Tag, Catalog, Iterate: A Non-Linear Analysis of Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party"

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Works of literary criticism are typically built around their central arguments. The argument is often an opinion about a theme, function, or other textual attribute, and it is presented along with textual evidence that supports it. This usually means that a critical work closely examines textual details that are relevant to its thesis, while moving past or even ignoring less relevant details. Figure 1 shows a simplified illustration of this process. If each segment in the primary text contains details of types A, B, C, or D, a typical critical work will select one or more of these details for its analysis, while other details remain either less examined or fully unexamined.

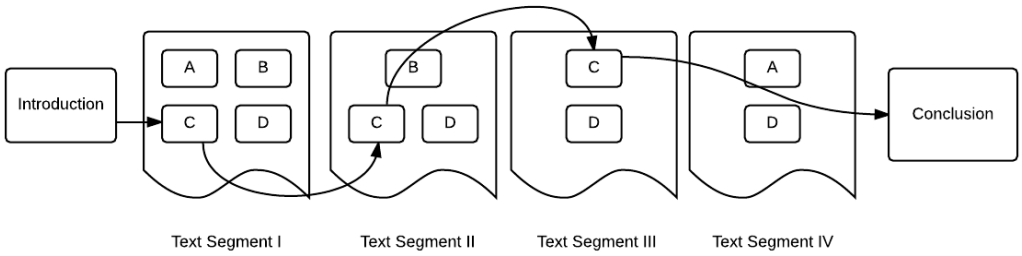

Figure 1: Narrative Criticism

There is nothing inherently problematic with this style of criticism—the thread that ties together these elements is that which makes the critical work enjoyable and easy to follow. This is also the structure that helps a critic to outline his or her contribution to the discussion: "Critic X discusses textual element A, and critic Y discusses textual element B, but they're both ignoring the key to understanding the text, which is element C." This can be a reasonably satisfying line of reasoning, but what if there were a more inclusive, less centralized way of talking about a text? Could we imagine a pluralist, iterative style of literary criticism? Would such a style be useful, or even desirable?

First, it is necessary to admit that this is not a new idea. What I will be calling "iterative criticism" here is present to some degree in any metaliterary work that gradationally catalogs, maps, or annotates a literary text. One such work is Don Gifford's monumental *Ulysses Annotated*, a book of annotations for James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Staggering in the breadth of its scope, it analyzes the novel on the level of the word and phrase, to such an extent that its own length exceeds that of its primary text. As a non-narrative work that refrains from privileging any particular reading of the text, it can be read non-linearly: a reader interested in, say, the third word of Chapter 3 can simply find the relevant annotation and start reading. This property is probably that which has led to its being given the enigmatic Library of Congress subject heading "Joyce, James — Dictionaries," rather than "Joyce, James — Criticism," like most other Joycean critical works. But Gifford's volume remains critical, despite the way works of annotation are often (quite literally, one might say) marginalized.

Another notable work of iterative criticism is Roland Barthes's *S/Z*. Subtitled "an essay," it is a book-length analysis of Honoré de Balzac's short story "Sarrassine" with a nearly phrase-level focus. Barthes divides the story into 561 textual units he calls "lexias," some of

which contain a few sentences, and some which contain just a few words. Each of these lexias he discusses in detail, according to five "codes," or groupings of annotations: hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, and referential. A typical annotated lexia looks like this:

> 16. *Nobody knew what country the Lanty family came from,* ★ A new enigma, thematized (the Lantys are a family), proposed (there is an enigma), and formulated (what is their origin?): these three morphemes are here combined in a single phrase (HER. Enigma 3: theme, proposal, and formulation).

Here, Barthes catalogs the emergence of "Enigma 3," belonging to the hermeneutic code ("HER"). This enigma will make several more appearances in Barthes's essay, the set of which forms a critical narrative in miniature. While *S/Z* is certainly meant to be read linearly, from beginning to end, these codes and enigmas form a network of non-linear subnarratives that provide alternate trajectories. In fact, one could almost call *S/Z* a proto-hypertext, in that its layering and self-referentiality provide a multiplicity of pathyways through the critical discourse. According to a 1994 definition by computer scientists Frank Halasz and Mayer Schwartz, hypertext provides "the ability to create, manipulate, and/or examine a network of information containing nodes interconnected by relational links" (30). This is precisely what *S/Z* accomplishes. One might even imagine that if Barthes had experience with a hypertext language like HTML, the codes and themes he cites might be linked together technologically as well as textually. That is one of the goals of the following experiment.

