

## Class Struggles and Social Inequality: A Marxist Reading of Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the intersection of class and society in Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House* using a qualitative approach steeped in Marxist literary theory. It investigates how the characters, and plot along with the setting form an interplay critiquing the class differences. *The Doll's House* as a central symbol illustrates class discrimination in particular juxtaposed to the Kelveys' makeshift clothing and paltry food that depict their poverty. In contrast, the Burnells can be viewed as the bourgeoisie. Within Mansfield's story lies a critique of the class structure as it exists in society, revealing the injustice that resides within it. Aunt Beryl and the teacher are perfect examples of how class prejudice is absorbed and borders are policed. The domineering control that the Burnells exercise with regard to *The Doll's House* and the Kelveys' exclusion from the house serves to illustrate how possessions transform into tools of subjugation. It is particularly Mansfield's portrayal of the Kelveys that serves as the strongest commentary on the judgmental economic framework of society that robs people off their humanity and opportunities. Mansfield underscores inequality through class vivid imagery and descriptions. The nurturing assumption would suggest Lil Kelvey becoming a servant is true, indicating bias permeates society's rigid hierarchies. The lunch break depicted is in contrast to the Burnells' ostentatious meals while the Kelveys modest breastfeeding illustrates social exclusion and exclusionary economic disparity. All these factors underline Mansfield's critique regarding socio class structures of her time and challenge the reader to think about the deep rooted social imbalance. Mansfield presents her critique on socio economic hierarchy through character's plot and setting in relation to *The Doll's House* which becomes an exemplary case in point for class segregation representation. Her depiction of classism is critical as it serves as a reminder for people to recognize it's enduring brutality even to this day. Mansfield's narrative not only sheds lights towards the injustice of her time but marks an arrow towards the direction of the society wherein sociably balanced structure is established.

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### Introduction

Katherine Mansfield is thought to be one of modern fiction's foremost writers. She captured some of the most important social movements such as feminism, socialism, and Freud's realism encompassed by psychology. Mansfield is known for her contemporary short stories that delve into the finer details of her character's emotional life and day to day difficulties, especially those of women and children (Brenda, 2010). Mansfield's nuanced understanding of human emotions allows her to craft narratives that have a universal appeal to diverse audiences throughout time and space. In his essay Malcolm Cowley commented that

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the characters created by Mansfield are “always so accurate that they perfectly fit in the situation and expose themselves with a gret effect” (Isherwood, 1965, p.45). Age old struggles of daily life embarked by complex emotions have made Mansfield’s writing relatable to people across the globe and the years.

Mansfield’s *The Doll’s House* is an evocative analysis of New Zealand society in the early part of the 20th century focused on class stratification, social exclusion, and privilege. Using the perspective of the Burnell sisters and their doll’s house, Mansfield attempts to expose the social stratification of her society. *The Doll’s House*, a harmless thing at first glance, turns out to be a symbol of extreme wealth and a cruel society that define people’s lives in terms of class categories. While the society is developing, the story uncovers class struggle alongside the socio-cultural and historical issues of a neo-colonial New Zealand bearing the brunt of WWI and the growth of Feminism and Socialism (Mansfield, 1922). Additionally, Mansfield’s subtler treatment of the children’s loveable naiveté and fragility reveals the depth of societal control on their social identity and social life. Using intricate details and subtle symbolism, Mansfield turns *The Doll’s House* into a complex fabric of interconnected themes. Besides dismantling the social mores of early 20th century sentry, the story also captures readers’ attention to think deeper on issues surrounding the concept of class, exclusion, and humanity as a whole. This paper attempts to look at *The Doll’s House* from a Marxist perspective analyzing how socio-economic differences and power relations described by Mansfield constitute the class struggles of her times. By contextualizing the narrative to the time period, this analysis also seeks to illuminate the hidden ideological critique by Mansfield that is relevant in today’s consideration of social order and the relationships within society.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does "The Doll's House" by Katherine Mansfield critique class dynamics, power structures, and economic disparities through a Marxist lens?
2. In what ways does the narrative contribute to or challenge Marxist views on societal hierarchy and class distinctions?

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze characters, plot elements, and setting in "The Doll's House" through a Marxist lens to reveal the narrative's engagement with class dynamics.
2. To explore how Mansfield, within the socio-economic context of her time, critiques or reinforces prevailing class structures in "The Doll's House."

### **Significance of Study**

This research provides an in-depth analysis of Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House* by applying a Marxist literary perspective to interrogate class relations in New Zealand during the early decades of the 20th century. This study not only aims to demonstrate the ways in which Mansfield perpetuates and contests the rigid social stratifications existent at her time but also aims to expose the deeper socio-political contexts of the story and the manner in which it is influenced by economic and class relations Mansfield's Literary representation.

Although this research stays within the confines of the analysis of *The Doll's House*, this research seeks to contribute to a discussion that challenges the boundaries of Marxist Literary Theory and defends its relevance in case literature is indeed a construct of social order. The research illustrates how the socio-economic reality of class segregation encapsulated by Mansfield still remain to be echoing within the context of big social issues such as social

injustice, elitism, and marginalization. The literary criticism situates the narrative into the context of its historical and ideological setting to show how literature is a product and a reaction to the socio-economic climate.

This research adds up to the existing body of literature by showing the relationship of class strife and narrative form reinforces the validity of the postulation of Marxist literature in exposing unfriendly power relations within a text.

## **Literature Review**

### **Marxism**

In the 19th century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels invented a socio-political and economic theory known as Marxism alongside Communism. It is based on historical materialism, a term which was explained in "The German Ideology" by Marx and Engels in 1845. This principle states that the development within society is always influenced by economic forces, mainly the production and its relations. While studying history, it was proposed by Marx and Engels that the world economies are structured in a way that is crucial to understanding how human societies develop over time. It assists Marxists in providing an analysis of the class struggle along with changes that have taken place in history with regards to the community as an outcome of the economy. How all of the above create a society is explained in depth by this theory.

Marxism, as described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in "The Communist Manifesto" in 1848, argues that the shifting dynamics of a certain society such as the growth of industrialization, labor exploitation, as well as inequality, foster the development of a new social, political, and economic theory which culminates with the working class in the capitalist system in mid-19th century. This document was intended to act as a parting order of the Communist league, as well as to explain the fundamental principles of the socialist and communist movements which were just taking ground. Embarking on their new ideologies, and proclaiming them to the world had and had their challenges. In one of Western Europe's national revolutions, violence proved useful to achieve these goals. The working men of the industrial era stirred in revolution, propelled by Marx and Engels' manifesto, which illustrated the fight between the bourgeoisie, capitalists, and the proletariat, in order to bang heads and struggle to move beyond profound suffering.

