

Analysis of Narrative Structure in the Short Story *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the narrative structure in the short story *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield, focusing on storytelling elements such as orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation. The story portrays social inequality through the perspective of the main character, Laura, a young girl from an upper-class family who experiences an internal crisis when confronted with the harsh realities of working-class life. This study employs a qualitative approach with a grounded theory method to analyze the narrative structure in the short story *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield. Data collection techniques include documentation, in-depth textual study, and content analysis of the literary work. The narrative structure theories of Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov are used to reveal how Mansfield constructs the plot and builds emotional tension as well as the character's social awareness. The findings show that Mansfield effectively employs narrative structure techniques to create a psychological transformation in the protagonist while delivering a contextual social critique of the upper class's indifference toward the suffering of the lower class. This study contributes to modern literary studies and broadens readers' understanding of storytelling techniques in modern literature.

Keywords: Katherine Mansfield, Narrative Structure, Short Story, Social Critique, The Garden Party

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1. Introduction

The short story, as one form of literary work, possesses a unique ability to depict social, psychological, and cultural realities in a concise and intense manner (Nurfalah, 2021). Through relatively brief texts, short stories are capable of conveying complex ideas while exploring the emotional and psychological depth of their characters in a compact way. The success of a short story in delivering these messages lies in the precise choice of words, the use of symbolism, and effective storytelling techniques (Ghina Salsabila et al., 2023). Therefore, short stories are often used by writers to explore major themes in human life, such as social inequality, inner conflict, and the interaction between individuals and their social environment.

One highly influential literary work in the form of a short story is *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield, a New Zealand writer whose works are known for their nuanced narrative style and rich psychological depth. This story was first published in 1922 and has since become one of the classic works frequently discussed in literary studies, particularly in the fields of narrative analysis and storytelling techniques (Nownes, 1993). *The Garden Party* (1921) portrays upper-class social life through the perspective of a young girl named Laura, who lives in a world of luxury and protection from the hardships of the lower class. However, the story also highlights the tension between the luxurious world of the upper class and the harsh reality of the neglected lower class. The story serves as a social portrait reflecting the thoughts and perspectives of its time regarding social class, economic disparity, and social injustice (Atkinson, 2006).

Beyond the social themes it presents, Mansfield constructs the narrative with a structure that not only delivers events chronologically but also inserts symbolic meaning into each part of the story. This approach makes *The Garden Party* especially interesting to examine from a narrative structure perspective, in order to grasp how the author weaves the plot and builds social tension within the story (Bashir et al., 2020). In this context, narrative structure analysis will help reveal how the author shapes the plot, characterization, and the deep use of symbolism. The analysis of narrative structure in a literary work holds an important role in understanding how an author constructs and delivers a story. The theory of narrative structure was first introduced by Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), a Russian literary theorist. In 1928, Propp developed this theory through his book *Morphology of the Folktale*, in which he analyzed the narrative structures of Russian folktales and identified specific recurring patterns within these stories by introducing the concept of narrative functions such as the roles of hero, helper, and villain (Putri & Dyah, 2018).

This theory was later refined by Tzvetan Todorov (1939–2017), a Bulgarian literary theorist, who proposed that every narrative moves through five interrelated stages. Todorov developed this concept in his book *Grammaire du Décaméron* (1969), which became one of the principal approaches in narrative studies. Todorov argued that a story progresses through five stages: initial equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the disruption, repair, and new equilibrium (Mare et al., 2022). The narrative structure theory developed by Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov can be simplified into four main parts of a story: orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation.

In the analysis of narrative structure in *The Garden Party*, the story begins with orientation through the introduction of the main character, Laura, along with her upper-class family, in the setting of a luxurious garden party on a bright summer day, which emphasizes the atmosphere of wealth and comfort in their lives (Bashir et al., 2020). Complication arises

when Laura learns that a laborer in the neighborhood has died tragically, triggering an inner conflict between her obligation to join the family's festivities and her empathy toward the suffering of others that has long been overlooked. Resolution occurs as Laura, though still troubled, attends the party but eventually musters the courage to bring flowers to the mourning family as a gesture of respect, although she does not fully grasp the meaning of her actions (Atkinson, 2006). The story ends with a reorientation, where Laura undergoes a shift in her view of life, realizing that the luxury she has always known is meaningless compared to the reality of life and death, while also subtly delivering a moral message about the importance of social awareness amidst prevailing inequality (Atkinson, 2006; Bashir et al., 2020).

