practices of literary works that examine more than the explicit presence of a class difference, but rather the subtle embodied cues that indicate social membership or otherness.

### **Modernism, Class, Narratives of Privilege**

The modernist literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tended to challenge the standard social structures, such as the status quo of classes, with experimental narrative and psychological realism. Modernists like John Carey (1992) have suggested that the focus on consciousness and perception in modernism has made it more closely aligned to bringing to light those processes by which privilege operates at the level of everyday life – manners, speech, internal doubts – than to economic conflict alone (Carey, 1992). Mansfield and modernism in New Zealand context: Mansfield at once inherits a British sociality and colonial strains; authors such as Fiona Joy Green, (2008) have demonstrated that class in Mansfield is placed not just in material inequity, but also in social rituals, domestic spaces and belonging genders (Green, 2008). That is, in modernist literature the characters tend to be caught between new and old manifestations of privilege and moral consciousness of those left out by their own status, giving an effect of conflict within the characters and narrative tension.

### **Depiction of Class and Social Distance by Kathleen Mansfield**

The Garden Party by Katharine Mansfield is a commonly referred to literary criticism as a story that explores social distance in an ambivalent and delicate way. Ozge Guvenc (2016) argues that Mansfield employs focalization in Section 1, Chapter 4 to break the complacency of her social circle: Laura is shocked by the presence of party workmen and when the neighbour dies, she is still felt to be in a space of her own worldview despite this shock. According to Guvenc, Mansfield contrasts the abundance of the Sheridan family, such as flowers, table settings, decorations, with the plain poverty of the house of Mr. Scott to reveal the art of hypocrisy and expression of empathy (Guvenc, 2016). In a similar vein, Jong-moon Lee (2022) points out that Mansfield employs the party preparations and family chats to reveal how the separation of classes is perpetuated by rituals and social expectations rather than direct conflicts; the romanticization of the workers by Laura, after which she feels guilty, is a sign of the awareness of the boundary of classes and its continuation (Lee, 2022).

### **Discourse, Markers of Social Position and Language**

The purposes of language and dialogue in The Garden Party can be seen not as a way to populate the characters, but as an indicator of class identity, power dynamics, and internalized social restriction. In his essay, Linguistic Structure and Rhetorical Resolution in Katherine Mansfield The Garden Party, Severn (2009) believes that the forms of polite negation, indirectness, and deference used by characters of a high social status both represent and uphold hierarchy; the speech is constrained, claims are infrequent and rhetoric is frequently ornamental, not confrontational (Severn, 2009). Characters of lower rank, on the other hand, are linked to more direct, assertive language, which adds to a contrast in communicative style that is highly social. Moreover, recent authors like Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze in Feeling 'Like a Work-girl': Class, Intimacy and Alienation in The Garden Party (2017) discuss the change in tone of the voice when Laura attempts to bridge social distance to the neighbour, to the workers, and how these changes reveal the discomfort and alienation caused by the internalisation of the expectation of class (Thorndike-Breeze, 2017).

### **Narrative Resolution, Class Consciousness, and Empathy**

One of the key strands of The Garden Party is the tension between privilege and conscience, and how a cross-class encounter can result in empathy and understanding of the difference in classes. This is how the prejudice and blindness of the elite are revealed by Mansfield, and also, as critics like LitCharts summarized, how even the well-intentioned empathy can be rather restricted and shallow against the background of the structural inequality being unchallenged (LitCharts, n.d.). Imdad Ullah Khan, Mahrukh Saif, and Kainat Alam (2023) approach The Garden Party in terms of Marxist-feminist perspectives and demonstrate that the developing sense of class consciousness in Laura is bound to the effects of gendered expectations; the inner struggle that Laura goes through is that of recognizing the superficiality of her own social world despite remaining largely unchanged in terms of its ideological framework (Khan, Saif, and Alam, 2023). Therefore, Mansfield does not provide any clear transcendence of class in her narrative, but instead she introduces class as a condition of existence and a thin line that one may sometimes feel but rarely to cross in its entirety.

### **Intimacy and Inner Conflict**

In The Garden Party, Katherine Mansfield does not only contrast the social classes but also talks about the psychological conflict in which the privileged become aware of their own alienation. In Feeling Like a Work-girl: Class, Intimacy and Alienation in The Garden Party, Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze (2017) explores how the experience of being in the workshop with the people preparing the party makes Laura feel almost viscerally alien to her own class; the location becomes a space between two worlds

in which intimacy and alienation coexist. The struggle of Laura desiring to reach out, yet her inability to cross the class divide completely at the same time, shows that cultural and symbolic capital is internalised and not merely what is perceived, but what prevents action. The metaphor of work-girl turns out to be one of the places where the habitus of Laura is contested, though not changed; intimacy is temporary and alienation is brought back, which accentuates the permanence of the distinction of classes even in the setting of emotional disruption (Thorndike-Breeze, 2017).