### **Ancillary Aspects in History of Marxism**

Marxism's history and ethnography has its own distinctive features which need to be appreciated within Europe, during the period of 1800 s'. Transformations across the social, political, and economic spectrums were extremely notable. Karl Marx, the German scientist blending the disciplines of philosophy, economic science, and political theory well regarded, along with Friedrich Engels remains a contentious figure. They jointly wrote pioneering and florid documents that gave the vertebrae and bone structure to Marxism. Between 1800 and 1850, Europe went under drastic transformation as a result of the Industrial Revolution. As industrial capitalism took flight, economies changed radically due to the decline in agriculture, increase in urbanization, advancement in technology, and the rise of a capitalist middle class. The bourgeoisie began being a source of capitalism which resulted in better standards of living yet resulted in severe social exploitation and inequality. These developments were a cause for concern for many, including Marx and Engels, which is why they set out to research and gain perspective on the situation. Out of the several works Marx and Engels produced together, "The

Communist Manifest" (1848) takes the prize for best encapsulating Marx's trademark ideology. Just as the socio-political changes were in full swing, the pair published the accompanying document which set out their vision for a society built on historical materialism and a class hierarchy. They argued, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

Their partnership reached deeper levels of intimacy with the publication of "The German Ideology" (1845) which set out to explore and build upon the concept of historical materialism. Their main argument was that economic systems dictate the pace of development of a society, a view which stands directly opposed to the idealist paradigm that placed the change of history solely on constructs of ideas. This is the starting point where Marxist views began looking at the flow of history from the perspective of economic determinism.

Marx's economic study was summarized in profound detail in "Das Kapital, Volume I," published in 1867, where he examined in detail capitalist production and commodity fetishism along with the labor theory of value. Here, he introduced the concept of surplus value, explaining how capitalism, as a system, inevitably leads to the imposition of excess value on labor and the exploitation of workers. To fully grasp the thoughts of Marxism, one is required to understand the profound social and economic changes that existed at the time. The contributions of Marx and Engels during this period formed the theoretical skeleton encompassing the phenomena of class conflict, historical development, and the paradoxes of capitalist society. So to speak, the socio-historical and philosophical components claimed to be presented in the works of Marxism remains to be integral for the society and political movements today.

The mid-19th century marked the period of industrialization throughout Europe, which caused a remarkable change in people's social standing. To this, we have Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist, and Italian pair Friedrich Engels who presented a contrasting critique of capitalism by proposing 'The Communist Manifesto'. This contained the powerful and fashionable theories that proclaimed the abolishment of capitalism and the revolution for a classless society. Marxism captures a wide-ranging theory that relates to the social, economic, and political aspects of a society. Marx and Engel's main aim was to develop the theory of social structure as well as the theory of social change, especially class relations. In brief, Marxism is a reaction to the problems of inequality and discrimination which capitalism societies practiced, thus requiring radical transformation. What is distinctive in Marxism is its analysis of capitalism for exploitation and its image of the envisaged society. Marx and Engels accepted that the capitalist way of production promotes, for one, struggle between classes and/or exploit the laborer. The ideal of Marxism is to bring about a classless society where the tools of production are owned and managed by everyone. Such a vision of communism requires the elimination of private property and class divisions, and the creation of a new society that is based on unity and cooperative ownership.

Opening the treasure chest of socio-economic connections with narratives, and embarking on the literary journey of Marxist literary theory, is certainly exciting. While venturing through the Karl Marx and Friedrich Engles works, particularly "The German Ideology", the researcher discovers that literature is an illuminating mirror reflecting the contours of societal structures, which allows them to carve deeper into the pulsating heart of the written word. The historical materialism that forms one of the cornerstones of Marxist thought is profoundly discussed in the following pages of this review, along with the literature, explaining the links of literature and the economy. Not only does this deepen my understanding

of literary works, but also prepares me for detailed examination of Katherine Mansfield's "*The Doll's House*" in which the metaphorical portrayal of class relations and power structures in New Zealand during the early twentieth century profoundly reflect the echoes of the historical materialistic approach.

Katherine Mansfield is a proficient writer whose works mirror the conditions of the society. Many scholars have examined her work by various views.

They have analyzed the feminist perspectives in her works, as well as women's roles and their standing in the society. Some critics claim there is an advocacy of females' as well as equal employment opportunities in some of Mansfield's works like in *Life of Ma Parker*. Cooper (2008) observed the short stories from a feminist perspective and evaluated how the two opposite social positions, that is, male and female, aid in the perpetuation of social stratification, which leads to self-alienation, where the woman's true self is submerged under the man and his roles. Her female characters' despair is in the form of their deep self-consciousness.

In his review of Katherine Mansfield's, *The Doll's House*, Sahin Kiziltas explains that the State has an inalienable right to define the boundaries between the elite and the underclass by means of its ideological apparatuses. He quotes Althusser (2014) saying, "an ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice or practices. This existence is material" (p. 128). The ruling class predefines the functions for the working class and their ability to alter these boundaries is prohibited. Social structural constraints, social stereotypes, and the prevailing culture of the working class prevents them from moving out of their historically defined position. The upper class hardly accepts the fact that a person from the lower class can own exquisite goods or enjoy a status equal to them. This is the very form of ideology in *The Doll's House*, where Aunt Beryl does not allow the Kelveys to mingle with the Burnells, perpetuating class discrimination. The same goes to the mother of the Kelveys who attempts to block her children from socializing outside of their social stratum, thereby accepting societal restrictions. These set forms of alienation lead to a lack of confidence and excessive fear toward the Kelveys, which deepens class differentiation.

Kiziltas describes how, in modern capitalism, the dominating class unjustly exploits social elite, which subsequently makes the working class obedient to the captivating ideology of the ruling class. To support his views, Kiziltas cites Althusser: "The society takes the shape through the goals of the class" (p. 136).

Ria Mistry (2022) has a Marxist interpretation on Mansfield's *The Doll's House*, *The Garden Party*, and *A Cup of Tea* analyzing them through the lenses of class oppression and master's ideology using Marx. Her qualitative research investigates a paradox where the powerless section of society is ethnically cleansed in a sophisticated way while the powerful elite rules in the realm of ideas. Marxism is a clear denial of the accepted practices of the people through their bare bones economic and social reliefs. In *The Doll's House*, children cast as adult's initiate structural violence through oppression. *The Garden Party* depicts the contempt of Rosemary's family towards the suffering lower class, and in *A Cup of Tea*, Rosemary showcases how charity can be a self-serving act in disguise.

In his essay entitled *The Ecocritical Perspective on Literature: A Case Study of Janet Frame's Fiction*, Lawrence Buell (1995) offers a different viewpoint regarding the Marxist Reading of *The Doll's House*. According to him, the natural environment in Mansfield's story is not simply a setting; it actually takes part in class transactions. An Eco critical approach reconsiders Doane's point by expanding the scope of consideration beyond human relations

with each other and involving nature as a voiceless participant of class disputes. The natural circumstances, shaped and caused by social hierarchal conflicts, respond to and aggravate socio economic struggles.

Thompson's ideas (1963), specifically associated with his version of "the making of the working class," categorically place Mansfield's story in the socio-economic framework of New Zealand at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thompson's model enables us to appreciate class relations not as fixed entities, but as gradually constructed over time due to economic, cultural, and historical change. This sheds further light on Ms Mansfield's novel *The Doll's House* as it views social relations as a construction process instead of a set one and reflects class struggles and processes of class building as fluid.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) comes up with the idea of the "chronotope," which sharpens the analysis of spatial and temporal elements in *The Doll's House*. This theory explains how a given space is influenced by the interaction of time with narrative and the class set. THE CHRONOTOPE OF *THE DOLL'S HOUSE* enables an investigation of the class struggle in the different times of the social relations, in other words, the fluid nature of social relations as opposed to the static phenomena is shown.