Research on the narrative structure in *The Garden Party* is essential as it provides a deeper understanding of how Mansfield employs storytelling techniques to convey major themes in her work, such as social inequality, individual awareness, and psychological change within characters. By analyzing the elements of orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation, readers can better comprehend the complexity and depth found in the story's narrative structure (Anggraeni et al., 2024). Overall, research on the analysis of narrative structure in *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield not only offers profound insights into the work itself but also contributes significantly to literary studies in general, particularly in the understanding of narrative techniques employed by modernist writers. In this context, this study aims to further explore how Mansfield utilizes narrative structure to create meaning and a lasting impact on readers. Two research questions that serve as the framework for the discussion in this article are as follows: First, what are the narrative structure elements found in the short story *The Garden Party*, and how do these elements shape the theme of the story? Second, what is the contextual meaning contained in *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield based on an analysis of its narrative structure? Therefore, this study is limited to the analysis of the narrative structure elements present in the story, namely orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a grounded theory method to analyze the narrative structure in the short story *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield. This approach is chosen because it enables the researcher to deeply understand narrative elements such as orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation, as well as the relationships among these elements in shaping the theme of the story. Grounded theory provides space for the researcher to develop concepts directly from the textual data without being strictly bound by established theories, although narrative structuralism theories from Tzvetan Todorov and Vladimir Propp are still used as initial conceptual references. The analysis process is carried out through repeated readings and data coding to identify thematic categories that can give rise to new narrative propositions. Thus, this study not only describes the narrative structure but also offers new insights into Mansfield's plot construction techniques and the social messages conveyed through her story.

In collecting the data, this study uses documentation techniques, in-depth text study, and content analysis. The documentation technique involves gathering the text of *The Garden Party* as the primary data, along with supporting secondary sources such as books, journals, and previous studies. Through in-depth text study, the researcher reads the story repeatedly to identify its narrative elements and the storytelling techniques employed by the author. Subsequently, content analysis is applied to extract relevant information from the text and

categorize the data into relevant classifications aligned with the study's objectives. These three techniques are conducted systematically to uncover the contextual meanings and narrative patterns embedded within the short story.

3. Findings

3.1 Orientation in *The Garden Party*

The orientation in a literary work functions as an introduction to present the initial elements related to characters, setting, atmosphere, and events that serve as the foundation for the story's development (Gessey-Jones et al., 2020). In Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Garden Party*, the orientation is placed at the beginning to build the atmosphere of an upper-class family's life, which becomes the center of the narrative flow. Additionally, the orientation serves to introduce the main character along with her social environment, enabling readers to understand the characters' social positions, the values they uphold, and the initial situation that becomes the backdrop for the emergence of conflict (McLean et al., 2020). Mansfield arranges this orientation in considerable detail, starting from the introduction of the main character to the depiction of the setting and the socially unequal atmosphere between the upper and lower classes. Thus, the orientation in this story becomes a solid foundation for developing the conflict and the major theme concerning social awareness. The following is an explanation of the orientation elements found in the short story.

First, the short story *The Garden Party* introduces the main character named Laura Sheridan. Laura is a young girl from an upper-class family who possesses a character distinct from the other family members. From the beginning of the story, Laura is portrayed as being more sensitive to the social issues around her, particularly toward the poor who live near her home. Laura's character is introduced through her perspective, which is more open and sympathetic to the gardeners and the lower-class society. As stated in the story: "Laura thought of the people down there in their little houses, and she was sorry for them." (Mansfield, 1922). Laura's characterization, which is gentle yet internally conflicted, forms the main basis for the story's plot development since most of the important events in the story are seen and experienced from her point of view. Consequently, the introduction of this main character plays a crucial role in building the narrative framework that will unfold throughout the story.

Second, the introduction of the Sheridan family and their lifestyle becomes an important part of the orientation. The Sheridan family consists of Mrs. Sheridan, Meg, Jose, Laurie, and Laura herself, all of whom are depicted as living in luxury and comfort as bourgeois figures in their community. The family's daily life is filled with lavish activities and a constant effort to maintain their social status in the eyes of their neighbors. The atmosphere within the Sheridan family at the beginning of the story is described as lively and enthusiastic because they are in the midst of preparing for a grand garden party to be attended by distinguished guests. Mansfield writes, "The hall door was opened, and the air from the garden floated in, full of the scent of roses." (Mansfield, 1922), which illustrates how the luxurious and cheerful mood of the party is already palpable from the start. Through this depiction of the Sheridan family, Mansfield begins to reveal the character of the social elite, who are more concerned with entertainment and their public image than the conditions of the surrounding community. This introduction to the family and their lifestyle provides a complete picture of the social values held by the characters.

Third, the story's orientation also introduces the setting, namely a large house belonging to the Sheridan family, surrounded by a wide and beautiful garden. This luxurious home is

situated on a hill, separated from the settlement of the lower-class people who live in modest conditions. Mansfield vividly describes the Sheridan family's house, from the white tent set up in the yard, the fresh flowers adorning the rooms, to the tables of food prepared for the party. One line describes this setting: "The sun was hot and the ground hard and dry. The flowers were like painted butterflies." (Mansfield, 1922). Behind the beauty of this setting lies stark social inequality, as only a few meters away from the party venue, poor communities live in deprivation. This setting not only serves as the physical location for events but also symbolizes the social class disparity, which becomes the story's central theme.

Fourth, within this orientation section, the main event that initiates the chain of conflicts in the story is also introduced, namely the preparation for the grand garden party held by the Sheridan family. Since morning, the family has been preoccupied with various party arrangements, from decorations, tent setup, flower selection, to the preparation of luxurious dishes. The garden party symbolizes the lifestyle of the elite class, who constantly strive to maintain their social status and honor in the public eye. Mansfield describes the bustle with the line, "The flower-girls were coming and the band was playing in the distance." (Mansfield, 1922). This party preparation marks the starting point of Laura's inner tension, especially after she learns that a poor neighbor in the nearby area has passed away on the same day. The introduction of this main event provides an essential foundation for the development of value conflicts and moral messages within the story.