### **Modality, Persuasion, and Social Obligation**

The garden party works not merely as a means of communication but as a means of constraining and as a means of reinforcing social order. One of the studies was called *The Garden Party Will Go on or Not? Who Persuades Whom?: The article A Modality Analysis of Mansfield's 'The garden party'* (2017) explores how various figures: mainly Laura, Mrs. Sheridan, and Jose, employ modality to convince or be convinced that the party should or should not be cancelled in the context of the death of Mr. Scott. It has been shown that, Mrs. Sheridan and Jose are ardent pleasers of social validity (we already have guests, one cannot look ungrateful), whereas Laura is a pleaser of ethical desirability—she is not interested only in social, but in moral. Such interaction shows how social obligation (as a type of symbolic capital) may prevail against ethical instincts as cultural capital requires living up to appearances. Negative modalities, conditionals, polite forms, and appeals to tradition are also demonstrated as strengthening the class boundaries through the language and demonstrating how speech acts are the mechanisms of maintaining the classes (EJELLS, 2017).

### **Postcolonial Situations and Cultural Hybridity**

In addition to instantaneous interpersonal conflicts in the classroom in *The Garden Party*, it is suggested by critics like Emmanouil Aretoulakis in *Colonialism and the Need for Impurity: Katherine Mansfield, The Garden Party and Postcolonial Feeling* (2014) that the social world of the novel also bears the stamp of colonial history and a trace of cultural hybridity. Mansfield, raised in colonial environments, born in New Zealand, brings into her fiction a consciousness of the cultural impurity created by colonialism, i.e. interactions of coloniser and colonised cultures that disarm easy distinctions between privilege and poverty. This postcolonial sentiment makes the nature of cultural capital more tricky: what is refined or taste is never wholly pure but is in fact already scrambled up with colonial regimes. So the difference in Laura is classed, but is in some way racialised or colonialised, that is, the imperials have created the criteria of refinement which she fulfils. This point of view adds a Bourdieusian reading that contextualizes cultural capital not only as intrinsic to class but also as bound up with the colonial power.

### **Empathy, Class Consciousness and Ethical Awareness**

The tension between empathy and social inertia is one of the main dynamics in *The Garden Party*: Mansfield appears to imply that people are able to acknowledge the difference in classes but that this almost never leads to any change in the structures. This thought is highlighted in the theme analysis in LitCharts (n.d.) on Empathy, Understanding, and Class Consciousness, where it is pointed out that, although experiences between classes (like Laura seeing the Scott household) can wake people up to some level of awareness, prejudice due to various classes and the social distance between people can still hinder understanding to a certain degree. This story by Mansfield demonstrates how privileged characters might experience discomfort or compassion though these feelings are usually suppressed or settled in a manner that reinforces social norms instead of destroying them (LitCharts, n.d.). The cultural capital so helps to produce the potential to perceive the suffering of another and ability to look away without change- showing that only moral impulses do not alter the structural dispositions or the habitus.

### **The Aesthetics of Class and Symbolic Capital**

Bourdieu also recognises the existence of the symbolic capital along with the prestige, honour and recognition bestowed on individuals or groups due to the status markers (Bourdieu, 1984). Symbolic capital can be observed in *The Garden Party* in the fact that the Sheridan family can use money to buy cultural prestige: the selection of flowers, music and expensive hats are all symbols of taste. As Angela Smith (2010) notes in *Katherine Mansfield and Symbolist Aesthetics*, in her narratives, Mansfield tends to focus on the performance aspect of social rituals and how aesthetic preferences and beauty are filled with symbolic meaning. The obsession of the Sheridan family with appearance is the symbolic capital that helps to maintain the family identity of their classes and the discomfort of Laura points to a temporary disruption of the symbolic order (Smith, 2010).

### **Learning, Habitus, and the Frontiers of Mobility**

The next Bourdieusian prism that could be applied to the story of Mansfield is the relationship between education, habitus and social reproduction. Annette Lareau (2011) argues that, besides imparting knowledge, education institutions also reproduce class-based dispositions, justifying the cultural capital of the privileged groups, and demeaning the working-class practices. Though the issue of education is not explicitly foregrounded in *The Garden Party*, the speech of Laura, her manners, and her developed sensitivity are a testament to her education and cultural conditioning. The fact that she is reluctant about the party also represents the moral quandaries of someone whose habitus has been formed to see inequality but not to violate the standards of her own class. By doing this, the tale exemplifies the fact Lareau (2011) notes: education and socialization are subtle systems of exclusion: despite existing awareness, the logic embedded in the habitus prevents the opportunity to become internally mobile, or to be in solidarity. The story told by Mansfield can therefore be related to the larger theme of Bourdieu which asserts that cultural capital and habitus naturalize privilege and restrict the transformative ability of empathy.

**1.1. Statement of the Research Problem**

On the one hand, despite the broad understanding of *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield as an exploration of the relation between classes, the majority of interpretations look at the work in terms of empathy, symbolism, or modernist aesthetics without a systematic application of the theoretical contributions of Pierre Bourdieu. Coming to the existing scholarship, there is a gap in analyzing how the narrative of Mansfield embodies the various forms of cultural capital, symbolic capital and habitus as mean of social reproduction. This paper therefore focuses on the issue of class distinction functioning in *The Garden Party* not only as an economic block but as a system of culture and symbols that perpetuates inequality. The study aims to explore how privilege, taste, and social rituals strengthen the status quo and also demonstrate how individual empathy can be constrained by more strongly established hierarchies by analyzing the story in terms of Bourdieusian perspective.