In her *Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses and Literary Criticism*, Ozan Altınay analyzes the ideological and the repressive state apparatuses. Ozan uses Althusser's claim that one is an ideology's offspring and so, a product of society's construct that provides them with a role and autonomy in existence. While Marx perceives the working class as subordinated to the bourgeoisie, Ozan participates into Althusser's concept of "interpellation", which describes the individual as a product of ideology. Ozan (1970) cites Althusser, who says that "the superstructure is determined by the base" (p. 1). But Ozan also points out determinants like these are disallowed as they overlook an important fact: people have some freedom to act in ways wholly different from the boundaries established by those beliefs even if they are provided by ideologies.

Grossmann Liane (2001) considers class awareness in the case of *The Doll's House* and argues that pupils learn class ideologies at school at an early age which divides them socially. In her analysis, Liane contends that schools are contact zones for children of different social strata, but instead of dissolving boundaries, such interactions reinforce social divisions. Students display class-conscious behavior patterns in their early school years, which assists in perpetuating social stratification.

Dr. L. Amutha, in *Class Consciousness with Reference to Katherine Mansfield's The Doll's House*, explains how class belonging is a reality that a person cannot hope to transcend. Amutha notes the Aunt Beryl character who considers the Kelveys not beautiful or privileged because they are lower class. She quotes Mansfield depicting Aunt Beryl's contempt: "Her attitude clearly showed that she regarded the Kelveys as destitute and therefore unqualified to appreciate beauty and elegance of *The Doll's House*" (Amutha, 2018, p. 14). The example illustrates the manner in which class prejudice is practiced in ordinary life, which contributes to deep-rooted social discrimination.

Elaborating from Donovan's (2000) focus on the power of brevity, Mansfield provides *The Doll's House* as a case study of how short fiction captures sophisticated socio-economic critique. In Donovan's perspective, short stories are more potent because of their limitations. This is a principle that Mansfield employs in order to distill class conflicts into a powerful and concise narrative. This kind of brevity sharpens the critique of social inequality as it provides a snapshot of class strife in early twentieth century New Zealand.

Eagleton's (1996) Marxist literary criticism offers a class perspective on *The Doll's House* and comes in handy after looking at Eagleton's lavoro sociologico. From Eagleton's perspective, literature serves as a social document and, in this case, goes hand in hand with Mansfield's portrayal of class struggle. With the aid of Eagleton's perspective, *The Doll's House* serves as a site where intimate relationships exist against the backdrop of systemic classed relations, which gives rise to the conflicts encapsulated by gendered hierarchies.

Fredric Jameson (1981) adds another dimension to class analysis in *The Doll's House* by offering the concept of "cognitive mapping". According to Jameson's theory, literature acts as a map for readers to help them navigate through different social strata. In Mansfield's story, *The Doll's House* is a metaphor for shaped social spaces where the affluent live in the center while the poor are pushed to the margins. With Jameson's framework, it is further possible to appreciate the class relations and their spatial and symbolic configuration in the story.

Gilbert's *The Doll's House* Feminist literary critic Sandra Gilbert (1984) classifies her analysis with gender and class as she explains how social norms define class boundaries. Gilbert shows how the female characters are given specific roles that need to be played and in turn, these roles help to maintain a greater structure of power. In the story by Mansfield there is a simultaneous operation of class and gender which governs the lives and interactions of the golden characters rather the people who were born in the middle class.

A short story by Virginia Woolf has been analyzed using a Marxist approach emphasizing class differences and their social relations. Madden (2006) notes Woolf's treatment of class considerations and the class system's ambiguities. The study furthers Woolf's portrayal of class by arguing that it is differentiated internally by sex and race. She deals with the multiplicity of race, gender and class politics in her early writings to a remarkable degree. This research proposes that Woolf uses her satiric wit in the portrayal of class distinction, often turning the gaze upon her own privileged status. While not particularly sympathetic to class structures and speaking for social equality, Woolf's writings manifest instances of her class identity which she affirms.

In their June 2018 article, A Marxist Critique on Bina Shah's *Slum Child*, Muhammad Asif, Sana Fatima and Ayesha Hafeez analyze Bina Shah's novel through Marxist lens. Therein, their analysis elaborates the unfortunate reality of class conflict within Asian nations, wherein Shah's *Slum Child* encapsulates the stark contrast of exposed socio-economic factors. The researchers highlight the glaring gap existing within the upper and lower classes, portraying Shah as an outspoken opponent of the bourgeoisie's oppression of needy workers. Their analysis also shows a dismal depiction of social mobility, wherein the Proletariat is continuously suppressed in an oppressive reality. The study further reveals the complexity of interrelation of economy and sociological intricacies of the work by Shah, demonstrating, from a Marxist ideology, the disorder and suffocation faced by the lower class, and unchallenged affluence of the upper. This thematic analysis resonates with my analysis of *The Doll's House*, as class struggles are highlighted throughout both plays.

Likewise, Ambreen Bibi's March 2021 paper, 'Class Struggle in *The God of Small Things*,' discusses class conflict in Arundhati Roy's novel. This analysis is parallel to my research on Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House*. Bibi and her co-authors argue that *The God of Small Things* vividly portrays the social class conflict and the subordinate class exploitation by the elites. Their conclusions support my research as Mansfield's story also comments on the oppression organized on class lines and the stratified society. Both studies demonstrate the

continued importance of Marxism in literary criticism, revealing the class struggle as a prominent feature in modern and old fiction.

In the December 2020 article *A Marxist Study of Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Tahseen Fatima and Amber Saleem continue focusing on the Marxist analysis of capitalism's violence. Their study claims that the victims of capitalism in Roy's novel undergo a dreadful form of rebellion or retaliation. By interpreting the novel from a Marxist viewpoint, the authors argue that Roy's critique of capitalism is a systematic portrayal of India's capitalist mechanisms and how ideology allows the elite to dominate labor and human capital. Their analysis emphasizes the subjugation and mental manipulation of the working class and how, through capitalism, people are treated unequally in a systematic manner.

Yasemin Asct's article from August 2019, *Marxist Elements in Charles Dickens's Hard Times*, studies socio-political clashes and class-based oppression in the novel. This study corresponds with my investigation of *The Doll's House* since both are aimed at the confining class differentiation within capitalist societies. Asct brings to light the diminished status of the proletariat in comparison to the bourgeoisie dominators. This is important, as the working class is devalued regardless of its important societal contributions. This argument fills an important gap in my research from a Marxist perspective of literature and confirms the subjugation of class exploitation as an essence in literary works.

This study, *A Marxist Analysis of Social Classes and the Exploitation of the Lower Class in Suzanne Collins's The Hunger Games* by Jennifer Cristy Rimun in 2013, adds more depth to the review. Her findings illustrate how capitalism causes severe class block divisions, with the working class enduring miserable living standards while the upper classes revel in wealth and power. In Rimun's analysis, the working class is wrought to submission, which is quite similar to the primary themes in junior level sociology, particularly in Mansfield's *The Doll's House*. This reinforces the systemic oppression of people as a whole which is a theme in literature of various historical and cultural contexts.

In the framework of postcolonial criticism, the analysis of *The Doll's House* could be developed further based on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). class relations in which Said's concept of the "other" applies offers more understanding of the relationship between the Burnell sisters and the Kelveys. Within this framework, *The Doll's House* becomes a symbol of both economic privilege and colonial domination, thus situating Mansfield's story into the wider discourses of power and oppression. The Kelveys as outcasts has a combination of colonial class and race discrimination, which indicates the inequality they experience because of economic and racialized issues. This additional postcolonial argument broadens the analysis beyond a purely Marxist view of class struggle.