Overall, this orientation section aims to present an initial description of the main character, the upper-class lifestyle, the setting, and the significant event that builds the narrative foundation in *The Garden Party*. Katherine Mansfield carefully arranges this orientation to highlight the social inequality that becomes the story's central conflict (Mitchell, 2017). Furthermore, this orientation functions to build narrative tension and clarify each character's moral position before entering the complication section. With such a detailed and meaning-rich orientation, readers can comprehend the initial situation that serves as an important background for the story's theme development on social awareness and humanity.

3.2 Complication in *The Garden Party*

Overall, this orientation section aims to present an initial description of the main character, the upper-class lifestyle, the setting, and the significant event that builds the narrative foundation in *The Garden Party*. Katherine Mansfield carefully arranges this orientation to highlight the social inequality that becomes the story's central conflict (Mitchell, 2017). Furthermore, this orientation functions to build narrative tension and clarify each character's moral position before entering the complication section. With such a detailed and meaning-rich orientation, readers can comprehend the initial situation that serves as an important background for the story's theme development on social awareness and humanity.

The complication in a narrative work refers to the section that presents the main issues or conflicts that begin to develop after the orientation is established (McClean et al., 2020). At this stage, significant events start to trigger clashes of values, interests, and perspectives between characters, resulting in narrative tension. In Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Garden Party*, the complication arises when the grand garden party atmosphere begins to clash with the social realities outside the Sheridan family's privileged environment. The main character, Laura, experiences inner turmoil upon learning about the death of a poor neighbor amidst the party preparations. This complication juxtaposes humanistic values with the social

interests of the upper class, steering the narrative toward its resolution (Nownes, 2023). The following explanation details the elements of complication found in the story.

First, the complication begins when Laura learns about the death of Mr. Scott, a poor neighbor living in the lower hills near the Sheridan residence. This news is delivered by one of the household workers while the Sheridan family is engrossed in arranging the garden party. The death, which occurred suddenly due to a workplace accident, immediately affects Laura's emotions, as she has exhibited greater social sensitivity than the other members of her family from the outset. Laura feels that it is inappropriate for the party preparations to continue while there is a bereavement in the surrounding community. Mansfield writes, "*But, mother, don't you think it's rather a sad thing about the man who's died?*" (Mansfield, 1922). This sentence affirms Laura's empathy and social awareness, which starts to clash with her family's indifferent attitude.

Second, the conflict tension heightens when Laura attempts to express her objections to her mother, Mrs. Sheridan. In their conversation, Laura politely suggests that the party be postponed or, at the very least, not held with such exuberance as a form of respect for the bereaved family of Mr. Scott. However, Mrs. Sheridan dismisses Laura's concerns and regards the death as irrelevant to their affairs. She insists that the party must proceed as planned to maintain the family's image in the eyes of their guests. Mrs. Sheridan firmly states, "*Nonsense, Laura. Don't be silly. Life is very strong. Life is very splendid.*" (Mansfield, 1922). This value conflict between Laura and her mother marks the initial peak of the complication, as Laura finds herself torn between her family's social values and her own conscience that resists ignoring the suffering of others.

Third, the climax of Laura's inner conflict intensifies when the garden party continues with extravagant joy, as though nothing tragic has happened nearby. The guests indulge in the festivities, enjoying the food, music, and beautiful garden without any awareness of the tragedy that has unfolded just a few meters away. Laura, who had previously busied herself with the party preparations, begins to feel increasingly uneasy and restless amidst the merriment. She is overwhelmed by guilt for participating in a celebration that now seems hollow and devoid of empathy. Mansfield conveys Laura's anxiety through the narrative line, "*Poor people! She thought, feeling rather ill.*" (Mansfield, 1922). This inner conflict further strengthens the story's complication, as Mansfield juxtaposes the artificial joy of the elite with the stark reality of the poor.

Overall, the complication in *The Garden Party* functions to heighten the narrative tension by presenting a clash of values between the protagonist and her environment. Mansfield skillfully constructs this complication as a means to sharpen the themes of social inequality, the upper class's indifference to the suffering of the lower class, and the inner struggle of a young woman beginning to awaken to the social realities around her (Atkinson, 2006). This complication plays a vital role in the plot, as it marks the point where moral, humanitarian, and social conflicts peak, while also preparing the path toward the resolution section.

3.3 Resolution in *The Garden Party*

Resolution in a literary work serves as the stage where the conflicts developed throughout the plot begin to find their conclusion. At this point, the tension built through complications gradually moves toward resolution, either through the characters' actions, changes in attitude, or revelations of meaning from the preceding events (Tamba, 2022). In Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Garden Party*, the resolution appears when the main character, Laura, faces the

social reality that had previously been unfamiliar to her. The resolution in this story does not arrive in a conventional form but rather through the protagonist's internal awakening to the stark social inequalities surrounding her. The following explanation outlines the elements of resolution within the story.