The Experiment

The following is an experiment in iterative literary criticism, where the text of Katherine Mansfield's story "The Garden Party" is broken into 205 Barthesian lexias, annotated, and tagged. These tags are then linked to each other, forming miniature topic-based critical works. Clicking on a tag scrolls the page to the next annotation with that tag, and if there are no more, the page loops back to the first. A reader interested, in say, the semiotics of flowers in "The Garden Party" might read an annotation tagged "flora", while a reader interested in gender dynamics might choose the tag "sexuality." Since many lexia have more than one tag, the reader may switch between related tags once annotations with their first chosen tag have been exhausted. This effectively creates a non-linear critical work that more resembles a decision tree than a straight line. In this way, the reader effectively assembles his or her own critical narrative in the act of reading. A revised flowchart for this style of criticism might look something like Figure 2.

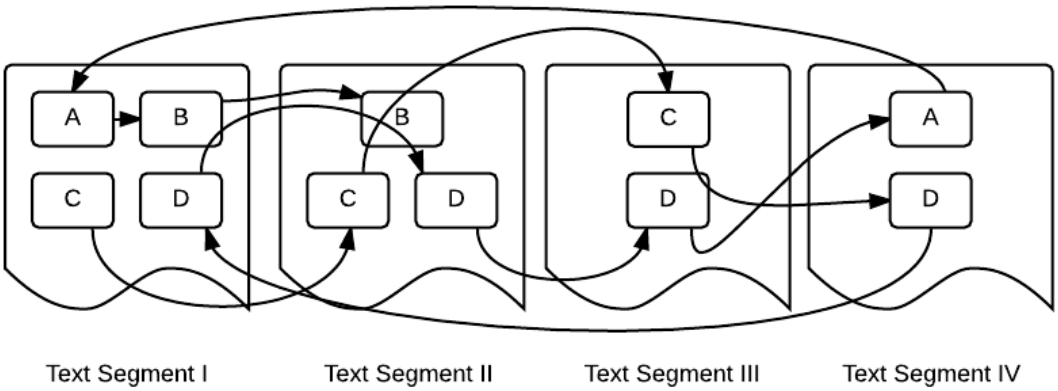

Figure 2: Iterative Criticism

One of the advantages of this iterative style, compared with the narrative style, is that it opens the textual field to the greater possibility of surprises. New details emerge that might have otherwise been elided had the detail needed to fit into a prose paragraph, and the paragraph into an overarching argument. The two-column format used below privileges no particular reading, and as such, it allows for minority readings—critical theories that may not have enough textual evidence to be made into a standard-length journal article—to have equal status with majority readings.

Another advantage of this style is that, by cataloging the appearance of textual themes, tensions, and images chronologically—that is, charting their occurrences according to where they happen in the story—we can derive a better picture of how those literary elements unfold, and where they disappear. To Barthes, this is the music of the text, which he charts literally in Figure 3.

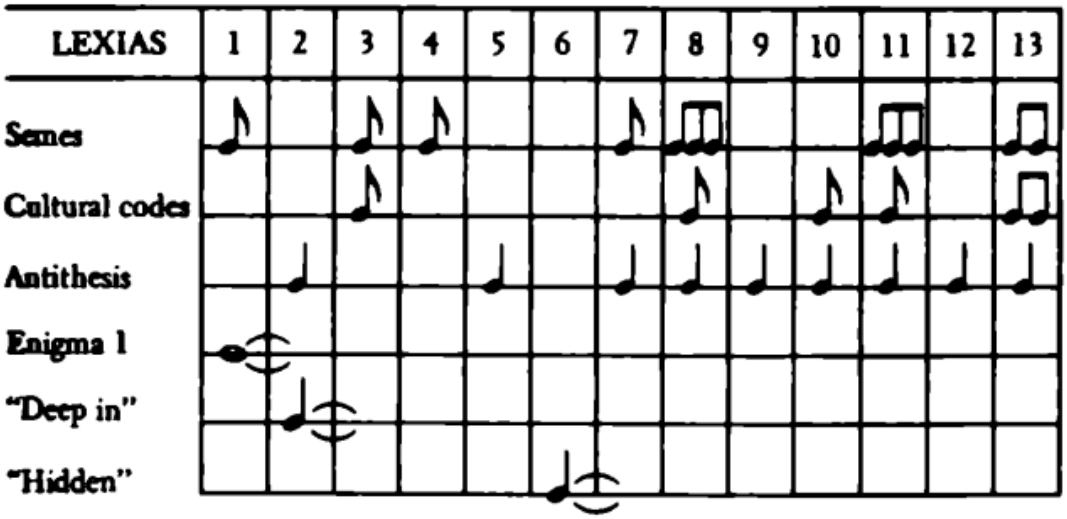

Figure 3: Barthes, Score for "Sarrassine" Lexias 1-13 (29)