The gap in research within this thesis stems from the scant analysis of the intersectional dynamics of *The Doll's House* from a Marxist viewpoint focusing on class and gender. Earlier pieces of literature have deeply focused on the conflict of various classes within the story, but gender roles as an influencing factor in class division has been neglected. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by focusing on Mansfield's portrayal of women and the social norms surrounding them. The study will address that gap to contribute a deeper dimension of interpretation surrounding the power relations hidden in *The Doll's House* to the existing literature on *The Doll's House* and The Mansfield's short story.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper applies a qualitative method using Marxist literary theory as a lens to critique the class system in Katherine Mansfield's *The Doll's House*. The primary source of the

research is the short story itself, paying attention to the language, imagery, and themes which are indicative of articulations of class critique. Other Marxist theory and class analysis scholarly works serve as secondary sources which build the argument and enable the interpretation of the primary source from a class theory perspective. The characterization, the action of the story, and the setting are analyzed with regard to the socio-economic order of the society, demonstrating Mansfield's concern with class relations. The study applies a Marxist approach with class relations integrated into the historical analysis of the work in relation to how the story builds and responds to the power structures in society. This approach will provide an integrated reading of the work in its context in literature and discourse focusing on economy and society.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Analysis of Class Representation in "The Doll's House"**

Katherine Mansfield's *"The Doll's House"* tells the story of a class system that creates a sharp divide between the privileged and the underprivileged. The narrative explores the story's burning theme of class division. The children of the Burnell family are among the well-to-do doll's house that Mrs. Hay bought them. Without question, this family has access to the better things in life. The Kelveys collection is notably different owing to the fact that their mother is a washerwoman and their father is either absent or non-existent. Also, the Kelveys face unrelenting contempt from peers as well as teachers. The story clarifies social biases that are present in school, where the Kelveys are not only ignored but also actively disallowed from mingling with the 'superior' students. Clothing and other class markers such as the doll house's facade serve as parent telling indicators of disparity among distanced groups of people in society. Mansfield beautifully encapsulates the complex social hierarchies existing in a poignant story reflecting the realities of New Zealand in the 20th century. Moreover, she sheds light on the inequalities these characters' experience in their life.

*Instance 1: "When dear old Mrs. Hay went back to town after staying with the Burnells, she sent the children a doll's house."*

The first sentence of "The Doll's House" reveals the incidents where the story derives its narrative propulsion including the exposition. The expression of "dear old Mrs. Hay" indicates something of a familiar connotation of Mrs. Hay which describes her as privileged and indicates that she is intimately acquainted with the Burnell family which tells us that Mrs. Hay belongs to the upper class. In this case, Mrs. Hay is capable of bestowing lavish gifts because she is affluent, absolutely supporting the Burnell's social standing and confirming the doll's house was given to Mrs. Burnell's family on account of great wealth that she possessed. Such an act of kindness is gives quintessential evidence to class discernment. The doll's houses serve as the medium for Burnell's triumph over their economically less fortunate peers, especially the Kelveys, thus demonstrating that economic resources unconsciously determine social relations and stratification.

*Instance 2: "There stood the doll's house, a dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow."*

A thorough explanation of *The Doll's House* offers understanding towards its symbolic value. The description "dark, oily, spinach green" brings to the mind something sinister and even repulsive, additionally contrasting with "yellow," which is bright and cheerful. This contrast can be seen as a metaphorical representation of the class system in the story where *The Doll's House*'s wealth is proudly displayed, but the deep inequalities of society remain

hidden. The striking image of division illustrates inequality in society; where class distinction is enticing yet harshly unfair.

Instance 3: *"For it had been arranged that while the doll's house stood in the courtyard, they might ask the girls at school, two at a time, to come and look."*

As this sentence indicates, the Burnells' social circle is quite exclusive. The words "it had been arranged" demonstrate a deliberate attention was paid to displaying *The Doll's House* as a shrine, reinforcing the idea that it is not simply a toy but rather a luxurious object. The limited access to viewing it "two at a time" highlights the arrogance in the actions of the Burnell family. The Kelveys, however, are pointedly excluded, which accentuates the social lines that determine inclusive worthiness. Embodying such inordinate privilege allows the doll's house to be protected and strategically wielded to illustrate dominance over others.

Instance 4: *"Lil Kelvey's going to be a servant when she grows up."*

This illustrates the deterministic social class structure of the narrative. The prediction that Lil Kelvey will eventually end up being a servant demonstrates the unchanging prejudices concerning social class. The phrase "going to be" indicates destiny rather than free choice, signifying how class standing determines one's path in life. "Servant" evokes images of subservience and inferiority, which demonstrates the lower stratum of the social structure that does not permit persons such as Lil Kelvey social mobility which is affordable. Mansfield captures this moment to illustrate the harshness of a system that automatically assigns roles to people based on their life's origin, reinforcing social injustice.

Through these examples, Mansfield successfully critiques early 20th century society and its class divisions, demonstrating how *The Doll's House* embodies the concept of exclusion and privilege. The way the Burnell children treated their peers demonstrates how social stratification is reinforced through material goods, social perception, and fences which are rigidly enforced, making *The Doll's House* an interesting case study in class relations.

Instance 5: *"How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?" said her cold, furious voice. "You know as well as I do, you're not allowed to talk to them."*

This passage precisely explains the class discrimination and social etiquette that is practiced within the story. Aunt Beryl's furious outburst, "How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?" highlights the social gap and gaps and relations between different classes and the unspoken etiquettes that govern them. The phrase conveys astonishment and extreme outrage at soiling deep social norms which goes beyond the boundaries which have already been set. The description of her tone as 'cold' and 'furious' explicates the extent to which she considers this to be a social blunder, how classism on the contrary goes parallel to social oppression, and still emotive extremity is present in boundary enforcement. In addition, the phrase: 'You know as well as I do, you're not allowed to talk to them' serves a double function reprimanding Kezia for going beyond her prescribed bounds and asserting that there is no reality where people refuse to be excluded as is standard within this society. Aunt Beryl's reaction shows the conditioning response of people directed towards class discrimination which seeks to ensure that people do not cross the social boundaries which are privileged and those who are poor and oppressed.

Instance 6: *"And she stepped into the yard and shooed them out as if they were chickens."*

This excerpt captures the Kelveys' mistreatment in class society very well. Aunt Beryl's action of 'shooing them out' describes the Kelveys as nothing more than chickens that can be tossed aside at will. Kennelly and the Kelveys are described in a stripped of the compassion and respect, metaphorically referring to their chicken-like adornments through the eyes of social

class standards. The Kelveys, who are viewed through the 'superior' social class are strips of humanity, ungracing them of dignity. The verb 'shooed' suggests an impatient dismissive motion. For the Kelveys she represents a class which lacks fundamental decency or civility. It is attitude that Aunt Beryl shows towards the Kelveys that clearly shows the class biases existing in the society that is trying to be sold in the novel. Taking the extreme step of 'removing them from the yard' is but an exaggeration of social class expectations. That act fortifies the assumption that the Kelveys have no business being where the upper class reside. It is but a metaphor for discriminatory actions that are covered under the acceptance of family values and community culture acts broad discrimination.