**1.2. Research Objectives**

- To investigate how the Katherine Mansfield story *The Garden Party* has shown the distinction of class based on cultural practices, aesthetics symbols and social interactions.
- To examine how the cultural capital, symbolic capital and habitus function in the story to enforce the social hierarchies.
- To investigate how much Mansfield uses Laura to examine the understanding of inequality and the constraints of sympathy in overcoming deeply rooted class systems.

**1.3. Research Questions**

1. What does *The Garden Party* do to show the class differentiation in terms of the cultural practices, symbols, and social experiences?
2. How do cultural capital, symbolic capital and habitus play a role in the story to maintain and reinforce the class hierarchies?
3. In what ways the idea of inequality manifest itself in the minds of Laura and where is the boundary of empathy to traverse the structural class barriers?

**1.4. Significance of the Study**

This research is meaningful as it adds to the literary academic literature on Katherine Mansfield as it puts the story *The Garden Party* into the perspective of the sociology of culture as depicted by Bourdieu. Though the modernist style of Mansfield and her sensitivity to social difference have been studied by critics, not many studies have specifically addressed the ways in which forms of cultural capital are coded within the material objects, aesthetic decisions, and linguistic patterns of the narrative. This research is a new interpretation by foregrounding the theory of Bourdieu because it helps to understand better how the reproduction of class takes place in the everyday practices of culture, not only through the economic structures. This line of thought meshes literary criticism and cultural sociology, and fills the gap between textual analysis and social theory.

Moreover, the study has even more interdisciplinary importance. At a time when inequality and social mobility remains a burning issue, the story by Mansfield still speaks as a satire of privilege and exclusion. Using the ideas of Bourdieu, one can see how literature may be used as a cultural piece, one that mirrors, criticizes, and even opposes social stratifications. The present research can thus be useful not only to those studying literature but also sociologists, cultural theorists, and modernist studies students because it demonstrates the way literary texts reflect the dynamics of capital, class, and habitus. Finally, the results highlight the importance of literature as the instrument of critical reflection on the social formations that remain unaltered with the course of time.

**1.5. Delimitation of the Study**

The study has been limited by developing the short story *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield (1922) and it does not encompass her entire works. Although the theoretical framework is based on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu on cultural capital, symbolic capital, and habitus, it does not seek to offer an extensive implementation of his sociology of practice. Another restriction of the study is that the author involved in the discussion is not concerned with the historical reception or biographical context, but with textual and thematic analysis, i.e. language, symbolism, and character interactions. To a certain extent, secondary sources are included selectively to allow incorporating interpretations, but the major focus is put on a close Bourdieusian reading of the text itself.

**2. Literature Review****2.1. Class Separation and Laura's Moral Conflict**

Jong-moon Lee (2022) explores the way Mansfield dramatizes the social division between classes by depicting a moral dilemma of Laura. Lee says that Mansfield creates an opposition between the extravagant plans of the Sheridan family and the accidental death of the poor carter, Scott, to point out how stratification into classes becomes the new reality of upper-middle classes life. The scene when Laura sympathizes with the carers of the lower-class and tries to cancel the party is a temporary rebellion against the established class divisions (Lee, 2022). Another point which Lee raises is how Mansfield employs description and symbolism (flowers, food, setting) to bring out the absurdity and heavy-handedness of such distinctions, meaning that class division is not only economic but also aesthetic and cultural in scope.

**2.2. The Markers of Class Identity, Language and Discourse**

In his essay, *Linguistic Structure and Rhetorical Resolution in Katherine Mansfield The Garden Party*, Stephen E. Severn (2009) examines the Mansfield using linguistic decisions as a means of encoding a distinction in the classification. Severn notes that the upper-class characters are more likely to use indirectness, polite negatives, tag questions and rhetorical constructions that restrict challenge, and preserve a sense of hierarchy, and less direct speech is related to lower-class characters. The temporary change of Laura towards more assertive or neutral syntactic structure, like when she asks whether she should send lilies to Mrs Scott, reflects her feeling of discomfort, and points towards her newly awakened sense of her social identity (Severn, 2009). The analysis reveals that language is among the important means of a cultural capital and distinction of classes in the text.

**2.3. Psychological Readings: Intimacy, Alienation and the Inner Other**

Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze (2017) in her article *Feeling Like a Work-girl: Class, Intimacy and Alienation in The Garden Party* examines the mental aspects of the concept of class, in particular through the inner world of Laura. She contends that the observations and sensory experiences (e.g. she observes that the workman smelled of lavender) of Laura bring out intimacy with and alienation to working classes. These cross-class identifications are weird: Laura feels some similarities (or humanitarian unity), but is still distanced by her habitus and social upbringing (Thorndike-Breeze, 2017). The psychological reading, therefore, displays the way in which cultural capital is internalized, how awareness of classes influences subjectivity—Laura is never entirely Other, never entirely absorbed into the working class.

