

Miss Brill's essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Miss Brill's given name is never mentioned since she has no friends who would use it. However, at the beginning of the story she is blissfully happy with her life and situation. She has compensated for her isolation by sitting in on the lives of other people and casting herself as a significant character in the panoramic, multi-charactered drama of life.

Very much a creature of habit, her Sunday routine was to attend the open-air band concert at the public gardens. She had her own special seat where she would listen to the music and sit in on the conversations of nearby people. She was disappointed if they remained silent. The previous Sunday had been unpleasant because the conversation between an Englishman and his wife involved her complaints about failing vision and the problems involved with wearing spectacles. " Miss Brill had wanted to shake her."

" And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in gray met just in front of her." Interestingly, the woman in her fur hat was getting on in years and it showed in " her hair, her face, even her eyes," which were " the same color as the shabby ermine." Miss Brill is shocked when the gentleman " lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face. . . flicked the match away and walked on." The innocent Miss Brill is unaware that she has been watching a prostitute plying her trade without success.

The high point of the story occurs as Miss Brill fantasizes that all the people in sight, herself included, were actors on stage. If she had missed playing her part one Sunday, someone would have noticed! In reality, Miss Brill is a part of nothing. She sits alone on a bench with her ratty old fur and watches the world pass before her. She sees other people sitting on benches Sunday

after Sunday and thinks of them as “ funny...odd, silent, nearly all old...as though they'd just come from dark little rooms.” Rather than see herself as one of them, she creates a fantasy world to escape facing the truth.

When thinking of things, such as the band that plays regularly in the park, Miss Brill compares them to family: “ It was like some one playing with only the family to listen....” Everything and everyone is included in this performance she loves so dearly. Even the young couple who take a seat on the bench with her are pictured to be the “ hero and heroine” of her magical fairy tale. This is her escape from the life she has; her escape from the truth. Eavesdropping on their conversation, she hears them refer to herself as “ that stupid old thing” and to her furpiece as “ exactly like a fried whiting,” referring to a fish. The realization emotionally destroys her. The couple that she hears in the park exemplifies this by making fun of her fur which in turn means that they have been mocking her.

To avoid this realization she must believe that the fur is beautiful. After her encounter with the couple, she begins to grasp reality and, in despair, hurries home not even stopping at the bakery where she always stops. She gets home and sits there for a while with the fur and as she begins to put it away, she hears a crying. When she puts the fur away it is noted that she doesn't look at it. This definitely contrasts to how she acted towards it at the beginning. She now realizes that she is neither beautiful nor young and by putting the fur away she puts these beliefs behind. The crying that Miss Brill hears comes from her own heart because she has just been crushed by the realization that she has been compelled to make at the park.

In the heartrending conclusion, Miss Brill returns to her “ little dark room – her room like a cupboard” without making her usual stop at the baker’s for a slice of honeycake that might -just might – have an almond in it. She removes her necklet and puts it in a box, thinking as she does so that she hears something crying. The symbolic correspondence of this sweet little old lady who wants only good things to happen and has not an iota of ill will or meanness in her is completed as we realize who is weeping and the depth of the hurt that has been caused.

One wonders if the crushing realization of how others, and especially the young, view her can be overcome. Will there be future Sunday band concerts and slices of honeycake? Will her fur stole ever again leave its cupboard?

The narration is made in order to convince and get the reader into the point of view of Miss Brill. Even though the story is narrated in the third-person, which seems to show things exactly as they are by an omnipotent narrator, we start to romanticize things while Miss Brill gives their descriptions. The loneliness seems to be the main cause of her romantic view, as a way to forget, or to mask, the reality she’s going through in life. We also see that she makes projections of herself in others, a possible desire of a relationship.

This projection becomes more obvious when Miss Brill start describing all the events, and even herself, as parts of a big play. The theatre, where she is an actress, and the audience as well, seems to be, with her loneliness, the main part of this short story. If we go through an allegorical interpretation, the play described is related to a of Miss Brill’s romantic views of the world,

representing life. Miss Brill describes herself as an actress, but also as the audience, these two possibilities are connected with her real situation.

Following this analogical comparison, there is also the band, which plays, in every act, a soundtrack according to her feelings. The acts happening in the play reflect on Miss Brill's feelings and in what the humor and style of the band. The Miss Brill's play resembles either the ancient Greek theatre, with a choir representing the feelings of the audience, either in tragedy or comedy. Similarly, the narration looks like a comedy, imbued with happiness and good feelings, but it suddenly ends up as tragedy, when Miss Brill does what she's used to, overhearing people, a kind of hamartia, which leads her to loneliness again.

Either visions, the allegorical or the comparison with the theatre, build two main opposite views: real versus unreal. Although her representation is lifelike, it's only an imitation and projection, of what Miss Brill thinks is real. When she puts the lid on the box, there is another representation of an exclusion. What she hears crying seem to suffer of the same thing she is going through, the crying may be something from the subconscious of Miss Brill, but also from what she closed in the box. Whether it is her or not, this short story is meant to represent social issues and fantasies we face, and how our fantasies may fall apart.

In many countries, taking care of the elderly is one of the top priorities. Some feel that our nation neglects the elderly. The older generation is often left to live in nursing homes or remain in their own homes with no loved ones around. This has the potential to make a person feel that he would like to

shut out all of reality. The short story « Miss Brill», by Katherine Mansfield, is about an older woman who doesn't have any people around her that love her. Because of this isolation she makes things up in her mind to compensate.

A person who doesn't have any significant others in his/her life may create an alternate reality to make up for what they don't have. If Miss Brill realizes that what she believes isn't reality, she can become broken and emotionally devastated. Through point of view, representation, and symbolism, Mansfield is able to easily and clearly show how this happens to Miss Brill. Another way that the author supports the theme is her description of the woman in the ermine toque. This character is used not as a symbol but more as a characterization of Miss Brill.

The narrator shares the details of the woman by saying: « she was wearing the ermine toque she'd bought when her hair was yellow» (81). Obviously this is to create a tie between her and Miss Brill as both being old. It can also be deduced that the two are similar by comparing the fact that the woman is wearing an ermine toque which is a fur, similar to Miss Brill wearing her fur. Both these connections lay the groundwork for what the author intends to be the main theme of the woman in the ermine toque.

Miss Brill watches an incident happen to the woman where she flirts with a tall distinguished man who stands there while she talks and then abruptly leaves, showing his disregard for her by blowing a puff of smoke in her face. This is a characterization of how Miss Brill is rejected by society. The couple that Miss Brill overhears making fun of her is a perfect example of this. All of

these points are carefully created to subtly teach the reader about Miss Brill and the effects of rejection.

People are sometimes forced to create a distorted view of reality to avoid the pain of rejection. Miss Brill, however, was eventually not able to sustain this image. A final part of the story that shows Miss Brill's alternate reality is a very descriptive piece about the fur that Miss Brill wears throughout the story. The fur piece is treasured by Miss Brill, who addresses it as "Dear little thing" and "Little rogue." We are told how "She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed life back into the dim little eyes."