Instance 7: *"Lil, for instance, who was a stout, plain child, with big freckles, came to school in a dress made from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnells', with red plush sleeves from the Logans' curtains."*

This excerpt provides a sensitive illustration of economic disparity and the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged. From this physical description, Lil is 'a stout, plain child, with big, freckled looked, which places her on the periphery of society, and reinforces its beauty norms.' Certainly, it is her condition that marks her family's financial strife that is most telling. Poverty's lack of means leads to a dress, which is a "green art-serge table cloth of the Burnells." The table cloth dress is a consequence of poverty. Her family's purchase reflects the wealthier family's possessions delineate the socio-stratification of the community. Her garment is further accented by "red plush sleeves from the Logan's curtains." This detail deepens the impression of impoverished clothing the Kelveys must use and emphasize how the Kelveys have to make do with things from refuse bins or items bought at garage sales. Such imagery illustrates the plight of the lower class which is meant to convey the predominant the theme of material deprivation alongside economic hardship and social exclusion.

Instance 8: *"Wicked, disobedient little girl!" said Aunt Beryl bitterly to Kezia, and she slammed the doll's house to."*

It describes Aunt Beryl's behaviour as class conscious, or as an upholder of class distinctions, perhaps illustrating a climactic moment or the extreme side of Aunt Beryl's enforcement class boundaries. The choice of vocabulary such as "wicked and disobedient" suggests a lot more, okay, class boundaries and relations tell a lot more about morality in this case and Aunt Beryl's perspective. In Aunt Beryl's perspective, classifying people socially is something that structures the society and that is why Aunt Beryl is not in a position to allow any sort of kindness to be shown to the Kelveys students.

*The Doll's House* figuratively and literally symbolizes exclusiveness and privilege so "slammed *The Doll's House to*" also marks the closure or juncture to separations lines made within class. The segregating barriers are all social and physical mechanisms intended for structurally and politically imprisoned stratified society. *The Doll's House*, as a form of barely concealed in the open, set aside ornament, mark propulsive territories and set forces from every single region and nation. These discriminating actions combined with class inequalities functioning on smaller lad are the actions as described helped lift the walls of civilization.

Instance 9: *"But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys. Many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them."*

This quotation encapsulates well the arbitrary yet definitive nature of the class divisions in the story's framework. The wording 'the line had to be drawn somewhere' vividly illustrates the unconditional acceptance of social division outlining discrimination as an unavoidable part of society. The phrase 'it was drawn at the Kelveys' suggests passivity and further reinforces

that these boundaries are put in place sans any negotiations, rendering agency obsolete. Known social structures are further reinforced through 'many of the children, including the Burnells, were not allowed even to speak to them.' This underscores the indoctrinated nature of bias within school boundaries. Mechanisms of social reproduction can be found at all levels which entrenches social stratification at an early age. By drawing on the very childhood experiences, the narrative shows how social divisions are entrenched across generations. The fact that schools, which are ideal places of learning and development, instead become confined emblems of societal inequities where children are socialized to internalize class differences. This is the most telling quote as it showcases exclusion as a given, systematically solidifying social divisions.

Instance 10: *"Her hat, perched on top of her high forehead, was a grown-up woman's hat, once the property of Miss Lecky, the postmistress."*

The description of Lil Kelvey's hat serves as a symbol of their social class differences and the struggle between the economic hardships the family went through. Lil wearing a hat belonging to the postmistress, Miss Lecky, shows that her family is financially strapped and uses items that are no longer wanted. The description "grown-up woman's hat" adds to the lack of suitability since it does not fit Lil. She does not seem to have any other options. This detail shows the Kelveys' marginalization because they are poor and their poverty is visible through their raggedy clothes. The gap between Lil's old hat and her more fortunate peers, like the Burnells, had probably even more stylish and modern accessories which widen social gap and illustrate the difference in class in the society.

Instance 11: *"And the consequence was all the children in the neighborhood, the judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the store-keeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together. Not to speak of there being an equal number of rude, rough little boys as well. But the line had to be drawn somewhere."*

This passage highlights the rigid social hierarchy that governs interactions among the children. While external circumstances such as schooling force children of different backgrounds to mix, social prejudices remain firmly in place. The phrase "the line had to be drawn somewhere" signals an arbitrary but deliberate act of exclusion, emphasizing that while some mixing is tolerated, the Kelveys are deemed beyond acceptable social boundaries. This exclusion reflects the entrenched class distinctions within the community, illustrating how social segregation is both maintained and justified. The fact that children internalize and reinforce these divisions at such a young age underscores the pervasiveness of class prejudice, which is not merely an adult construct but a deeply ingrained societal norm passed down through generations.

Instance 12: *"Even the teacher had a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children when Lil Kelvey came up to her desk with a bunch of dreadfully common-looking flowers."*

This example shows the Kelveys' discrimination which is entrenched at a class level, as it applies to their classmates and subordinates like the teacher. The term "special voice" indicates the use of a mocking or patronizing style which suggests that the teacher does not use proper etiquette with the Kelveys but offers them some sort of mock civility or pity. Coupled with her 'special smile' towards the other children as Lil approaches 'special smile' indicates primary school like simplicity further serves to perpetuate the Kelveys' social isolation. In addition, the teacher's attitude towards Lil's flowers, which she called "dreadfully common looking," shows her to be quite unpleasant towards the Kelveys' simple gift. The word

'dreadfully' supports pitying attitude, which indicates, but does not state, aesthetic judgment of the Kelveys' socioeconomic status. This highlights the subtle yet savage class prejudice within society because even with goodwill, the Kelveys' gestures will be regarded as condescending instead of appreciating them. It further emphasizes that instead of alleviating the discrimination, those in authority position such as elders blatantly propagate it, reinforcing the Kelveys' discrimination.

Instance 13: *"What a little guy she looked! It was impossible not to laugh. And her little sister, our Else, wore a long white dress, rather like a nightgown, and a pair of little boy's boots."*

The description of Lil Kelvey's appearance highlights the poverty and social shame that she and her sister suffer. Lil's face also had a certain 'What a little guy she looked!' imprinted on it which shows mockery. Mockery is implied in this instance because when one looks at Lil, her features are so substandard when juxtaposed with the standards of beauty that exist, as to make them laugh. The use of 'guy' also indicates that the individual in question is either a masculine or uncouth person; devoid of more feminine features, remarks, which serves to emphasize the resemblance she bears with masculine apparel, which serves to suggest further a lack of 'proper' feminine entity. Else's 'long white dress, rather like a nightgown, and a pair of little boy's boots' also conveys the same message as regard lack of choice. Their dresses which are completely out of place at one time was elegant and was a reflection of high class society appears to have been grabbed from whichever was at hand. Their inability to afford basic clothing is a reflection of their economic status. These details not only explain the lack of resources the Kelveys have but also explain why their market value of being the subject ridicule pity as mentally insufficient.

Instance 14: *"And the only two who stayed outside the ring were the two who were always outside, the little Kelveys. They knew better than to come anywhere near the Burnells."*

This instance vividly captures the social neglect which is inflicted upon the Kelveys, both through others' actions and their learned behaviour. The expression "the only two who stayed outside the ring" is both figurative and literal: while the rest of the children form social circles, the Kelveys remain eternal outsiders. Their exclusion is not incidental, but inevitable, as "who were always outside" indicates. The phrase "They knew better than to come anywhere near the Burnells" demonstrates their awareness of a lower caste society. There's an inherent understanding that the Kelveys are social outcasts. Sadly, the Kelveys have been trained to accept their ostracism, knowing that any attempt to scale the social ladder will be met with disdain. This extract captures how social barriers become deeply entrenched and affect boundaries permeate external relations but also the self-image and actions of recipients of such inequality.