**2.4. Exploitation, Two Worlds and Capitalism**

In the article, *Observing Oppositions of Two Worlds, The Garden Party – Exploitation to the lower class by Capitalism*, Lei Liu (2023) sets the story in a wider social-economic context of criticism. Liu looks at how the story by Mansfield discloses exploitative dynamics of capitalism- how the middle/upper classes make money (or live comfortably) at the cost of lower-class labour and suffering. Those oppositions are not confined to characters only: they are expressed within the story in terms of setting, visible and repressive. Liu claims that such ambivalence of Laura (both discomfort but acceptance) indicates that the middle class is reluctant or unable to challenge the exploitation system. In this perspective, cultural capital is problematic: aesthetic value, ceremony, and luxury are tied up with disparities (Liu, 2023).

**2.5. Compassion, Understanding and the Ineffable Frontiers**

Although a lot of critics mention that Laura develops in the sense of class awareness, they also acknowledge how her transformation is not complete. According to Alam (2017), theme analysis Empathy, Understanding, and Class Consciousness, the experiences of crossing the class lines demonstrate that Laura awakens to her empathy, but nevertheless, the role of a class prejudice and symbolic distance that still exists despite the presence of empathy is also evident in the narrative. Mansfield therefore appears to indicate that cultural capital or knowledge in itself will not wipe away structural disparities or bridge class lines completely. Empathy can change consciousness but can frequently do little to change habitus or to change the social field.

**2.6. The Narrative and Irony in Social Modeling**

Zhongju Huang and Xiaoxuan Feng (2021) study *The Garden Party* in terms of narrative perspective, focalization and irony. They claim that Mansfield applies the alternating focalization the alternation of nonfocalized narration, internal focalization through Laura and hidden development in order to contrast idealistic world view of Laura with the social norms of her family and her social group. By so doing, as Huang and Feng observe, Mansfield encourages the reader not only to criticize the upper-middle class on the basis of its material effusiveness but also on the social blindness and performative gentleness (Huang and Feng, 2021). Particularly, the ironic distance established by the nonfocalization enables the reader to see the absurdity of the insistence of the Sheridan family to proceed with the party despite the death of Mr. Scott; internal focalization then prompts the reader to experience the shock of Laura, the moral questioning and the confines of her privilege. Such a moving story perception helps to grasp the way cultural capital is embedded into what is and what is not perceived, and supports class differentiation as the viewpoint and moral visibility become regulated.

**2.7. Modality Analysis, Social Obligation and Ethics**

In *The Garden Party Will Go on or Not?: In Who Persuades Whom?* (2017), Md. Saiful Alam performs a modality analysis of speech acts between Laura, Jose, and Mrs. Sheridan about whether or not to cancel the Sheridan family party due to the death of a neighbour. Alam differentiates between modality of desirability (the ethical appeal of Laura, her wish to delay the party) and modality of validity (the appeal to social norms, obligations and preserving appearances of Mrs. Sheridan and Jose). Alam theorizes that even with the moral urge of Laura, the more socially dominant modalities are marginalized by her arguments, and that institutionalized values (as a subset of cultural capital) still devalue ethical factors in favor of the preservation of classes (Alam, 2017). This paper emphasizes the fact that language is not neutral as it is so much engaged in maintaining the hierarchy of classes- through persuasion speech, social expectation, and the tacit power that determines what is deemed as valid versus desirable.

**2.8. Postcolonial Aspects and Multiracial hybridity**

*The Garden Party* is placed in a postcolonial context by Emmanouil Aretoulakis (2014), who claims that it involves an acknowledgment of the impact of colonial history on what is regarded as good taste, what kind of cultural capital receives

valuation, and how privilege gets dispersed. Aretoulakis suggests that a conflict between colonial and anti-colonial modes is evident in the writing of Mansfield: the Sheridans represent civilized, imported versions of culture, whereas the working-class characters and depictions of death and poverty are the colonial reverse face of social polish. A New Zealand origin of Mansfield and her sensitivity to imperial culture is what renders taste not only local but also related to the transnational colonial relations (Aretoulakis, 2014). This lens is useful in enhancing a Bourdieusian reading in demonstrating that cultural capital does not merely focus on class but rather it is connected with colonial legacies of value and identity.

