

【原著】

A Study of Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden-Party"

Hironobu Konishi

キャサリン・マンスフィールドの「園遊会」に関する一考察

小 西 弘 信

I

Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923) wrote her short story "The Garden-Party" in 1921.¹ The story was one of her best works, among her so-called the New Zealand stories. It was published in 1922, one year before she died, and is her best-known and best-loved story. Ian A. Gordon says "The Garden-Party" evoked a chorus of praise on both sides of the Atlantic."² Moreover, by the end of 1923, the short story "had been reprinted once in England and seven times in America."³ She never wrote a full-length novel. She took her cue from such innovators as Anton Chekhov, and made the short story form her own. Walter Allen says she was one of "the best English short-story writers of the twenties and thirties."⁴ She usually gives a severe criticism to her own works. However, she seemed to be satisfied with the completion of "The Garden-Party," saying, in her *Journal* (October 14, 1921), "This is a moderately successful story, and that's all."⁵ And she wrote in her *Journal* (October 16, 1921) as follows:

Another radiant day. J. is typing my last story, *The Garden Party*, which I finished on my birthday. It took me nearly a month to 'recover' from *At the Bay*. I made at least three false starts. But I could not get away from the sound of the sea, and Beryl fanning her hair at the window. These things would not *die down*. But now I am not at all sure about that story. It seems to me it's a little 'wispy'—not what it might have been. The *G.P.* is better. But that is not *good enough*, either....⁶

In her *Journal* above, she confesses having confronted a creative dilemma by comparing her works: "The Garden-Party" and "At the Bay." Moreover, she wrote her regret of her indolent writing and encourage herself in her *Journal* (November 13, 1921):

It is time I started a new journal. Come, my unseen, my unknown, let us talk together. Yes, for the last two weeks I have written scarcely anything. I have been idle; I have *failed*.... Wasting time. The old cry—the first and last cry—Why do ye tarry? Ah, why indeed? My deepest desire is to be a writer, to have 'a body of work' done.⁷

D. M. Davin points out “through Katherine Mansfield’s diaries, note-books, and letters one theme is consistent: the necessity to write better.”⁸ She is a diligent and sincere writer, rather than a genius.

Mansfield’s works are produced by making her memory and imagination fuse perfectly. Her stories are for the most part domestic, her range seldom reaches beyond the familiar, beyond the walls, the garden, the street. Her concern is with the experiences that overtake everyone, not with what is externally rare or strange. She responded deeply to many trifles of everyday life, and could discern in a trivial event or an insignificant person some moving revelation of motive or destiny. W. E. William says “Her emotional antennae, so to speak, were uncommonly sensitive and alert.”⁹ Those traits of hers show her talent.

The most unquiet of us have been children and are still in some sense simple, and for most the family has at one time been our entire world. Davin mentions as follows:

Katherine Mansfield’s imagination stretches back into time, re-creates the figures that the past contained, breathes life into them, and the life passes through into us who read. The artist’s circle is complete. Artist, creation, and reader are fused in temporary eternity.¹⁰

The aim of this thesis is to study why Mansfield writes “The Garden-Party” late in her life by pursuing Laura Sheridan’s growing in the story and the writer’s experience in her life.

II

According to Kate Fullbrook, Mansfield is “one of the prose writers who, along with Henry James, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, is most responsible for calling the twentieth-century reader into being.”¹¹ She is called one of the “modernists,” and wrote “modernist fiction.” Her style of writing a story is different from her preceding writers’, and she was something of an impressive “modernist” writer for her times.¹²

David Lodge says about the term “modernist fiction”: “Modernist fiction, then, is experimental or innovatory in form, displaying marked deviations from preexisting modes of discourse, literary and non-literary.”¹³ Concerning the “experimental or innovatory” form of modernist fiction, he adds “A modernist novel has no real ‘beginning’, since it plunges us into a flowing stream of experience with which we gradually familiarize ourselves by a process of inference and association; and its ending is usually ‘open’ or ambiguous, leaving the reader in doubt as to the final destiny of the characters.”¹⁴

Mansfield’s short stories have the same characteristics as Lodge mentions. “The Garden-Party” is not exceptional, and begins with this passage as follows:

And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seeded to shine. (237)¹⁵

A Study of Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden-Party"

Thus, the story is told over the course of a few hours with no set beginning or traditional character introductions. Instead Mansfield begins her story in the middle, allowing the character's histories to unfold as the story progresses.