Instance 15: *"Only the little Kelveys moved away forgotten; there was nothing more for them to hear."*

This illustrates the sentiment of social neglect and exclusion best. The term "forgotten" suggests a lack of attention that is impactful concerning the Kelveys- even when sharing space with the other children, they are entirely overlooked. Their leaving goes unnoticed, reinforcing their status as marginalized individuals whose existence is considered irrelevant. In addition, the expression "there was nothing more for them to hear" indicates that the children do not only lack social interaction, but also an overarching social, experiential framework that includes information relevant to the friendship forming in early childhood. It accentuates how class discrimination renders the Kelveys perpetually absent from opportunities for belonging

and connection. This image once again emphasizes the extremely fragmented social reality within the story while showcasing the extent to which the economy impacts social interactions.

### **Analysis of Economic Structures in "The Doll's House"**

Within the narrative of "The Doll's House" by Katherine Mansfield, a subtle yet pervasive exploration of economic structures unfolds, influencing the characters' lives, interactions, and perspectives. The story not only portrays visible economic disparities, such as the Burnells' privileged position juxtaposed against the Kelveys' economic struggles, but also subtly integrates economic considerations into the characters' daily lives. From Aunt Beryl's disdain for the smell of paint to Lil Kelvey's potential future as a servant, the narrative underscores how economic status shapes individuals' roles, opportunities, and even their sense of self-worth. Occupations and financial pressures manifest in characters like Aunt Beryl, providing a lens through which the reader can explore the complexities of societal expectations and economic constraints in the early 20th-century setting. This economic backdrop adds layers of depth to the characters' experiences, underscoring the pervasive influence of wealth and social standing in the story's rich tapestry.

Instance 1: *"For, really, the smell of paint coming from that doll's house ('Sweet of old Mrs. Hay, of course; most sweet and generous!') -- but the smell of paint was quite enough to make any one seriously ill, in Aunt Beryl's opinion."*

The mention of the smell of paint in this excerpt serves as a subtle yet significant indicator of social class and economic disparity. Aunt Beryl's reaction provides insight into her character and the societal norms of the time. The appreciation or aversion to the smell of paint becomes a symbol of different perspectives on luxury and privilege. Old Mrs. Hay, presumably of a higher social class, is portrayed as generous for gifting the doll's house, suggesting an economic capacity to afford such a gift. However, Aunt Beryl's reaction reflects a contrasting viewpoint. The smell of paint, often associated with the manufacturing or refurbishing of items, is something she finds repulsive, reinforcing the economic disparity between the Burnells and those of a lower social stratum. This aversion subtly highlights the discomfort that economic disparities create, reminding the reader of social divisions and differing standards of living.

Instance 2: *"The daughters of a spry, hardworking little washerwoman, who went about from house to house by the day."*

This sentence emphasizes the economic status of the Kelveys and provides a glimpse into their social standing. The term "spry, hardworking little washerwoman" portrays Mrs. Kelvey's profession as labor-intensive and transient, suggesting economic instability. The use of "little" may imply physical diminutiveness but also conveys a sense of humility or insignificance in the eyes of society. The phrase "going from house to house by the day" underscores the precarious nature of her employment, where she lacks economic security and depends on daily wages. In contrast to the stable and likely more lucrative professions of higher-class families, the Kelveys' economic hardships contribute to their marginalized position in the story's social hierarchy.

Instance 3: *"A letter had come from Willie Brent, a terrifying, threatening letter, saying if she did not meet him that evening in Pulman's Bush, he'd come to the front door and ask the reason why!"*

This sentence introduces an element of fear and intimidation, reflecting economic and social power dynamics. Willie Brent's threatening letter creates an atmosphere of suspense and vulnerability, particularly for Aunt Beryl. His insistence on secrecy and control suggests a

power struggle, hinting at economic or social leverage that he holds over her. The threat of public exposure at the "front door" underscores the societal pressures and fear of scandal that influence characters' actions. This moment extends the theme of economic power beyond the children's interactions, highlighting broader societal hierarchies and struggles.

Instance 4: *"The Burnell children could hardly walk to school fast enough the next morning. They burned to tell everybody, to describe, to -- well -- to boast about their doll's house before the school-bell rang."*

The Burnell children's excitement about showcasing their doll's house highlights the role of material possessions in social standing. Their eagerness to "boast" reflects the significance of wealth in gaining admiration and status among peers. *The Doll's House* becomes a symbol of privilege and exclusivity, reinforcing class distinctions. By positioning material wealth as a means of social validation, the narrative critiques the emphasis placed on economic status in determining social worth.

Instance 5: *"But now that she had frightened those little rats of Kelveys and given Kezia a good scolding, her heart felt lighter."*

Aunt Beryl's sense of superiority is evident in her satisfaction after demeaning the Kelveys. The derogatory term "little rats" dehumanizes them, emphasizing her disdain and reinforcing class-based discrimination. Her pleasure in enforcing social boundaries suggests that maintaining class distinctions is crucial to her self-perception and authority. This moment illustrates the emotional impact of upholding rigid social hierarchies, revealing how those in privileged positions derive comfort from exerting dominance over the less fortunate.

Instance 6: *"The little girls sat under the pines eating their thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake spread with butter. While always, as near as they could get, sat the Kelveys, our Else holding on to Lil, listening too, while they chewed their jam sandwiches out of a newspaper soaked with large red blobs."*

This lunchtime scene vividly illustrates economic disparities and social segregation. The Burnell girls enjoy a lavish meal, symbolizing abundance and privilege, while the Kelveys' humble jam sandwiches wrapped in newspaper represent their economic struggles. The act of sitting "as near as they could get" emphasizes their marginalization, as they are physically and socially distanced from their wealthier peers. This stark contrast highlights the entrenched class divisions that dictate social interactions, reinforcing the Kelveys' exclusion from the privileges enjoyed by the upper class.

Instance 7: *"And perhaps the smell of paint would have gone off by the time it had to be taken in."*

The strong smell of paint serves as a metaphor for economic privilege, symbolizing the newness and exclusivity of *The Doll's House*. The reference to "taking it in" suggests a transition from novelty to acceptance within the Burnell household. Aunt Beryl's aversion to the paint odor underscores the class divide, as her reaction reflects an upper-class sensitivity to minor inconveniences that may go unnoticed by lower social strata. This contrast highlights how economic disparities manifest not only in material possessions but also in sensory experiences, shaping how individuals from different classes perceive their surroundings.

Instance 8: *"There was a twitch, a tug at Lil's skirt. She turned round. Our Else was looking at her with big, imploring eyes; she was frowning; she wanted to go. For a moment Lil looked at our Else very doubtfully. But then our Else twitched her skirt again. She started forward."*

This moment captures the unspoken bond between the Kelvey sisters and their quiet resistance against societal constraints. The "twitch" and "tug" at Lil's skirt symbolize Our Else's

desire to break free from imposed social barriers. Her imploring gaze reflects a yearning for inclusion, while Lil's hesitation embodies an awareness of the restrictions placed upon them due to their economic status. However, Our Else's persistence and Lil's eventual compliance signal a small yet significant act of defiance. This scene poignantly underscores the intersection of economic hardship and social exclusion, revealing the resilience of those marginalized by class divisions.