## **2.9. Laura and her Education, Identity Formation and Privilege**

In her work, *Laura in the Garden Party*, Sebastian Kaya (2011) presents a socio-psychological approach to the argument that the schooling, both formal and informal, that Laura undergoes shapes her as an agent of upper-class privileges that protect her against the full reality of social misery. Kaya argues that the education provided to Laura is a false one, i.e. it does not teach her about death, poverty or social inequality and thus creates a gap between the moral instincts that are inside of Laura and the behavioural expectations of their family and social status (Kaya, 2011). The absence of encounter with the more painful aspects of life is one of the essential processes through which the cultural capital works: it shields certain people against the discomfort, but at the price of moral clarity and authenticity. As presented by Kaya, these omissions create and limit the identity of the character Laura as they make her reflective at one time but, as a result, submissive to the rules of the class.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Overview**

The research methodology used in this study applies qualitative research in exploring the issue of class distinction and cultural capital in *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield. Qualitative methods are especially appropriate in the context of literature inquiry, as they focus on the making of meaning, interpretation, and cultural context of a text in place of numerical quantification. Study takes an interpretive paradigm, according to which the researcher can consider how Mansfield constructs social realities with the help of the narrative technique, symbolism, and discourses. The approach gives emphasis to depth rather than breadth as it seeks to produce fine details regarding the role played by cultural capital in maintaining class hierarchies in the tale.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The research is designed in accordance with the textual analysis approach directed by the thematic and critical discourse analysis. The story is first closely read, followed by identification of textual units like dialogue, text images and narrative viewpoint. These textual fragments are then thematically coded into categories that conform to the Bourdieusian theory which are cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and habitus. Second, this paper uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze the role of language, persuasion, and modality in supporting or undermining class differences in interactions between characters. Lastly, the findings are drawn together to show how the text by Mansfield is both a representation and criticism of the practice of classes. This architecture offers a methodical channel between textual content which is raw and conceptual interpretation.

### **3.3. Data Collection Method**

As the first source of data, *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield (1922) will be used, and secondary one will be scholarly books, journal articles, and critical essays that address both the works of Mansfield and the ideas of Bourdieusian capital. The collection of data is done through purposive sampling of these secondary sources bearing in mind that they need to be relevant to the themes of class, cultural capital, and social distinction. Major excerpts of the story, including the preparations of the party, the contacts between Laura and the workers and her meeting with the Scott family are taken out to be examined in detail. These texts are then contrasted with what has been written in the secondary criticism analysis in order to place the textual interpretation in the greater academic context.

### **3.4. Theoretical Framework**

The theory of practice, specifically his ideas on cultural capital, symbolic capital and habitus by Pierre Bourdieu, serve as the foundations of this study. Cultural capital encompasses knowledge, taste and education as social resources which work as social assets whereas symbolic capital is associated with prestige, honour and recognition which are results of cultural display. Meanwhile, habitus embodies the internalized dispositions which influence perception and behaviour. Using these ideas, the paper explains the way Mansfield dramatizes the division of classes with the help of the aesthetic detail (flowers, hats, parties), the linguistic (persuasion, tones, rhetoric), and the psychological (empathy and alienation of Laura) division. It is the framework that gives the textual evidence the prism through which it is structured and analysed.

### **3.5. Data Analysis Procedure**

The analysis of data follows three phases. First, preliminary coding implies defining and labeling passages that imply contrast of classes, or cultural performance. Second, these codes are thematically grouped into bigger analytical categories, including: aesthetic display as symbolic capital, language and discourse as cultural capital and habitus and limits of empathy. Third, the interpretive synthesis connects such findings with the Bourdieu framework showing how the story of Mansfield describes and criticizes the processes of class reproduction. In the process, the triangulation is established through cross-referencing the

primary text with the critical commentaries in such a way that the interpretations are based on the current scholarship with the also new perspectives.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1. Overview

The analysis of *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield utilises the theoretical model of Pierre Bourdieu on cultural capital, symbolic capital, and habitus to question the manner in which the distinction of classes is manifested in the story. Dwelling on cultural practices, aesthetic symbols, and social relations the discussion will attempt to uncover the unobtrusive processes by which the privilege and hierarchy are normalized in the story. The textual materials are analyzed with the help of close reading, with a special stress on the scenes when material and symbolic practices emphasize the gap between the Sheridan family and the working-class characters.

### 4.2. Party Preparations in Terms of Class

The preparations made before the party of the Sheridans can be seen as one of the most vivid illustrations of the difference in classes. The plot focuses on the lavishness of the environment, and cultural and symbolic capital is presented in the form of aesthetic decisions: They could not have had a more perfect day in a garden-party, had they ordered it. The sky was warm and cloudless, windless. The blue itself, though, had been cloaked in hazy light gold, as is sometimes in the early summer” (Mansfield, 1922). The visual aspect creates the party as a social phenomenon in addition to being an ambiguous representation of privilege and genteel elegance. Bourdieu argues that these exhibitions of taste and beauty serve as markers of culture that helps to differentiate the privileged group of people. The attention to the description of the surrounding, aestheticized, implies that the richness of the Sheridan family allows them to have nature itself converting into a symbol of high social status.

### 4.3. The Aesthetic Taste and the Symbolism of Flowers

The ornate use of flowers is the most explicit use of cultural capital, as they are a status symbol and an indicator of sophistication (Mansfield). The carrying off of the lilies is also described in heavy-handed language: They could not have ordered a better day in the year to go to a garden-party. It was the daisy-petal sky, and the lawn was green and smooth and velvety, and the karaka trees were deep green in the middle of the lilac and pale blue hydrangeas. The garden-party would be absolutely a success” (Mansfield, 1922). Most flowers are not decorative but serve as a kind of symbolic capital associated with prestige and cultural refinement. According to Bourdieusian terms, the opportunity of the Sheridans to invest in such extravagant beauty proves that the aesthetic taste becomes a tool of differentiation, which puts them above the working-class characters, who cannot afford such demonstrations.