Next, the story ends as follows:

Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. "Don't cry," he said in his warm, loving voice. "Was it awful?"

"No," sobbed Laura. "It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie—" She stopped, she looked at her brother. "Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life—" But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

"*Isn't* it, darling?" said Laurie. (251)

Thus, the ending is ambiguous, and the reader leaves the story without feeling finished. Noted for her ambiguous endings, Mansfield intentionally ends the story with a dissatisfying conclusion to allow room for the reader's interpretation of events to come. The reader's first reading can possibly make him or her perplexed and at a loss. Those techniques are experimental and peculiar to modernist fictions.

This is another experimental form of modernist fiction: internal monologue. Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr say "The 'Garden-Party' is told as a single character's story in a straightforwardly sequential narrative."¹⁶ Mansfield experiments with the use of third person narration from Laura's point of view, allowing the reader simultaneous insight into the protagonist's thoughts while observing her actions. Noted for her frequent use of internal monologue, a literary device that expresses the thoughts of a character, Mansfield allows for an in-depth observation of Laura's perspective as her story unfolds. In the first scene of "The Garden-Party" Mrs. Sheridan tells her daughter Laura to supervise the workmen preparing for the garden party, and she meets and speaks to them. The following is their first encounter as follows:

"Good morning," she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, "Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?"

"That's right, miss," said the tallest of the men, a lanky, freckled fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag, knocked back his straw hat and smiled down at her. "That's about it."

His smile was so easy, so friendly, that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! And now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. "Cheer up, we won't bite," their smile seemed to say. How very nice workmen were! And what a beautiful morning! She mustn't mention the morning; she must be business-like. The marquee. (238)

Laura's internal monologue beginning with "His smile was so easy..." is found in the third paragraph above. The reader can go into her thought naturally in the narrative. Those literary devices in "The Garden-Party" are Mansfield's revolutionary experiments, which impress the reader.

III

“The Garden-Party” depicts the day when the bourgeois Sheridan family hold the party.¹⁷ In spite of its title, only a little space is given to the party scene, and the story is concerned mainly with the scene of their preparation of the party and with the heroine’s [Laura’s] visit to the dead man’s family after the party.

“The Garden-Party” is not divided into scenes and Laura is “the consciousness through which everything is observed throughout the day’s events.”¹⁸ The story focuses on the thoughts and feelings of Laura and the way that the reader sees her growth during the action of the plot. Mansfield characterizes the heroine as an endearingly naïve young lady who is pampered and petted at home. She is accustomed to the privileges and comforts associated with the upper middle class and yet she is eager to prove how pragmatic she can be. With the story’s progress, the reader finds Laura is awakened into an adult with common sense.

At the first scene, Laura is sent to negotiate with the workmen over the placing of the marquee. She behaves like a little girl with them.

Laura wished now that she was not holding that piece of bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn’t possibly throw it away. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them.

“Good morning,” she said, copying her mother’s voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, “Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?” (238)

At several scenes of the story, she is shown to find problematic the class consciousness of her family and her own understanding of social class. When she sees the lower-class workmen working at her family’s garden, she likes the vulgar way of their calling each other “matey” meaning *companion*. She refuses to recognize social distinctions between her and them saying to herself as follows:

It’s all the fault, she decided, as the tall fellow drew something on the back of an envelope, something that was to be looped up or left to hang, of these absurd class distinctions. (239)

Her refusal is the most clearly seen when Laura finds out about the death of the carter Mr. Scott, and she is horrified and wants to call off the party: “Jose!” she said, horrified, “however are we going to stop everything?” Jose, however, told her amazingly: “Stop the garden-party? My dear Laura, don’t be so absurd” (244). She rejects her with a strong sense of moral righteousness in her social status.

As the story progresses, Mansfield skillfully reveals how the girl’s feelings shake between tremendous sympathy and empathy for Mr. Scott and his family and her class consciousness and vanity. When Laura goes to her mother to try and persuade her to cancel the party, her mother distracts her successfully with the new hat. Handed it to her, Laura can’t look at herself and turns aside at first. However, she happens to look at herself in the mirror. After that, magically, she

wants the opportunity to wear it and does not mention cancelling the party again:

There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan... (246–47)

Here the reader finds how the promise of wearing the hat and showing it off at the party dispels Laura's feelings of horror at the death of Mr. Scott. For her, wearing the new hat and looking good becomes more important than her feelings of sympathy. The hat works as upper-class status symbol to overcome Laura's innate sympathy. She accompanies her mother to welcome the guests to the party.