First, the resolution begins when Laura is finally assigned by her mother to deliver a parcel of leftover party food to the Scott family, as a way to ease her guilt. Although initially reluctant, Laura agrees to this request, driven by her enduring sense of humanity. Laura's journey to the Scott family's home becomes a pivotal moment in the story, as it marks her first direct encounter with the harsh living conditions of the poor, so vastly different from her own privileged life. Laura steels herself to complete the task, though her emotions are mixed — guilt, fear, and deep empathy. Mansfield writes, "*She felt a strange trembling and excitement and awe*" as Laura steps toward the house (Mansfield, 1922).

Second, the resolution takes place when Laura arrives at the mourning house and directly sees Mr. Scott's lifeless body, lying in a small, modest room. In this situation, Laura experiences a profound emotional moment. She is transfixed by the calmness of the deceased's face, which to her seems peaceful, as if freed from the burdens of the world. This moment becomes a turning point for Laura, as she begins to grasp the meaning of death, suffering, and life itself. Through this description, Mansfield illustrates an inner transformation in the protagonist, who had lived in a world of luxury but now starts to recognize the humanity long overlooked by her social class. Laura feels that, "*He looked so natural and so calm, lying there as if he were merely asleep*" (Mansfield, 1922).

Third, Laura's change in attitude is visible as she leaves the mourning house with indescribable feelings. On her way home, she no longer thinks about the garden party or her family's extravagance. Instead, she is absorbed in contemplation about social injustice and the meaning of life. Mansfield writes, "*Everything seemed to be quite different now. The garden party was over; the sun was still shining; the house was full of happy people...*" (Mansfield, 1922). Here, Mansfield does not explicitly reveal Laura's exact thoughts, but through a subtle portrayal of her emotions, the reader senses a significant shift within the character. Laura has become more aware of the social realities around her and begins to question the values her family has long upheld.

Overall, the resolution in *The Garden Party* functions to resolve Laura's internal conflict through a deeply moving personal experience that awakens her awareness of social inequality and human values. Katherine Mansfield presents this resolution not in a dramatic manner, but through a meaningful and symbolic personal encounter. This part of the story confirms its central theme, social awareness behind a facade of privilege, and the importance of empathy amid class disparity. Through this resolution, the story reaches its thematic climax while leaving a reflective impression on its readers.

3.4 Reorientation in *The Garden Party*

Reorientation in a narrative serves as the story's closing section, providing a final impression that binds together the meaning of all prior events. At this stage, the story does not merely conclude the sequence of events but also conveys a moral message, social meaning, or implied conclusion drawn from the characters' experiences (Gessey-Jones et al., 2020). In *The Garden Party*, Katherine Mansfield presents the reorientation not through an explicit resolution of the social conflict, but by illustrating the protagonist's growing awareness of the realities beyond her privileged environment. This reorientation becomes an essential part in

summarizing the story's central theme and delivering the social message intended by the author. The following outlines the elements of reorientation in the story.

First, the reorientation begins when Laura returns home after visiting the Scott family's mourning house. By that time, the garden party has ended, the guests have left, and the house has become quiet once more. This situation illustrates the contrast between the Sheridan family's world, comfortably returning to its luxury, and the Scott family's world, still shrouded in grief. Laura, having just undergone a deeply emotional experience at the mourning house, now carries an internal transformation into a family environment oblivious to what has occurred beyond the party. Mansfield writes, "*When she reached home the house was very quiet and empty-looking, and the garden looked dusty and dead,*" depicting the stark difference between the two worlds experienced by Laura (Mansfield, 1922). This moment marks the beginning of the reorientation, as the story prepares to close with a reflective impression.

Second, the reorientation becomes more apparent in a brief conversation between Laura and her brother, Laurie. Still overwhelmed by sorrow and reflection, Laura attempts to convey her experience and newfound awareness to Laurie. Although she struggles to fully articulate her feelings, this conversation signifies Laura's internal acknowledgment of her transformative experience. Laurie, as perhaps the only family member with a slight degree of sensitivity, gently comforts Laura with a warm demeanor. In the short story, Laurie says, "*Isn't life— Isn't it, rather exciting?*" offering both consolation and space for Laura to process her own emotions (Mansfield, 1922). This brief exchange symbolizes that Laura's social consciousness has begun to grow, even if it may not yet be fully accepted or understood by her family.

Third, in this reorientation, Katherine Mansfield emphasizes Laura's inner transformation without providing a definitive resolution to the external conflict. The garden party continues as planned, and the Sheridan family remains immersed in their luxuries, but the incident Laura experiences leaves a lasting mark on her consciousness. Mansfield conveys this through the narration, "*Laura had never realized before how funny it was to be afraid. She was sorry for the poor man, and yet she was afraid,*" signaling the unique experience and new understanding within Laura (Mansfield, 1922). This reorientation reveals that Laura is no longer the same as she was before the party, having begun to develop a deeper social awareness.

Fourth, the story's conclusion is presented with an open-ended impression, as Laura utters a brief, unfinished sentence to Laurie: "*Isn't life—*", before the line is left incomplete. This incomplete sentence serves as a symbol that Laura's understanding of life, death, and social disparity is still evolving. Mansfield deliberately leaves the ending open with "*Isn't life—*", as if inviting the reader to reflect upon the story's meaning (Mansfield, 1922). This reorientation confirms that the story is not truly over, for Laura's inner reflection and transformation will continue beyond the pages of the narrative.