Rather than use semes and cultural codes, however, this edition of "The Garden Party" is tagged nonhierarchically, using roughly fifty tags. The types of these tags range everywhere from color images like "green" and "black" to the story's treatment of social class, given by the tag "class." Some significant objects, such as Laura's hat are tagged, as well as the story's envelope(s). A full list is given in the iPython notebook used to generate tag statistics. Figure 4 shows all tags with more than three occurrences, sorted according to how often they are used.

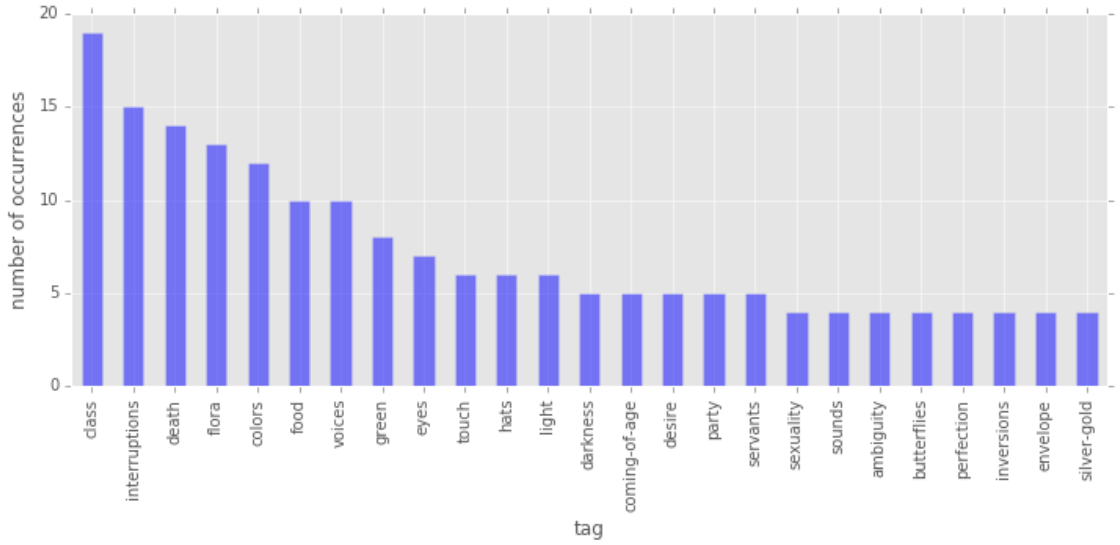

Figure 4: Most Frequently Occurring Tags

The tag that appears the most often is "class." This is unsurprising, given the story's overt treatment of social class. The second most frequent tag is "interruptions," which charts both syntactic truncation ("isn't life" of L204, for instance) and proairetic truncation, such as the interrupted breakfast of L7. Other notable tags include "flora," used whenever literal flowers appear, or when floral metaphors are used, such as in L150. These tags can help to track trends, themes, and moods as they unfold in the chronology of the story.