And Laura, glowing, answered softly, "Have you had tea? Won't you have an ice? The passion-fruit ices really are rather special." She ran to her father and begged him: "Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink?" (247)

After the party, the reader sees that she has tried to reach out to the family, taking a basket of leftovers, and unexpectedly she is invited to the house. Her gazing at the corpse of the dead man there leads her to the realization that he is something with heavenly beauty.

There lay a young man, fast asleep—sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy...happy... All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content. (251)

Laura has returned from the Scotts a different person. She touches something sacred, and possibly realizes death is one of the common things among human beings. All people will eventually die no matter their circumstances. Death takes them away from social classes. Laura develops into something matured spiritually. Moreover, she possibly realizes that life is full of love, suffering and mystery. Donald S. Taylor and Daniel A. Weiss say "Laura stands now on the threshold of the real world, sinister at first, but now transmuted into beauty by the dream of death."¹⁹ Rhoda B. Nathan mentions as follows:

Laura has been initiated into the mystery of life through exposure to death.... She has

experienced an epiphany and has begun to understand the complex life outside her high prospective gates.²⁰

At the end of the story, Laurie, her brother, is questioned about what life is by her. Through his response, she feels a precise affinity with him.

... "It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie—" She stopped, she looked at her brother. "Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life—" But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

"*Isn't* it, darling?" said Laurie. (251)

She is philosophical enough to accept herself, and she says to herself "No matter." Thus, she has become mentally matured.

IV

Laura is the heroine and narrator of "The Garden-Party." Before the start of the party, Laura is dispatched to the workmen and feels a warmth for them with the marquee in an unconsciously patronizing manner which is only a small shift away from her mother's aloofness. She does not have her mother's and her sister's imperiousness or arrogance, but she finds problematic the class consciousness of her family and her own understanding of social class. After the party, she goes to view Mr. Scott's corpse. Dazed by its stillness she is forced to apologize to it for her hat, which is a symbol of her class. Thus, through the young lady's experience in her one day life, the reader sees her spiritual growth, becoming an adult, in the story.

What is the reason of Mansfield's producing "The Garden-Party"? It can be traced to her history. The reader should keep in mind these three experiences in her life: her life in New Zealand, her illness and her brother's death. Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr note about Mansfield's last years:

During the two relatively settled phases of these last years, in the Swiss Alps and for a month or two in Paris, there was the isolation and the occasion necessary for her best writing. She was terrified of death, and terrified that it would catch her before she had set down what she felt was still in her. Mostly her mind was on the New Zealand of her youth, and the urge to create her vision of it as a memorial to her dead brother never quite left her.²¹

New Zealand is Mansfield's native country where she was brought up with her brother and sisters. She had a good chat with him about their memory of New Zealand just before his death. Actually she hated the closed-off complacency of bourgeois suburban New Zealand until Leslie's death when, quite suddenly, her hatred turned to love. She, in her *Journal* (January 22nd, 1916), writes her desire to produce some works based on her memory of New Zealand as follows:

Now—now I want to write recollections of my own country. Yes, I want to write about my own country till I simply exhaust my store. Not only because it is 'a sacred debt' that I pay to my

country because my brother and I were born there, but also because in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. I am never far away from them. I long to renew them in writing.²²

Mansfield, at 14, experienced studying and staying with schoolmates of other classes in New Zealand. "The Doll's House" (1922) is based on an experience she had between 1893 and 1898 when she and her sisters and her brother were pupils at the Karori State School, Wellington.²³ In the story, the reader is told what her parents thought of the school as follows:

For the fact was, the school the Burnell children went to was not at all the kind of place their parents would have chosen if there had been any choice. But there was none. It was the only school for miles. And the consequence was all the children of the neighbourhood, the Judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the storekeeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together. Not to speak of there being an equal number of rude, rough little boys as well. But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys. Many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them. They walked past the Kelveys with their heads in the air, and as they set the fashion in all matters of behaviour, the Kelveys were shunned by everybody. Even the teacher had a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children when Lil Kelvey came up to her desk with a bunch of dreadfully common-looking flowers. (339)

Thus, children from upper-class and lower-class mixed together. Mansfield possibly may have felt bad every time she saw not a few "social distinctions" there. This experience of hers possibly may have made her believe all human beings are essentially equal and inspired her to produce Laura's objection to social distinctions in the story.