Mansfield's "*The Doll's House*" intricately weaves economic structures into its narrative, exposing the ways in which wealth and social standing shape human interactions and self-perceptions. Through nuanced character portrayals and vivid instances, the story critiques the rigid class hierarchies that govern societal behavior. The recurring motifs of material wealth, sensory experiences, and social segregation serve as powerful commentaries on economic disparities, making the story a compelling exploration of class exploitation and social stratification.

### **Analysis of Class Distinctions in *The Doll's House***

The story is set in early 20th-century New Zealand, providing a backdrop that reflects the post-Edwardian era's societal norms and values. During this period, class distinctions and social hierarchies were pronounced, influencing people's lives and interactions. The depiction of the Burnell family, with their spacious home and social standing, suggests the existence of a bourgeoisie class. Meanwhile, the Kelveys, as a working-class family, face discrimination and exclusion based on their economic status. The historical context also influences the characters' attitudes and behaviors, as seen in Aunt Beryl's stern reaction to Kezia inviting the Kelveys into the courtyard, highlighting the societal norms and expectations that dictated interactions between different classes. Exploring these historical nuances adds depth to Mansfield's portrayal of class structures in the narrative.

Instance 1:

*"Even the teacher had a special voice for them, and a special smile for the other children when Lil Kelvey came up to her desk with a bunch of dreadfully common-looking flowers."*

In this sentence, the teacher's differential treatment of Lil Kelvey is evident, emphasizing the class-based discrimination prevalent in the story. The use of the term "special voice" implies a condescending or patronizing tone reserved for Lil, setting her apart from the other children. The accompanying "special smile" further underscores the teacher's biased behavior, as if Lil's actions or offerings are seen as less valuable or acceptable. The phrase "dreadfully common-looking flowers" not only denotes a judgmental attitude towards Lil's gesture but also adds a socio-economic layer, implying that the Kelveys are perceived as socially inferior or lacking in taste. This linguistic choice subtly reinforces the class divisions present in the narrative, where even simple acts of kindness are subject to scrutiny based on social standing.

Instance 2:

*"For the fact was, the school the Burnell children went to was not at all the kind of place their parents would have chosen if there had been any choice."*

This sentence alludes to the constrained circumstances of the Burnell family and provides insight into the economic challenges they face. The phrase "if there had been any choice" implies that the Burnells did not have the privilege or means to select the ideal school for their children. The implication is that the school attended by the Burnell children falls short of their parents' preferences, suggesting a compromise due to economic limitations. This

highlights the impact of socio-economic factors on the family's decisions and positions them within a specific class context. The sentence reflects the broader theme of economic struggle and how it shapes the characters' experiences and opportunities in the story.

Instance 3:

*"And the consequence was all the children in the neighborhood, the judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the store-keeper's children, the milkman's, were forced to mix together."*

This sentence illustrates the forced mingling of children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds due to the limited schooling options in the neighborhood. The mention of the judge's little girls, the doctor's daughters, the store-keeper's children, and the milkman's signifies a mix of families representing different social classes. The use of the word "forced" implies that this mixing is not a matter of choice but a result of the available schooling options. The sentence underscores the lack of social segregation in the school setting, bringing together children from various economic backgrounds, yet it hints at potential challenges and disparities arising from these differences. The forced interaction among children from different classes becomes a significant aspect of the story, impacting relationships and perceptions among the characters.

Instance 4:

*"Lil, for instance, who was a stout, plain child, with big freckles, came to school in a dress made from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnells', with red plush sleeves from the Logans' curtains."*

This sentence highlights the economic disparity between Lil Kelvey and her classmates. The description of Lil as a "stout, plain child, with big freckles" suggests a lack of conventional beauty standards, potentially influencing her social standing. The use of the phrase "came to school in a dress made from a green art-serge table-cloth of the Burnells', with red plush sleeves from the Logans' curtains" emphasizes Lil's economic circumstances. Her dress is repurposed from materials given by wealthier families, symbolizing her reliance on hand-me-downs and the economic divide between her family and those of her classmates. This example reflects the material differences in the characters' lives, contributing to the broader theme of economic disparities in the story.

Instance 5:

*"But the line had to be drawn somewhere. It was drawn at the Kelveys."*

This sentence underscores the social division and discrimination present in the story. The phrase "the line had to be drawn somewhere" indicates a figurative boundary established by the characters, signifying a limit to social interaction. In this case, the line is drawn at the Kelveys, implying that there are specific individuals or groups deemed socially unacceptable or inferior by the majority. This exemplifies a clear class distinction where the Kelveys are positioned as outsiders and face exclusion based on societal prejudices. The sentence reflects the prevalent theme of class hierarchy and discrimination within the narrative. The analysis and revisits the overarching themes explored in the thesis. It provides a coherent summary of the research, emphasizing the key takeaways and insights. The conclusion also reflects on the broader implications of the study, discusses any limitations encountered, and suggests avenues for future research. This final chapter aims to leave a lasting impression on the reader, encapsulating the significance of the research within the larger academic discourse.

In "The Doll's House," Mansfield masterfully employs vivid descriptions and meticulous details to illustrate the stark societal hierarchy between the Burnells and the Kelveys. The Burnells, representing the privileged bourgeoisie, are characterized by their extravagant doll's

house. This miniature mansion, described in rich detail, serves as a symbolic representation of economic and social disparities. The choice of words like "dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow" not only paints a visual image but also conveys a sense of opulence that sharply contrasts with the Kelveys' economic struggles. Furthermore, the doll's house symbolizes not only material wealth but also the social status associated with it. The Burnell children's possession of such a luxurious toy solidifies their place in the societal hierarchy. Mansfield skillfully weaves this symbolism into the narrative, prompting readers to question the implications of inherited privilege and the perpetuation of class distinctions.

The power dynamics in "The Doll's House" serve as a pervasive undercurrent that shapes every interaction within the narrative, accentuating the deeply entrenched societal hierarchy. The discrimination against the Kelveys is a poignant aspect intricately woven into the narrative, exposing the dehumanizing impact of deeply ingrained societal biases. Mansfield's exploration of discrimination against the Kelveys serves as a powerful commentary on the insidious nature of prejudice, prompting readers to reflect on broader implications and advocate for societal introspection and change. Mansfield's adept use of language and narrative techniques in "The Doll's House" intricately contributes to the nuanced exploration of class dynamics. The disdainful remarks of characters like Aunt Beryl and the biased treatment exhibited by the teacher are linguistic mirrors reflecting the deep-seated societal attitudes towards class distinctions. Through a rich interplay of character interactions, descriptions, and symbolism, Mansfield presents a compelling critique of the rigid class structures that dictate social inclusion and exclusion within the narrative.

## Discussion

Mansfield's *The Doll's House* recounts the example of the class system and its impact on society life in New Zealand, in the early twentieth century. The division between *The Doll's House*, which represents affluence, segregation and deep rooted social divides, is showcased through the keenly drawn boundaries between the Burnell family and the Kelveys. The focus of this excerpt is to provide class representation within the story alongside existing literature and critique to demonstrate how Mansfield sought to denounce the deeply established class systems in her society.