Overall, the reorientation in *The Garden Party* serves to convey the story's moral and social messages implicitly through the protagonist's inner experience. Katherine Mansfield closes the story with a reflective tone, highlighting that behind the upper class's luxury lies a harsh and painful social reality. The changes within Laura symbolize the birth of social awareness and empathy, which become the central message of this story. Thus, this reorientation not only concludes the narrative but also strengthens the story's theme and contextual meaning as a whole.

4. Discussion

4.1 Analysis of Narrative Structure in the Short Story *The Garden Party*

The analysis of the narrative structure in the short story *The Garden Party* reveals how Katherine Mansfield organizes the plot based on four main elements: orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation. These four elements not only serve as a sequence of events but also function as mechanisms for constructing deeper meaning (Piper et al., 2021). Each part of the structure contributes to the development of the main character and the delivery of subtle social criticism. The plot built here is not merely linear but follows the inner dynamics of Laura, the protagonist, as she navigates the social realities surrounding her. Thus, this narrative structure becomes a primary tool for conveying the moral and humanitarian messages contained within the story.

In the orientation stage, Mansfield introduces the story's setting, the main characters, and the luxurious atmosphere of the garden party. The description of the event is presented in detail, portraying a sharp contrast between the comfortable life of the upper class and the harsh conditions of the poor communities nearby. This orientation is crucial as it establishes the contextual foundation for readers to understand the background of the conflict that will later emerge (Nurfalah, 2021). Laura, as the protagonist, is depicted as existing within an environment isolated from the broader social realities. Consequently, the orientation serves to build both the social and psychological context that prepares readers to immerse themselves in the upcoming conflict.

In addition to presenting the physical and social setting, the orientation also implicitly conveys Laura's psychological position. Mansfield portrays Laura as a young woman who is still innocent and easily captivated by the luxury of the party (Ferrall, 2014). At this stage, Laura appears unaware of the social inequalities that exist beyond the gates of her opulent home. This orientation suggests the vast social distance between the upper and lower classes while also illustrating that Laura's world revolves solely within her own social sphere. Thus, Mansfield strategically constructs the narrative foundation for the emergence of social tension in the next part of the story.

The complication in this story begins when Laura hears news of the death of Mr. Scott, a poor neighbor. This event triggers an internal conflict within Laura, as she faces a moral dilemma between her family's party and the sorrow unfolding in the surrounding community. Mansfield uses this complication as the starting point for Laura's psychological development and as a means of highlighting class differences (Martin, 2015). The resulting emotional tension successfully drives the story toward a confrontation between personal interests and human compassion. In this way, the complication serves not merely as a disruption in the plot but as a medium for exploring deeper social themes.

Laura's inner conflict becomes more pronounced when she attempts to voice her opinion about canceling the party but is dismissed by her family. Mansfield shows how Laura's moral voice finds no space within an apathetic upper-class environment. This further intensifies Laura's emotional turmoil as she begins to realize the injustice hidden behind her family's privilege. This complication also underscores the imbalance of power within the social relations of the Sheridan family. Mansfield thereby illustrates that upper-class dominance is not only evident in economic relations but also in the control of values and norms (Bashir et al., 2020).

The tension within Laura continues until it reaches its climax when she is asked to deliver leftover food from the party to the Scott family's home. This action becomes a symbol of how

the upper class often expresses 'concern' in ways that maintain social distance. Mansfield deliberately places Laura in an ambivalent position: on one hand, performing an empathetic act, while on the other, still retaining a position of superiority (Mitchell, 2017). This complication does not culminate in a social rebellion but in a psychological conflict that leads Laura into a process of reflection. Mansfield carefully constructs this complication as a path toward social awareness without necessitating physical confrontation between classes.

The resolution in this story arrives not as an external solution but as an inner transformation within Laura. When she arrives at the Scott family's house, Laura is directly confronted with the reality of death and grief, both of which are unfamiliar to her. This moment becomes an emotional turning point, as Laura begins to comprehend the meaning of life, death, and social inequality on a more personal level. Mansfield demonstrates that direct experience can awaken an individual's consciousness to the social realities they have previously ignored (Atkinson, 2006). This resolution affirms that the story's conclusion is reflective rather than conclusive.

Laura's journey to the Scott family's home symbolizes an inner journey toward self-awareness and social reality. Mansfield presents this resolution to emphasize the importance of lived experience as a medium for moral learning. Laura, who was previously enamored by luxury, now witnesses firsthand the suffering of others she had long overlooked. Although there is no significant social change following this event, Mansfield illustrates that personal transformation can be an initial step toward social awareness. The resolution in this story successfully conveys the message that personal experience can serve as a source of existential reflection (Piper et al., 2021).

The reorientation emerges when Laura returns home and engages in a brief conversation with her brother, Laurie. Their exchange is short and inconclusive but leaves the impression that Laura's inner transformation has begun. Laura's unfinished statement, "Isn't life—" becomes a symbol of an ongoing consciousness process that has yet to reach a final form. Mansfield deliberately leaves the ending open to invite readers to contemplate the meaning of Laura's recent experience (Sorkin, 2018). This reorientation suggests that social awareness is not an instant occurrence but an ongoing inner journey.