### 4.4. Interpersonal and Social Insensitivity

The dialogues between the Sheridans also indicate that they have ceased being connected to the reality of the working classes, and the discussion shows the role of social capital in upholding the boundaries between classes. On receiving news about the death of Mr. Scott, Mrs. Sheridan is dismissive, saying that people like him do not expect us to offer anything like a sacrifice. And it is not too sympathetic to take away the fun of everyone like you are now doing” (Mansfield, 1922). This quote depicts how the family does not or cannot put itself in the position of the poor, but rather focuses on its own enjoyment. This is reflective of Bourdieusian terminology, where habitus is the upper classes with dispositions being modulated by privileges to cause insensitivity towards the other. That tragedy is seen to be useless to their own world is how symbolic and social capital works to maintain hierarchy so as not to allow working-class reality to infiltrate elite spaces.

### 4.5. Laura’s Ambivalence and Class Awareness

Lastly, the ambivalent outlook of Laura Sheridan plays out the paradox between compassion and the limits of the class habitus. When she gets to the Scott home, she thinks: It was her brother Laurie she loved so much—she could feel it. Oh, what will mother say? But you had to cry all the same, and you had to keep crying and you would wonder all the time you were crying how you could get yourself to stop (Mansfield, 1922). The response of Laura displays her actual sympathy as well as restrictions of her social conditioning. Although she has a brief consciousness of inequality, she is still bound to her upbringing that frowns upon real solidarity. The concept of habitus by Bourdieu aids in understanding that empathy does not result in action by Laura: as her dispositions are formed through privilege, it is hard to cross the symbolic lines of class. The story therefore highlights the boundaries of personal empathy in breaking down the established social systems.

### 4.6. Aesthetic Displays Cultural Capital

In *The Garden Party* of Mansfield, cultural capital is expressed in the aesthetic exuberance of the preparations of the Sheridans. This is highlighted in the text by giving a detailed account of the garden: The garden was full of guests. Others were pacing through the rose-bushes; others chatting away in the lawns; the band had been playing all the afternoon, and the odour of the pink canna lilies was in the air, sweet, intoxicating (Mansfield, 1922). The descriptive sensory language is not just ornamental—it signifies how the Sheridan family can make nature a manicured area of sophistication. Bourdieu says that cultural capital is not just represented in education and taste but is also objectified in material objects and cultural goods. In this case, the garden and its tended beauty becomes a show of objectified cultural capital that establishes the position of the Sheridans as elites. Aesthetic sophistication is something that cannot be afforded by the working classes, such as the Scotts, whose real world is

full of work and survival over pleasure and show. In this respect, the fertility of the partying environment plays the role of a coded language of class differentiation, which naturalizes privilege in the form of a cultural performance.

#### **4.7. Symbolic Capitals and Politics of Prestige**

The story is also about symbolic capital which Bourdieu describes as recognition and prestige that cultural and social markers have. Mansfield explains it by the fact that Mrs. Sheridan is excited by the party preparations: "My dear child, it is no use asking me. I am going to leave you children everything this year. Forget I am your mother. Show me like a great visitor" (Mansfield, 1922). It is also indicative of the manner in which symbolic capital works in the family itself, where Mrs. Sheridan is placed as an agent of authority and taste and whose favor lends credence of legitimacy to the event. The fact that she insists that the party is a matter of pride shows that the gathering is not just a form of entertainment but status show. In this case, symbolic capital is associated with the image of the family; the success in the event is the transfer of social prestige, which strengthens their high status in society. The Scotts, on the contrary, whose lives are marred by death and poverty, cannot afford to have similar symbolic resources to boost their social status. Mansfield thus plays out the perpetuation of inequality due to symbolic capital which gives credibility to privilege and leaves the plight of the poor off the agenda.

#### **4.8. Reproduction of Class Norms and Habitus**

The idea of habitus, or internal dispositions, which are imposed by the social position, is best perceived through the inability of the Sheridan family to fully understand the working-class experience. Mansfield seizes this when Jose, sister to Laura, insists on continuing the party anyway even with the news of the death of Mr. Scott: "You will not resuscitate some drunken workman by sentimentality," said Jose coldly. "Nobody expects us to. You need not be so lavish" (Mansfield, 1922). This claim summarises the logic of upper-class habitus: an attitude which naturalises the emotional indifference towards the suffering of the working classes. The fact that Jose considers the empathy of Laura to be extravagant shows how deep-seated dispositions do not allow the upper classes to see the humanity of the poor. Habitus to Bourdieu is not deliberately adopted, but rather transmitted and strengthened in the process of socialization, which guarantees continuation of class structures across generations. The story by Mansfield reveals the way such attitudes work not as one person being cruel but as the social conditioning of people to perceive the world in a particular manner, thus continuing to perpetuate inequality in the name of being rational and orderly.