What stands out in the story is the perennial class system rooted into the lives of the characters which is best exemplified by the description of the Burnells and Kelveys. The Kelveys are Burnells dominate house because of their upper class stature and thus enjoy perks that come with their social standing. One example of this is the lavish doll's house Burnells received from Mrs Hay and a vast number of children were privileged with birthday presents. Children such as Susan received presents and were framed as "motorists". In as much as Pamela Dunbar argues the doll's house is but a toy, it is a reflection of their status and serves as a miniature setting of the social world, which he aptly remarked (Dunbar 1997). The eagerness of upper class children to show off the doll's house created by hand for them in the school serve to confirm the children's beliefs that material possessions give one social status, which reinforces the social hierarchy.

The Kelveys are never included in any activity social or recreational. They are the daughters of a washerwoman with a missing father. This makes them the target of scorn and ridicule, set aside as outcasts. They are living in poverty which is just further symbolized by the tablecloth and curtains masquerading as dresses. The fundamental differentiation between the Burnells and the Kelveys signifies the underlying financial imbalance which fuels the class

system. As noted by Angela Smith, "As always in *Mansfield*, there is a story behind the story; here the social injustice cannot be overlooked: The Kelveys' destitution is used to show the cruelty of a society that judges people socially according to their bank accounts" (Smith, 2000).

The doll's house is perhaps the most striking class division symbol within the story. Its description as dark, oily, spinach green doll's house picked out with bright yellow suggests an alluring yet grotesque figure. It reflects the manner in which wealth works, nice on the surface, but deeply rooted in inequality. For the Burnell children, the doll's house becomes a means of exercising their social power because they can now control who can access it and keep the Kelveys away. The mere act of exclusion would seem harmless, but in reality, it serves as a window into the unspoken social rules which govern the inclusion as well as exclusion of individuals within the confines of social interaction.

Critics point out that *The Doll's House* also encapsulates the class boundaries of the society. Hanson, for example, argues that *The Doll's House* is 'an enclosed exclusive world of the bourgeoisie, where privilege is carefully guarded and social mobility virtually impossible' (Hanson, 1981). This, in turn, explains Aunt Beryl's reaction when Kezia invites the Kelveys to view *The Doll's House*. Her outraged protest, 'How dare you ask the little Kelveys into the courtyard?' reveals the boundaries of social order and the etiquette that is observed among different social strata.

Also, it is noted how class bias is embedded into the framework of their society, especially in schools. The school's treatment of the Kelveys as, 'speaking with a special voice to them and with a special smile to other children', highlights the extreme degree of class discrimination (V. A. Anderson). Moreover, this discrimination is reinforced by Lil's submission of 'dreadfully common looking flowers for the teacher's assignment'. In the eyes of the teacher, these flowers received no respect but mockery. It is, of course, selective mockery, which counts as bias. As critic Kate Fullbrook remarks, such behavior shows 'the internalization of class biases by those in positions of authority who perpetuate rather than contest social order' (Fullbrook, 1986).

The Kelveys are excluded from social interactions with other children of their age and the adults, which is reflected in Aunt Beryl's contemptuous attitude towards them. Her "little rats" remark and the phrase "shooing them out as if they were chickens," depicts them in a contemptuous manner devoid of humanity and dignity reinforcing their social status as 'the Kelveys.' This captures the entire social trap that trains people to preserve class differences to subordinate those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

*Mansfield* further examines the socioeconomic systems that give rise to class distinctions. The economic hardships of the Kelveys is highlighted alongside the bulldog like status of Burnells as exemplified by their old and second-hand clothes and their meager diet. The Burnell girls' lunch of "thick mutton sandwiches and big slabs of johnny cake" sharply contrasts with the Kelveys' meal of "jam sandwiches out of a newspaper," showcasing the level of economic disparity that governs social relations. As one critic, Sidney Janet Kaplan, notes, "*Mansfield* uses food as a metaphor for class, drawing attention to the material deprivation of the lower class and the lavish life enjoyed by the upper" (Kaplan, 1991).

The Kelveys' family struggles with class and poverty, more so because of the expectation that Lil will likelihood take up the role of a servant as she is social class predetermined to do. This expectation, as critic Patricia Moran contends, "shows how societal views are grounded in particular 'meritocratic' stereotypes of society which unforgivingly strip Lil of any chances to move up in life" (Moran, 1996). *Mansfield* takes advantage of this moment to express

frustration towards a society that places people in boxes and assigns roles determined by one's background.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the stated objectives, the character, plot and setting analysis using a Marxist approach as well as how Katherine Mansfield critiques or supports the existing class systems - *The Doll's House* stands out as a striking critique of the harsh class disparity in New Zealand during the early 20th century. Mansfield's story is deeply critical of class discrimination which subclasses people in society and denies them the opportunities to be included into a certain societal stratum, using the richly symbolic social interactions of the characters.

The Marxist reading of *Doll's House* argues that its characters serve as caricatures of their socio-economic status. The Burnell children embody the upper middle class, or the bourgeois, as they luxuriate in the ownership of an extravagant doll's house. Their unabashed want to show off *The Doll's House* to their classmates illustrates the need to flaunt their social status, which supports the notion that a person's standing in society is dictated by their wealth. Conversely, the Kelveys epitomize the proletariat, as they are economically deprived. Social isolation is the only form of engagement with peers, which underscores the discriminative and degrading nature of class targeted exclusion that these children, and indeed adults, are subjected to.

The exclusion of the Kelveys from the doll's house illustrates how class boundaries are maintained. This doll's house is not simply a mark of wealth and privilege; it is used as a means of enforcing social class. Notice how the Burnell children use the doll's house to display their dominance over others - it is as though their belongings give them such power. The school setting, where children of differing socio-economic statuses must interact with each other, resembles the greater inequalities present in society. The mingling of children of differing social standing, like the lunch combination shown here, underscore the oppression of class structures on social relations.

In her narrative, Mansfield appears to confront the class concerns of her day by revealing the inequitable treatment embedded in the systems. The Kelveys' forced invisibility paired alongside the Burnells' consumption of privilege is a poignant critique of a society which is perennially preoccupied with the finances of respectable individuals. Mansfield demonstrates how Aunt Beryl and other authority figures enforce class discrimination, perpetuating social hierarchies through the use of power.

The doll's house captures the material wealth of the Kelveys and the overwhelming poverty of the bourgeoisie through *The Doll's House*, which symbolizes the Kelveys' rough clothing and meager meals. Through the vivid illustrations used to describe the Kelveys and the powerful symbols Mansfield uses, one sees the social class constraints and prejudices, like the expectation of the child Lil Kelvey taking on the role of a servant, which in a deterministic society like this, there is no other option. The expectation exposes the rigid class norms which make it impossible for people like Lil to envision a different future.

Mansfield's *The Doll's House* continues to foster deeper thought and discussion on class relations and how they are organized within society. Social inequalities are very much a contemporary issue and are expertly explored in this story through economic divides and class discrimination. In terms of further research, it would be interesting to analyze how Mansfield's use of language and narrative structure differentiate the social class, and consider how class intersects with other social identities like race and gender. *The Doll's House* is one more compelling study on how class is represented using the characters, plot, and the setting as tools to critique the inflexible class system of society in the early 20th century. The story contributes to the existing literary conversation around class inequities through social inequality by depicting class structure by analyzing the limbs of society unlike the head which seldom accepts criticism of superior socio-economics. Mansfield captures the attention of her audience through her descriptions and rich symbolic word choice as she captures the harsh light of her society, and as well compels them to self-introspect as to why the issue of inequality exists in society.

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