This reorientation also serves to reinforce the central theme of social awareness and human empathy. Mansfield intentionally closes the story without a concrete social resolution because her focus lies in the psychological process of individuals confronting stark social realities. Laura, as a representative of the upper class, begins to realize that life is not as simple as a lively garden party. This reorientation implies that social change begins with personal awareness, even if it is small and incomplete (Mitchell, 2017). Thus, the ending of the story becomes a crucial point in conveying Mansfield's social critique.

Overall, the four elements of the narrative structure in *The Garden Party* are interconnected and form a plot that is not only dramatically engaging but also conveys a profound social message. Mansfield uses the orientation to build a contrasting setting and atmosphere, the complication to evoke inner tension and social critique, the resolution to present psychological reflection, and the reorientation to deliver an open moral message (McLean et al., 2020). This structure functions not only as a framework for the story but also as a subtle yet powerful thematic device. Each part of the structure reinforces the central themes of social inequality and the meaning of life. In this way, the story's plot becomes an effective medium for raising readers' awareness of the social issues it addresses (Piper et al., 2021).

Additionally, this narrative structure demonstrates how Mansfield succeeds in crafting a story that appears simple on the surface but is complex in meaning. The social critique regarding class inequality is conveyed not through physical conflict or open confrontation but through the protagonist’s inner struggle (Nownes, 2023). This makes *The Garden Party* a work that is delicate in style yet sharp in its social substance. Mansfield employs narrative structure as a mechanism to simultaneously develop psychological and social dynamics. Thus, themes of class disparity and existential reflection feel more vivid and relevant.

The narrative structure of *The Garden Party* also serves as a strong foundation for conveying its philosophical message about life and death. Mansfield shows that the meaning of life lies not in luxury or social status but in the awareness of human values and empathy (Atkinson, 2006). Through a systematic use of orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation, she constructs a narrative that encourages readers to reflect on the meaning of death as an inseparable part of life. Consequently, this story functions not only as social criticism but also as an existential contemplation of humanity’s relationship with life and death. It is this narrative structure that ensures *The Garden Party* remains a socially conscious and humanist literary work to this day (Bashir et al., 2020).

The following table provides a summary of the narrative structure analysis in the short story *The Garden Party* and its contribution to the development of the story and its themes.

Narrative Element	Function in the Story	Key Event	Contribution to the Theme
Orientation	Introducing the setting, characters, and atmosphere in the story.	The garden party at the Sheridan family’s house.	Depicts social class contrast, establishing the backdrop of inequality.
Complication	Presenting inner conflict and social tension.	The news of Mr. Scott’s death and Laura’s moral dilemma.	Evokes moral awareness about empathy and humanity.
Resolusi	Showing the protagonist’s inner change and reflective experience.	Laura’s visit to the Scott family’s house.	Brings awareness of social reality and the meaning of death.
Reorientation	Providing an open-ended conclusion with a hint of psychological change.	Laura and Laurie’s brief dialogue about the meaning of life.	Suggests that social awareness is a continuous process.

4.2. The Contextual Meaning of *The Garden Party* Short Story Based on Narrative Structure Analysis

This discussion seeks to interpret the various social, cultural, psychological, and moral contexts contained in *The Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield, referring to the results of the previous narrative structure analysis. Through mapping the orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation of the story, several instances of symbolism, hidden messages,

and human values that construct the wholeness of its narrative meaning are revealed. This story does not merely present conflicts between characters or events, but offers a profound social reflection on the relationships between social classes in British colonial society (Zapf, 2018). In addition, the story also exposes the psychological tensions experienced by individuals living under the pressure of upper-class cultural norms that deny the humanity of marginalized groups (Bashir et al., 2020). Therefore, this contextual meaning analysis is essential to uncover the depth of the social, cultural, psychological, and moral messages embedded in the storyline.

4.2.1 Social Meaning

The *The Garden Party* story explicitly illustrates social class inequality through the relationship between the Sheridan family, representing the bourgeois class, and the Scott family, representing the working class. Differences in lifestyle, ways of thinking, and responses to the death incident clearly mark the wide social gap between these two groups. Upon hearing about Mr. Scott's death, Laura instinctively expressed her concern by saying, "*Isn't it terribly heartless of us?*" (Mansfield, 1922). This sentence shows Laura's emerging social awareness amid her family's indifference. The story delivers social criticism against the insensitivity of the upper class towards the suffering of the poor, where the garden party continues regardless of the tragedy occurring nearby (Huang & Feng, 2020).

The garden party itself acts as a metaphor for the luxury and stability of the upper class, intentionally built to obscure the surrounding social realities. The extravagant party, with white tents, complete dining tables, and the sound of music, demonstrates the cultural superiority of the bourgeoisie who attempt to distance themselves from the social reality beyond their backyard (Vieco, 2020). This contrast becomes even more evident when Mr. Scott's death is treated as a trivial matter, unworthy of being discussed during the party. Mrs. Sheridan even remarks, "*You're not to take a notice of it. What's a drunken workman got to do with us?*" (Mansfield, 1922), clarifying the upper class's apathy toward the working class's lives. Through this garden party symbol, Mansfield subtly criticizes the hidden social injustice behind luxury.