#### **4.9. In the hat of Laura, the intersection of Cultural and Symbolic Capital is present**

Maybe the most notable representation of the interaction between cultural and symbolic capital within the narrative concerns a new hat of Laura. The story responds to its transformative quality: She felt that she was another person. It seemed as though it had somehow become important (Mansfield, 1922). The hat is not just a garment, it is a symbol of status, and it has some symbolic meaning, which raises the ego of Laura. The hat, in Bourdieusian terms, is a form of objectified cultural capital, or an object of style and elegance, as well as symbolic capital, bringing about social status and power. The fact that it is there when Laura visits the Scotts house highlights that privilege continuously invades poverty. Although Laura is facing death and the vulnerability of life, the hat keeps on reminding her of the symbolic boundaries that still exist between her and the working classes. Mansfield exploits this object to condemn the unity of cultural and symbolic forms of capital to reinforce the structures of class as a subtle critique of the failure of personal empathy to overcome any structural boundary.

#### **4.10. The first Sympathy of Laura and the Test of Habitus**

When Laura learns of the death of Mr. Scott, her initial thought is to cancel the garden party, and this indicates that Laura is sensitive to social affliction. And Mansfield takes note of her outcry: "'Mother, a man was murdered,' she stammered. Not in the garden? Said her mother. 'No, no! Oh, Laura!' Her mother swatted at her in an almost desultory way. 'But listen, mother,' said Laura. She had told the horror of it, choking half out of breath. Naturally we could not possibly have a garden-party when a man was dead at the front gate'" (Mansfield, 1922). This scene indicates the understanding of Laura that the celebration of the culture cannot go hand in hand with the tragedy and the intuitive understanding of the inequality is shown in terms of classes. But the hasty disregard of her mother reveals the deep-rooted habitus of the elite, in which tragedy amongst the poor is perceived to have no relation with the discursive patterns of elite life. According to Bourdieu, Laura temporarily opposes the dispositions that have been instilled in her but she does not have the cultural and symbolic resources to successfully oppose them. The struggle brings out structural power of habitus in recreating privilege as evidenced by even empathy being neutralized when it endangers to upset the status quo.

#### **4.11. The Hat as a Mark on Extrinsic Class difference**

The protest that comes to Laura is immediately shattered by her mother as she distracts Laura with the gift of a hat. Mansfield narrates: "'Darling!' Mrs. Sheridan arose, and walked over to her, with the hat. Laura could not prevent her before she had popped it on. Oh my child, said her mother, and took Laura by the shoulder. 'My child!' Laura was looking in the mirror. 'Is it not darling?' she said. And the hat was as becoming as ever. Such picture had she never appeared. Mother, it is so costly.' 'But it suits the garden-party.' The hat as a sign of aesthetic good taste is an instrument of cultural capital, representing taste and style, as well as symbolic capital, which provides status and power to Laura. This diversion succeeds: When Laura is fascinated with the beauty and power of the hat, this ethical dilemma is pushed into the background. This is the way cultural symbols that have become internalized or habitual can overcome critical consciousness. The Bourdieusian theory can assist us in realizing that Laura has been conditioned to react to such signs of distinction in such a way that empathy yields to the enactment of a



class identity. The episode therefore theatricalizes the process of reproduction of privilege which takes place not just by being pressurized by the outside world but also by the alluring attraction of the symbols of culture.

#### **4.12. Experience of Death and the Limitations of Empathy**

The denouement in the moral struggle of Laura is when she visits the house of the Scotts and sees the body of the dead man. Mansfield puts this in such a graphic form: There was a young man fast asleep—sleeping so well, so deep, that he was far, far away between them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. He was wonderful, beautiful. As they laughed and as the band played, this miracle had arrived in the lane. Happy... happy... Everything is all right, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content.” (Mansfield, 1922). The emotional reaction of Laura to the appearance of death breaks the social boundaries and gives us a unique moment of existential awareness which eliminates the difference between classes. But the aestheticization of death, which establishes it as something peaceful and beautiful, the very fact of it, however, shows the residue of her privileged viewpoint. Laura sees death as something abstract and romantic as opposed to dealing with the cruel truths of poverty. Bourdieu concept of habitus describes why empathy of Laura is realistic but is bound in the interpretive structure of her own class and she can not build a radical identification with working-class world.

#### **4.13. Failure to translate Awareness to Action**

Although she is now more conscious, the reaction of Laura is only personal feeling as opposed to collective or practical action. When she walks out of the house of the Scotts, she turns to her brother and admits: "Isn't, isn't, isn't—isn't life, she stuttered, -but what life was she attempting to define? She had no idea. She couldn't explain. All she could do was, stand there and stammer: 'Isn't it, darling? The failure of Laura to express her ideas indicates the lack of effectiveness of the cultural and symbolic resources she uses to address the issue of social inequality. To Bourdieu, habitus not only facilitates perception, but it also limits it; Laura is raised in an elite environment and she can experience the feelings of disquiet, but she has no means to convert feelings of empathy into critique or action. The partial words she utters indicate that we cannot appreciate inequality without having a structural knowledge. By so doing Mansfield dramatizes the constraints of personal compassion under the larger framework of social reproduction, showing how even the insights of intense emotional understanding can not shake hierarchies.

