

# The garden party essay

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Since finishing this slim volume of a collection of Katherine Mansfield's stories I finally understand why she is frequently called the master of short stories. Despite the slightness of the book, and that most stories are no longer than five pages, this collection packs a punch. Beginning with the longer two stories, 'At the Bay' and the titular 'The Garden Party' sets the tone for this collection. Mansfield deals with a wide variety of themes that ranges from family relationships, life and death, love and the coming of age through quiet musings and monologues.

Underlying themes for this selection of stories are social and class issues. Mansfield selects characters who are outsiders to explore social predicaments. There is the strained young father ('At the Bay') and a young girl's dilemma of continuing a garden party after a poor man is run over down the street ('The Garden Party'). There are the elderly spinster daughters who are finally attempting to make their own way in the world after their domineering father dies ('The Daughters of the Late Colonel') and a young man hoping to propose to a girl in a class above his ('Mr and Mrs Dove'). Then there is the heart wrenching monologue of a maid's hard life ('Life of Ma Parker'), a young wife's obsession in becoming part of the new bourgeois class ('Marriage a la Mode') and an elderly patriarch who is being emotionally shunned by his family after providing them with wealth ('An Ideal Family').

Each story is so vividly drawn and it is amazing that Mansfield manages to deftly create each character in such a small amount of space. Each story explores the way of life mainly set in one moment of a character's day. This volume is a wonderful introduction to Mansfield's work and something you

can pick up and put down again easily. Perfect for musing on your thoughts after each story.