Laura's growing awareness throughout the story can be interpreted as a symbol of the birth of social empathy amid a society inclined to ignore social inequality. The moment when Laura visits the Scott family's house represents moral courage in crossing the social boundaries that have long separated her from the working class. This process not only changes Laura's perception of life but also proves that social change begins with individual awareness. Mansfield implies that the class system can only be challenged through personal courage to empathize with and engage marginalized groups (Sorkin, 2018). This is the core social message conveyed through Laura's inner experience.

The story also presents tensions among family members in responding to social events, reflecting the situation of the upper-class society that prioritizes social image over humanitarian values. Laura, who tries to voice her concern, is ignored and forced to return to enjoy the party. This tension mirrors the moral dilemma of the bourgeois society, where social norms are prioritized above human solidarity (Ferrall, 2014). Mansfield gently criticizes this situation through Laura, who is repeatedly warned not to dwell on the death of a working man. Through this dynamic, the story highlights the upper class's resistance to social change.

The social meaning of this story reaches its peak when Laura realizes that luxury and parties are temporary, while suffering and death are real parts of life. This awareness is evident in her brief conversation with Laurie at the end of the story, where Laura says, "*Isn't life—*" before her sentence is cut off. This unfinished sentence reflects Laura's contemplation of the

absurdity of the upper-class life that neglects social realities (Martin, 2015). Mansfield conveys that life is not merely about parties and luxury, but also about confronting the harsh social reality. This social message invites readers to be more sensitive to the inequalities happening around them.

4.2.2 Cultural Meaning

Culturally, this story reflects the early 20th-century British colonial society that highly upheld social class hierarchies. This culture is depicted in the characters' interactions and the differing values they hold regarding social status (Zapf, 2018). Mrs. Sheridan, as both a mother and an authority figure within the family, symbolizes the strength of patriarchal culture and hierarchical structures in determining important decisions in the household. When Laura wishes to cancel the party due to Mr. Scott's death, Mrs. Sheridan says, "*You're not to take a notice of it. What's a drunken workman got to do with us?*" (Mansfield, 1922), revealing how upper-class cultural norms reject involvement with the working class. This statement represents the exclusive and discriminatory values of colonial culture.

The garden party itself holds cultural meaning as a symbol of social status display commonly practiced by the bourgeoisie of that era. This activity functioned to affirm the Sheridan family's social position in the community while maintaining their existence within the class hierarchy. Mansfield uses the garden party as a cultural symbol to portray how the upper class exploited luxury as a means of reinforcing their social identity (Mirmotahari, 2018). This convention was so firmly upheld that the death of a working man was not considered significant enough to disrupt the celebration. The party becomes an illustration of a culture of showiness, which prioritizes symbols of luxury over humanitarian values.

The cultural norms depicted in the story also prohibit conversations about death amid the party, as it is deemed inappropriate and capable of spoiling the atmosphere. This mirrors the upper-class culture, which tends to exclude social tragedies from celebratory spaces. Mansfield deliberately highlights this norm through the attitudes of Mrs. Sheridan and the guests, who refuse to engage in discussions about Mr. Scott's death (Bashir et al., 2020). This situation illustrates how upper-class culture creates symbolic boundaries between their "perfect" world and the harsh reality surrounding them. This norm is maintained to preserve a fragile illusion of collective happiness.

Besides portraying class hierarchy, the story also implies patriarchal cultural values through the mother's role as the controlling figure within the family. Mrs. Sheridan is not only the ultimate decision-maker but also the guardian of conservative values that perpetuate upper-class power. Her insistence on Laura accepting a new hat as a symbol of social status reflects the cultural control imposed upon young women in that environment. Mansfield illustrates how patriarchal culture not only restricts women but also shapes their perspectives on social life. The dominance of the mother's role in this story reinforces the representation of patriarchal culture within bourgeois society (Atkinson, 2006).

4.2.3 Psychological Meaning

From a psychological perspective, this story portrays Laura's inner turmoil upon learning about Mr. Scott's death amidst her family's party preparations. The incident triggers an identity crisis within Laura, causing her to question her social position among the upper class. Mansfield illustrates this psychological dynamic through Laura's shifting emotions, from initially being excited about organizing the party to becoming anxious and uneasy after

receiving the tragic news. In one of the dialogues, Laura expresses her growing empathy by saying, “*Isn’t it terribly heartless of us?*” (Mansfield, 1922). This inner conflict marks the beginning of Laura’s process of developing social awareness.

Laura’s visit to the Scott family’s home represents an inner transcendence from innocence to social consciousness. The simple setting of the Scott household and its silent atmosphere of mourning stand in stark contrast to the luxurious party at her own home. Mansfield uses this journey to illustrate Laura’s psychological shift from an illusory world to a harsh reality (Atkinson, 2006). Upon seeing Mr. Scott’s lifeless face, Laura utters, “*You look just like a picture,*” (Mansfield, 1922), reflecting both her shock and contemplation about the transience of life. This moment serves as the climax of Laura’s psychological transformation.

Laura’s psychological conflict is also depicted through her feelings of awkwardness, fear, and compassion as she enters the Scott family’s home. The social norms upheld by her family, which view the incident as insignificant, clash with her personal moral instincts. Mansfield subtly portrays this emotional tension through Laura’s brief but meaningful gestures and dialogues (Nownes, 2023). This situation highlights the conflict between Laura’s ingrained values and her newly emerging empathy. It emphasizes that the process of developing empathy is often accompanied by psychological struggle.