In New Zealand, she experienced visiting the country's natives, the Maori. She set out on a camping trip in a bush country in the New Zealand's North Island and recorded her daily life there. She felt good to see them. She gave a lively description of a Maori girl:

She is very young. She sits silent, utterly motionless, her head thrown back. All the lines of her face are passionate, violent, crudely savage, but in her lifted eyes slumbers a tragic illimitable Peace. The sky changes, softens, the lake is all grey mist, the land in heavy shadow, silence broods among the trees. The girl does not move. But very faint & sweet and beautiful, a star wakes in the sky. She is the very incarnation of evening, and lo—the first star shines in her eyes.²⁴

In the above, Mansfield uses the epithet "crudely savage" to regard the girl as if she were sacred and majestic. The word "savage" is common with the concept of "noble savage" which was popular in Romanticism between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The idealized concept of uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization. This experience may have made the writer have a warmth for lower-class people. She is supposed to think people are not to be judged in any way.

Leslie's death changes her ideas about life and death. Moreover, her brother's existence in her mind was very essential to her motivation to produce her works after his death. Willa Cather mentions the change in Mansfield's feelings and thoughts in her writing as follows:

He came over in 1915 to serve as an officer. He was younger than she, and she had not seen him for six years. After a short visit with her in London he went to the front, and a few weeks later was killed in action. But he had brought to his sister the New Zealand of their childhood, and out of those memories her best stories were to grow. For the remaining seven years of her life (she died under thirty-five) her brother seems to have been almost constantly in her mind. A great change comes over her feelings about art; what it is, and why it is. When she prays to become "humble," it is probably the slightly showy quality in the early stories that she begs to be delivered from—and forgiven for.²⁵

She changes her attitude toward producing her works. Leslie's death was very concrete for her, which sometimes terrified her. The reader finds that she sincerely thought of life and death through her letter to William Gerhardt on March 13th, 1922 as follows:

And yes, that is what I tried to convey in *The Garden Party*. The diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything, Death included. That is bewildering for a person of Laura's age. She feels things ought to happen differently. First one and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it. Laura says, "But all these things must not happen at once." And Life answers, "Why not? How are they divided from each other?" And they *do* all happen, it is inevitable. And it seems to me there is beauty in that inevitably.²⁶

Thus, life and death "do all happen," which is inevitable. Mansfield had feared the threat of death because she had been ill since 1911 when she suffered from tuberculosis. She must have thought of life and death almost every day. Her illness and her beloved brother's death enabled her to think that the more conscious one is of his or her death, the more conscious he or she is of life, and that her living is her writing.²⁷ However, life and death is bewildering for a person of Laura's age. This matter is seen in the conversation between Laura and Laurie at the end of the story.

"Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life—" But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

"*Isn't* it, darling?" said Laurie. (251)

Mansfield is one of the modernist fiction writers, so she incorporates experimental items into her works. One of them is such ambiguous endings as above. Mansfield intentionally ends "The Garden-Party" with a dissatisfying conclusion. Susan Shepherd says as follows:

Another important feature of this story is in its inconclusiveness and the way in which Mansfield uses open-ended statements which allow the reader to contemplate the true meaning of life. She was original in that her stories always left much to the reader's

imagination.²⁸

Thus, Mansfield explored for her own writing techniques to make her works unique and impressive. The writing technique of her short stories shows an alternation of the past, present and future with the scenes juxtaposed to heighten the emotional impact of the story. She rejects "the traditional chronological sequencing of narration in favor of a subtle deviation in tense."²⁹

V

Mansfield was a modernist who struggled to find a means of literary expression as an artist in an age which called for a different type of prose. From her early days she chose the short story as her medium for artistic expression.

"The Garden-Party" is one of her masterpieces. The short story is not what the title suggests, rather it concerns the preparation for a party and the news of the carter's death. The reader can find the story depicts the theme of life and death through Laura's awareness of social reality and class consciousness in her personal life. Laura is endearingly naïve by nature and is growing even in the end of the story. Every event she encounters is beyond her control and is stimulatingly influential to her. Originally, she tends to favor the simpler pleasures of life unlike her mother who is noted for her extravagances. She is the most sympathetic character in the story, and is more sympathetic to the plight of the lower class. She is asked to attend the party at her mother's house as well as respect the carter's death at his house. She grows to accept her life with its human innate beauty—sympathy as well as acquired ugliness—class consciousness, toward the end of the story.

