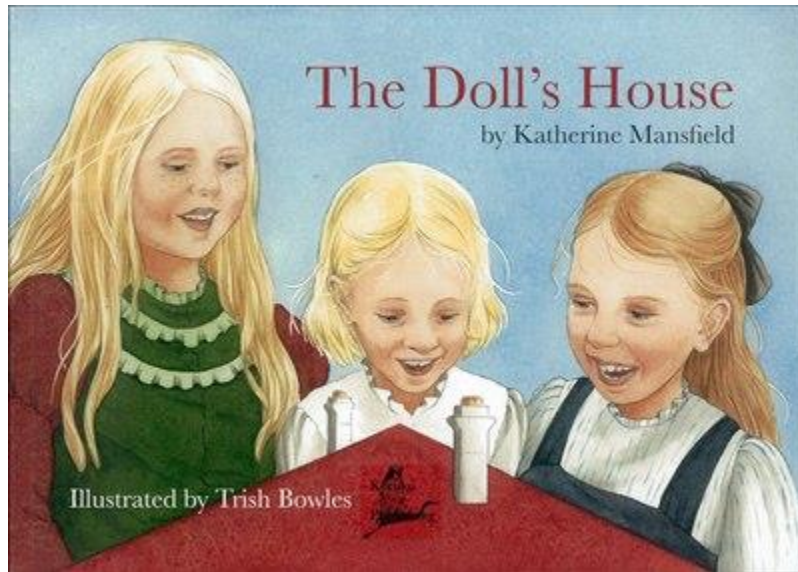


Class Consciousness with reference to Mansfield's *The Doll's House*

Dr. L. Amutha



Courtesy: <https://www.thechildrensbookshop.co.nz/p/nz-picture-books-the-doll-s-house>

Abstract

This paper focuses on the portrayal of the trivial activities of human being and revealed the brutality of grownup people in the society. Mansfield showed the innocence of small children and the unkindness of the society that draws a line between the rich and the poor, higher and lower status of people. The story dealt with the class consciousness which brought disturbance in the social set up, the children were discouraged to talk to the children from the lowest of the social classes. The story traced the problem of class consciousness through the character of Kezia, and her journey from innocence to the symbolic world of experience. The author commented on how hard it is to raise one's social status. The class in which a person is born in is the rest of their life. It is hard to change their future because everyone else is so focused on their parents' past. The Kelveys children cannot be accepted by the other children at school and other families because of the social-status of their parents.

Key Words: Mansfield, *The Doll's House*, Human being, Innocence, Class consciousness, Social status



Katherine Mansfield 1888-1923

Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katherine_Mansfield

Class Discrimination

Mansfield aspired to write the perfect short story and her writing was influenced by the Russian writer Anton Chekhov. Her stories exhibited many aspects like complex, luminous, race. She is skillful in deft character portrayal, creating powerful impressions with metaphor, and manipulating reader responses with a few apt words. Her description of Else Kelvey is an example. By frequently calling the girl “Our Else,” she assured the reader’s sympathies. She is a tiny wishbone of a child, with cropped hair and enormous solemn eyes. In her white nightgown of a dress, Else is a spectral image, perhaps a sad angel. She seems to be not quite of this world, and nobody has ever seen her smile.

Five Child Characters

There are five child characters in this story. They are the Burnell daughters and the Kelvey daughters. There were grown-ups like the Aunt Beryl, Mrs. Kelvey, the school teacher and so on. This story revealed that small children are innocent, but they are poisoned by the grown-ups and become cruel very slowly. Once Mrs. Hay had sent the Burnell children a doll's

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house. It was more beautiful than a real house. It had bed rooms, living rooms, kitchen, chimney etc. It was painted and decked in an attractive way. It was unique and large. It was newly painted so it was kept outside in the courtyard for a few days until the smell of the paint was disappeared. Above all there was a lamp that Kezia thought to be a real one. The Burnell children were delighted in looking at the admirable doll's house. The next day they reached school with great excitement. They were bated to tell about the wonderful doll's house. Burnell's eldest daughter Isabela shared with her friends about it during the lunch hour at the school. All the children came together. Among them there are Emmie Cole, Lena Logan and the rest. But two of the girls did not come near them. They were downtrodden, lower class and the daughters of Mrs. Kelvey. Mr. Kelvin was a jailbird. Mrs. Kelvey goes to every doorstep and asked for bits of cloth to her daughters. Besides, the Burnell's mother had forbidden their daughters to speak with the Kelveys.

At the Doll's House

All the school children except Else and Lil came to the Burnell's house to see the doll's house. Nobody spoke with them. The Burnells abused, shunned and hated Kelveys. Only the two sisters understood each other. Kezia invites Kelveys daughters to see the doll's house. At this very moment Aunt Beryl's harsh voice shooed them off as if they were chicken. Afraid of the situation, far off they sat on a drainpipe and the younger sister expressed her pleasure. In this way the poor children were hated by all. Innocent Kezia did not have any difference between one and another but the elder people created difference in society.

Actors

Aunt Beryl acted as the antagonist, and the representative of the higher class and illustrated how social injustice works. When she noticed that Kezia shared the view of the doll's house with two poor girls, Aunt Beryl lashed out at them. Her behavior clearly expressed that she viewed the Kelvey sisters as poor and unworthy of seeing something as beautiful and expensive as the doll's house she condemned Kezia for not being aware of class differences. *The Doll's House* has the theme of class, prejudice, connection, hope, appearance and equality. It was also noticeable that the other children and the teacher in the school, like the Burnells, also

consider themselves to be better than the Kelveys. Again this assumption appears to be based not only on the working class status of Mrs Kelvey but also by the fact that Mrs Kelvey is so poor that she needs to dress her daughters with cloth from items that her neighbours no longer need. All the characters except Kezia in the story judge the Kelveys based on, not only their perceived lower-class status but also by their physical appearance. Just as Lil and Else looked different to those around them by the way they were dressed, the other children, the Burnells and the teacher viewed the Kelveys as being different. Each character in the story was prejudicial towards the Kelveys.

Symbolism

There is also some significant symbolism. The doll's house itself symbolised the upper class Burnells. Something that is a little clearer to the reader when Mansfield tells the reader that Mrs Burnell only sent her children to the local school, not because she felt it would be good for them but because there was no other school available. It may also be important that there is a smell coming from the doll's house. The smell of the house, symbolically suggested that all is not right with the Burnells socially prejudice.

Mansfield brought out the bitter truth that the discrimination between the wealthy 'haves' and the deprived 'have nots' was based solely on wealth and class. The following words of author "the line had to be drawn somewhere" expressed volumes of interpretation to the social hierarchy prevalent in society. At the end of the story, Aunt Beryl shouts at Kezia, 'How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?' in her furious voice.

Conclusion

The final view of the Kelveys after seeing the doll's house, resting together on their way home, picks up on the spiritual overtone in the story. Beryl's cruelty is forgotten. The little lamp which Else has seen, a symbol for Kezia's benevolence and human warmth that confronts the inhumane tyranny of class distinction, is a light that shines in the darkness of the life of this child. Through the portrayal of the striving of the Kelveys' role, Mansfield conveyed out the class consciousness that was faithfully handed down by one generation to another, from parents

to children and vice versa. Moreover, through the neat portrayal of the character of Kezia, Mansfield tried to challenge the existing social class consciousness which was inflicting havoc on the social fabric.

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