#### **4.14. Discussion of the Study**

The results of this paper prove that the *The Garden Party* by Mansfield can be discussed in terms of Bourdieu who argues that cultural capital and habitus can be the mechanisms of social reproduction. The flowery celebration of the party by the Sheridan family, the elaborate preparation of the party, and the focus on fashion reflects the use of cultural symbols to demonstrate culture refinement and achieve the symbolic capital. These rituals are not just aesthetic, but are more social; they strengthen the differences between classes, based on some daily rituals that are natural and undisputed. As the analysis indicated, the momentary opposition that Laura had developed to this system, the fact that she felt uncomfortable when the Scotts were celebrating, was rapidly nullified by the objects of culture like the hat which represented both beauty and power. This implies that even in a time when there is critical awareness, these are mostly conditioned by the same mechanisms of cultural capital that perpetuates inequality. The story by Mansfield is, therefore, corroborative of Bourdieu that privilege is perpetuated since it is not just a materialistic wealth but also a part of apparently harmless acts of taste and enjoyment.

The other notable discovery is that Mansfield introduces empathy as frail and inadequate in the breakdown of established hierarchies of classes. The death of Mr. Scott shows Laura a great deal about the fragility of human beings but the response is aesthetic and unintelligible. This is in line with the idea of Bourdieu on the concept of habitus, which points out that dispositions are ingrained to such a level that they limit how individuals perceive and act in the world. The fact that Laura sympathizes fails to lead to action since her cultural upbringing has not equipped her with tools of confronting structural inequalities; though, it only shifts the extent of her perception to abstract thinking as opposed to social criticism. This key conflict between human feeling and social organization is thus exemplified by Mansfield: the element of empathy disfigures the symbolic order but the power of habitus makes sure that the boundaries of classes are not broken. The discussion points out that literature via its symbolic economy may expose the invisible yet strong mechanisms through which a privilege is reproduced and inequality perpetuated.

### **5. Conclusion**

This paper developed to examine Katherine Mansfield in the short story *The Garden Party* using the theoretical lenses of Pierre Bourdieu: cultural capital, symbolic capital, and habitus in order to gain an insight into how the text embodies and criticizes the issue of the class distinction. The discussion has shown that class division is not only coded by Mansfield in terms of economic inequality but also in terms of cultural practices, aesthetics and interaction patterns. The garden party hosted by the Sheridan family with its highly functionalized beauty, excessive use of flowers, and focus on material sophistication is an excellent example of how cultural capital works as a social status symbol. The act itself is a show of symbolic capital in which prestige and recognition is upheld by taste and aesthetic show. These results support the claim that Bourdieu puts forward by arguing that the perpetuation of privilege is instigated by the daily practice of enacting it in a natural and unthinking manner; furthermore, it is highly structured by social inequality.

The paper also showed that the concept of habitus offers a critical perspective of the shortcomings of Laura in empathy. The temporary realization of inequality that Laura exhibited due to the death of Mr. Scott is an example of how she fights against the internalized dispositions of her class. But such generosity is soon overtaken by cultural items like the hat, which is symbolic of sophistication and the

power of position, back into the symbolic order of privilege. She is not even subjected to her most sublime recognition, when she realises the beauty of death, but again, it is aestheticised, showing that her habitus prevents her in grappling directly with social inequality. The point of the story by Mansfield is thus the dramatization of the inadequacy of empathy as a tool, though a powerful one, without the cultural and symbolic means of turning the awareness into action. Using the Bourdieuan approach, this paper has demonstrated that the Garden Party is not a mere account of social sensitivity, but also a criticism of the institutional constraints of compassion.

Combined, the results indicate that the short story by Mansfield is an effective examination of how privilege can work in both symbolic and cultural spheres. The text has a far deeper reverberation than its modernist context, providing a reflection of how inequality persists in contemporary societies whereby the segregation of classes is still being reproduced via culture, education and the social practices. This paper proves that it is worth using sociological theory to interpret literature and fill in the gap between sociological studies of culture and literary analysis. By so doing, it serves not just Mansfield scholarship, but the discipline of class studies more generally, demonstrating that literature can be a critical location through which the finer mechanics of maintaining social hierarchies may be studied. Finally, the story by Mansfield uncovers the tension between empathy of humans and structural reality of social reproduction, which is not less topical now than it was in the early twenties of the last century.

### 5.1. Suggestions

Future studies can continue this discussion by investigating the nature in which other works by Mansfield interact with the notions of class, gender and cultural practices as this will provide a more comprehensive picture of her contribution to a modernist critique of inequality. Other modernist authors, whose cultural and symbolic capital functions may be examined through the Bourdieu ideas, could also be the focus of the comparative studies. Also, interdisciplinary methods that combine the literary analysis with modern sociological research of mobility between classes may further inform the knowledge of how cultural capital remains a source of inequality. Following these guidelines, researchers will be able to continue the current research and develop it further to shed light on the intricate interrelations between literature, culture, and social power.

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