

The dolls house essay- symbolism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Catherine Mansfield's "The Doll's house", the main theme is on the injustices and cruelty associated with class distinctions. Set in New Zealand sometime after it becomes a colony, Mansfield shows how the differences among social classes are closely adhered to. She also explores themes such as how the high class people take deliberate pleasure in being cruel to the lower classes, and how innocently born children who are brought up in this atmosphere can become easily influenced. Mansfield uses symbolism, particularly the doll house and the lamp, to reveal these themes.

The doll house is symbolic of the upper class people in this society, such as the Burnell's. The Burnell's are undoubtedly content with their position in society and with the lifestyle they live. When the doll house is dropped off in their courtyard, they become immediately proud of it, just like how they are of themselves. "But perfect, perfect little house! Who could possibly mind the smell?" The doll house may indeed seem perfect, but what it represents is something negative. The only negative part of the doll house is its smell, and this represents the cruelty of society.

Later on in the story when the reader sees the Burnell family neglecting the lower class people such as the Kelvey's, the smell represents the cruelty that they themselves give to society. Another symbolic aspect of the doll house is how closely it represents their own home. The Burnell children are only allowed to let the types of children that would be accepted within their home see the doll house. The immediate setting of the story is a rural area where different classes are forced to deal with each other in everyday situations. The Burnell children would have attended a ritzy private school had there been one nearby, but as it is, their school is the only one for miles, so they

are forced to attend a school that has a mixed group of children- both high and low class. " By the story being set here, and by the main characters being school aged, Mansfield shows what influence living in such an unjust society can have on children. Children are not born having hatred toward anything. Yet the story shows that the children who attend this school have been influenced greatly by their adult company.

The children practically shun the Kelvey's. One little girl, Lena, even mocks the Kelvey's on their poor background, showing the ignorant pleasure the upper class gets from being cruel to the lower class. However, there is also a certain amount of optimism in the story. Kezia Burnell is not like the rest of her family, or the rest of the upper class. What Kezia likes most about the doll house is the lamp that stands in the middle of the dining room table. Even when everyone else dismissed the lamp as something uninteresting and unimportant, she continues to admire it. It seemed to smile at Kezia, to say ' I live here '. The lamp was real". Mansfield uses the lamp as a symbol to show that there is hope in the otherwise dark situation of cruelty in society. " It was filled, all ready for lighting, but of course, you couldn't light it. But there was something inside that looked like oil, and that moved when you shook it". Kezia is the one who can light the lamp. Kezia is the hope for society that the lamp in the doll house symbolizes.

At the end of the story, after Kezia invites the Kelvey's to see the doll house, Else exclaims to her sister " I seen the little lamp ", as if to show something wonderful (respect and equality amongst all) can be passed on. In conclusion, Catherine Mansfield uses symbolism to develop the main theme of the story, which deals with the unfair treatment and injustice the lower

classes receive from upper classes. The two most prominent uses of symbolism are the doll house and lamp. Although the reader is left angry at the situation in the story, Kezia and the lamp provide hope that the future will turn out for the better.