

Katherine mansfield's
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part..."



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Katherine Mansfield's "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding" and "The Garden Party" Essay Sample

In Katherine Mansfield's "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding" and "The Garden Party", two female characters in similar positions- the position of mother and wife- are described. Despite their shared role, the two women - Frau Brechenmacher and Mrs Sheridan- are two very different individuals and their characteristics are understood through Mansfield's careful depiction of their actions and dialogues

In the short story "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding", the Frau is a woman worn down by domestic work. Her daily life consists of taking care of her five babies, and attending to her dominant husband. Throughout the story Frau Brechenmacher is constantly servicing her husband. Before the wedding, she polished and ironed his outfit, and prepared water and towel for him to wash his face with as soon as he return home. After the Herr has dressed, the Frau groomed him, 'straining at the waist buckle and giving him a little pull here, a little tug there.' She also rushed to put her children to bed and dress herself. Frau Brechenmacher is suppressed by the needs of her husband and family. She dresses in the dark because her husband 'needs the light.' 'She had not been out of the house weeks past' being so busy with caring for the family.

The busy works of the day 'flurried her that she felt muddled and stupid' the writer describes the stress effect of the lack of power the Frau suffers from. After the wedding , she returns home from a tiring day only to again service her husband, 'prepar[ing] a little supper of meat and bread for her man' and

' taking up the discarded boots' which the Herr had ' flung[ed]...into a corner', ' placing them on the over to dry.' Lastly, before she sleeps, she checked her babies and ' stripped the mattress off the baby's bed to see if he was still dry.' Clearly, Frau Brechenmacher's life is consumed by caring for her family and she is exhausted by it, her hands ' roughened'. However, she does not rebel against the hold of domestic work on her. When the Herr returns home and rudely complained impatiently, the Frau accepts it and calmly continued to service him, "' they are all ready for you on the table, and some warm water in the tin basin..."' This dialogue reflects the Frau's submissiveness.

Mansfield also features Frau Brechenmacher as a woman that is self-conscious and lacking confidence and power. As she enters the wedding, the Frau ' straightened her brooch and folded her hands, assuming the air of dignity becoming to the wife of a postman and the mother of five children.' She is mindful of other's perception of her. The Frau did not dance but watched while ' her roughened hands clasped and unclasped themselves in the folds of her skirt. While the music went on she was afraid to look anybody in the face, and she smiled with a little tremor round the mouth.' The Frau, trapped inside her home by domestic work, is afraid in the outside world and in the face of the society. She has no support -her husband abandons her to join the men for drinking, and the other women are uncaring. When Frau Brechenmacher's skirt is undone, Frau Rupp unsympathetically laughs at the mistake as she told the distressed lady. "' But how frightful!" said Frau Brechenmacher, collapsing into her chair and

biting her lip." "The Frau is powerless and felt that everyone in the room was 'all laughing at her because they were so much stronger than she was.'

In "The Garden Party", a completely different character is established by Mansfield. Mrs Sheridan is also a housewife; however she is not burdened by domestic life. Contrast to Frau Brechenmacher, Mrs Sheridan is haughty, in power, and at ease. Although her children have all grown up, she is still very much in control over them and has significant power over the household. Preparing for the party, she was consulted about where the marquee should be put, and when Laura mistakes the florist she was called to settle things. Mrs Sheridan also has the power over decisions. Although the party is supposed to be entirely organised by the kids, she still ordered 'pots of pink lilies' without the knowledge of the children. When they arrived she calmly said "it's quite right...I ordered them." Nobody objects and the readers are given the impression that things in the household go according to her wishes.

This is again reflected when Laura expressed her desire to cancel the party as respect to a lower class "neighbour's" death, but was rejected by Mrs Sheridan. Despite Laura's persistence, Mrs Sheridan would not cancel the party and did not accept Laura's pleas or persuasions. As a result the party went on. Mrs Sheridan's status of power can be observed in her haughty, patronising tones that she speaks in: "'My dear child, the hat is yours...'", "'My dear child, it's no use asking me...treat me as an honoured guest...'", "'My darling child...don't do that.'" She gives command over the household when Mr Sheridan is not present and is able to give orders: "'Laura come with me...Meg go upstairs this minute...Jose, run and finish dressing.'"

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Mrs Sheridan is also portrayed as a snobbish woman with no concern for the lower class, including their neighbours. Laura described her mother's voice as being 'fearfully affected.' When Mrs Sheridan heard of the news of a dead man, her first reaction was the fear that it had occurred in their garden - "'Not in the garden!'" Her concern only lies in that whether it would affect her plans of the Garden Party. When she heard that it wasn't in the garden, she did not bother to react to it anymore, let alone cancel the party for it. The upper class lady lost patience at Laura's pleas to cancel the party and coldly said "'You are being very absurd...People like that don't expect sacrifices from us.'" She clearly distinguishes herself from the lower class that she looks down on: "people like that", "people of that class." Moreover, to the dead man's widow she offers only insincere generosity "let's send that poor creature some of this perfectly good food," she gives only the scraps of the party.

In conclusion, Mansfield has skilfully described two female characters from her short stories "The Garden party" and "Frau Brechenmacher Attends a Wedding", illustrating a range of actions and dialogues to mould the different characteristics of the different women. The submissive, servicing actions of Frau Brechenmacher give insight into her life burdened and locked by domestic work, and signs of her stress can be observed from the author's writing. Similarly, the dialogues and acts of Mrs Sheridan give readers an understanding of her status, power and attitude towards the lower class.