Mansfield's memory of the chat between her and her late brother had roused her to produce the New Zealand stories since his death. Writing those stories, she may have been remembering her childhood with him in New Zealand, when she was better mentally and physically and had a great time in her wealthy family.

Why did Mansfield write "The Garden-Party" as one of her New Zealand stories? The story is filled with beauty and hope for life, which lightens her then physically and mentally miserable condition. Possibly she, predicting her death, may have written it nostalgically, and remembered several scenes in her childhood so as to relax herself spiritually. Possibly Laura is Mansfield herself. The heroine accepts life including death, which illustrates Mansfield's positive accept of her life including death.

Notes

- 1 Antony Alpers notes, in *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), p. 334: "Mansfield spent the months of 1921 with Murry in Switzerland as 'the summit of her creative life,' and that she wrote some of her greatest stories there, including 'At the Bay,' 'The Garden-Party' and 'The Doll's House.'"
- 2 Ian A. Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield* (London: Longmans, 1954), p. 15.
- 3 Gordon, p. 15.
- 4 Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream: A Critical Survey of British and American Fiction from the 1920s to*

- the Present Day* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), p. 244.
- 5 Katherine Mansfield, *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 266.
 - 6 Mansfield, *Journal*, p. 267.
 - 7 Mansfield, *Journal*, p. 270.
 - 8 D. M. Davin, Introduction, *Katherine Mansfield, Selected Stories*, by Katherine Mansfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. xv.
 - 9 W. E. Williams, Introduction, *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, by Katherine Mansfield (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1922), pp. 7-8.
 - 10 Davin, p. xvii.
 - 11 Kate Fullbrook, Introduction, *Katherine Mansfield* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986), p. 1.
 - 12 Sydney Janet Kaplan notes, in *Circulating Genius: John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield and D. H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 7: "By now, most critics take for granted that women writers contributed significantly to the development of modernism and that the dynamics of gender were central to both its aesthetics and its ideology."
 - 13 David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 45.
 - 14 Lodge, pp. 45-46.
 - 15 Mansfield, *Katherine Mansfield, Selected Stories*, ed. by D. M. Davin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). All page references are from this edition and are given in parentheses in the main text.
 - 16 Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr, *Katherine Mansfield* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), p. 115.
 - 17 Merry William notes, in *Six Women Novelists* (Houndmills: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1987), p. 74: "There had been a real garden party, when Katherine was a girl in Wellington with poor living uncomfortably close to her parents' house."
 - 18 Hanson and Gurr, p. 115.
 - 19 Donald S. Taylor and Daniel A. Weiss, "Crashing the Garden Party," *MFS*, vol. 4 (Winter 1958-59), p. 362.
 - 20 Rhoda B. Nathan, *Katherine Mansfield* (New York: A Frederick Ungar Book, 1988), pp. 45-46.
 - 21 Hanson and Gurr, p. 95.
 - 22 Mansfield, *Journal*, pp. 93-94.
 - 23 F. M. Mxkay, "'The Doll's House' by Katherine Mansfield," *The English Teachers' Magazine*, vol. 28. No. 4 (Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing Company, 1979), p. 46.
 - 24 Mansfield, *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, vol. 1, ed. by Margaret Scott, (Canterbury: Lincoln University Press, 1977), pp. 148-49.
 - 25 Willa Cather, "Katherine Mansfield," *Not Under Forty* (New York: Knopf, 1936), p. 143.
 - 26 J. Middleton Murry, ed. *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, vol. II. (London: Constable, 1928), p. 196.
 - 27 Tamai Mieko, *Mansfield no Bungaku*, [*Katherine Mansfield's Literature*] (Tokyo: New Currents International Co. Ltd., 1988), p. 118.
 - 28 Susan Shepherd, "Katherine Mansfield's Contribution to the Development of the Short Story," *Bulletin of Shikoku University*, Ser. A-No. 5 (Tokushima: Shikoku University, 1996), pp. 98-99.
 - 29 Shepherd, p. 99.

—平成30年 8月16日 受理—