Laura’s reaction at the end of the story reflects the initial stage of her acceptance of life’s realities, including death. Her unfinished final words, “*Isn’t life—*” (Mansfield, 1922), indicate that Laura’s reflection on the meaning of life remains ongoing. Mansfield deliberately leaves this sentence incomplete to suggest that the contemplation of life’s meaning is a continuous, unfinished process. Psychologically, this indicates that Laura’s inner experience has just entered the early stages of social awareness, a process that requires further time and experience to develop into a complete consciousness.

4.2.4 Moral Meaning

From a moral perspective, *The Garden Party* offers a lesson about the importance of social sensitivity, empathy, and moral courage in the face of injustice (Day, 2011). Laura, despite being raised in an apathetic bourgeois environment, dares to question these social norms when confronted with Mr. Scott’s death. Her desire to cancel the garden party out of respect for the Scott family exemplifies morality that arises from personal conscience rather than social pressure. Mansfield conveys that moral courage to act empathetically often emerges from individual awareness capable of transcending unjust social norms (Mitchell, 2017).

The story also teaches that indifference toward the suffering of others represents a dangerous form of moral blindness. Mrs. Sheridan and other family members embody the type of people who prioritize image and personal interests over human values. Mansfield explicitly demonstrates how upper-class culture can erode an individual’s moral sensitivity (Vieco, 2020). Through Laura’s character, readers are invited to reject such hollow morality and have the courage to perform small, meaningful acts of kindness for others.

Another moral message conveyed is that luxury and power are no guarantees of happiness. Mansfield presents the garden party as a symbol of shallow materialistic life. The luxurious lifestyle of the Sheridan family is, in fact, devoid of humanitarian values. In contrast, within the humble home of the Scott family, Laura finds meaning in life through silence and an awareness of death. Mansfield emphasizes that true happiness does not lie in wealth, but in one’s ability to feel the suffering of others and to perform good deeds, even if only through empathy (Huang & Feng, 2020).

The story also suggests that genuine morality is not always supported by one's social environment. Laura's compassion is seen as excessive by her own family. Mansfield illustrates how, in a patriarchal and bourgeois society, moral values are often dismissed in favor of maintaining the status quo (Ferrall, 2014). Nevertheless, moral courage must be upheld, even in the face of opposition. Laura represents a morally conscious individual capable of resisting social hegemony. Ultimately, this story teaches that even small acts of empathy carry significant moral impact. Laura, who merely delivers food to the Scott family, experiences a profound inner transformation. Mansfield intends to show that morality does not always manifest through heroic deeds, but can be born from simple, sincere acts of kindness.

Based on the contextual meaning analysis through the narrative structure of *The Garden Party*, it can be concluded that this story contains interconnected social, cultural, psychological, and moral messages. From a social aspect, Mansfield criticizes class inequality and the upper class's insensitivity to the suffering of the poor. From a cultural standpoint, the story reflects early 20th-century British colonial norms that glorify social hierarchy and luxury. Psychologically, it portrays Laura's inner turmoil in confronting social realities that conflict with her family's values. Finally, from a moral dimension, this story teaches about the importance of empathy, social sensitivity, and moral courage in addressing social injustice. Thus, *The Garden Party* is not merely a story about a party and a death, but a narrative rich in social critique and philosophical reflection on humanity. Mansfield successfully combines literary aesthetics with powerful social messages, making this story remain relevant for analysis today, especially in the context of shaping social character in modern society.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Katherine Mansfield's short story *The Garden Party* possesses a narrative structure consisting of four main elements: orientation, complication, resolution, and reorientation. These four elements are closely interconnected in building a compelling storyline while also conveying strong moral messages. The orientation in the story functions to introduce the setting, atmosphere, and main characters who represent a particular social class. The complication arises through Laura's inner conflict as she questions the extravagance of the garden party amidst the death of their poor neighbor, Mr. Scott. The resolution and reorientation then portray Laura's internal transformation towards social awareness and a deeper understanding of life and death.

The contextual meaning analysis reveals that the story contains various social, cultural, psychological, and philosophical meanings that are relevant to the conditions of early 20th-century British colonial society. Social class inequality, the culture of flaunting wealth, and social norms that disregard humanitarian tragedies serve as implicit critiques within the story. Laura's inner turmoil represents the gradual development of empathy and class consciousness within her. In addition, the story also addresses existential issues concerning human equality in the face of death and the unpredictability of life. Symbolism such as the garden party, Laura's hat, and the Scott family's house strengthens these messages.

Overall, *The Garden Party* not only offers an engaging storyline but also provokes readers' awareness of social realities and humanitarian values. Its well-organized narrative structure forms a solid foundation for delivering themes of social critique against class disparities and philosophical reflections on life and death. This story teaches the importance of empathy and sensitivity towards others' suffering, regardless of social status. These values remain highly relevant today, considering that social inequality continues to be a pressing issue

across various parts of the world. Therefore, literary works like *The Garden Party* hold an important role in fostering public social awareness.

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