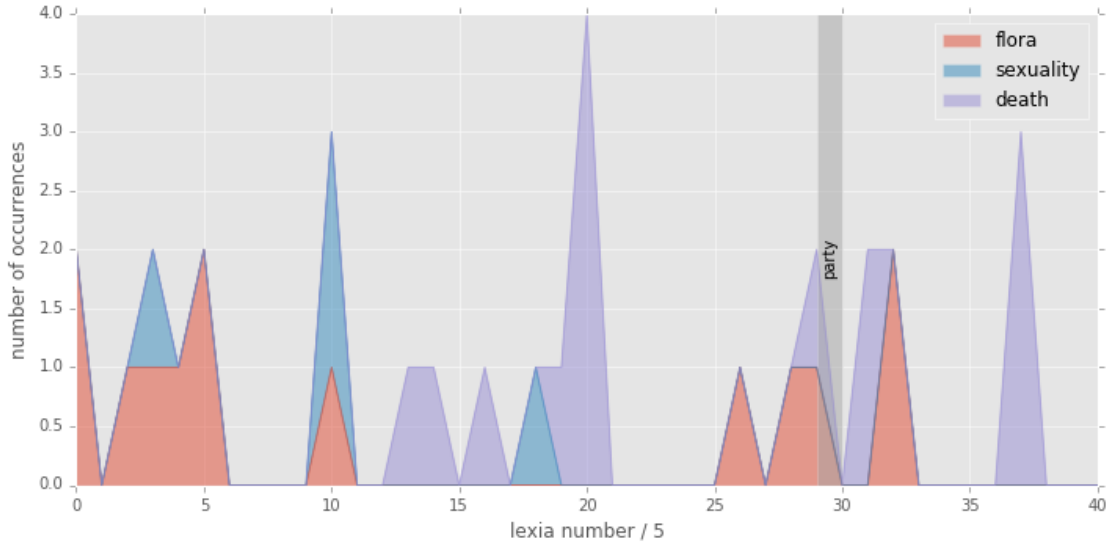

Figure 5: Flora, Sexuality, Death

Figure 5 shows three of these tags: flora, sexuality, and death, plotted according to where they occur in the story. Flora and sexuality tend to collocate, as one might expect, and for the most part, references to flowers and references to death are fairly separate, with the exception of the group that occurs around the time of the party. (The X values in this chart correspond to the lexia numbers divided by 5, grouped here for smoothing.) Upon closer examination, it turns out that these are some interesting collocations of floral and morbid imagery. One is

Laura's hat, black as if in mourning but "trimmed with gold daisies"; another is the floral metaphor of the dying afternoon: "the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed" (L150).

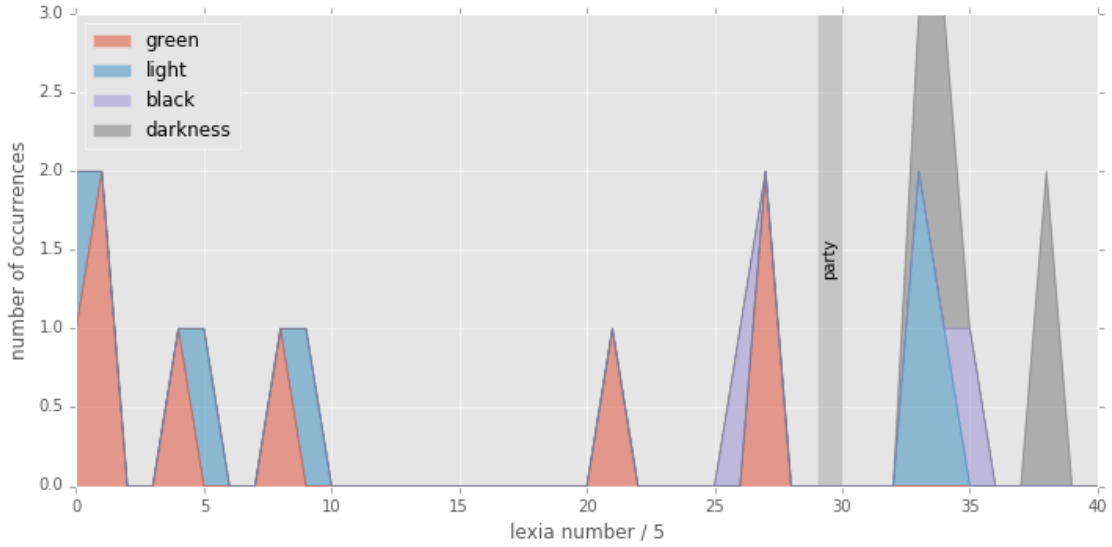

Figure 6: Green, Light, Black, Darkness

With colors, too, we find interesting collocations, as shown in Figure 6. On the whole, references to greenness or green things (the grass, bushes, and turban, for instance) collocate with the morning and with preparations for the garden party. References to light occur mostly in this portion of the story, too, and references to black and darkness mostly happen after nightfall. However, there are two notable surprises here: the collocation of green and black at 27, directly before the party, and the strange combination of light, black, and darkness around 33. The first corresponds to the black hat of L137 followed by the green band and green tennis court of L140. One might read the appearance of the black hat as a hint of the mourning scene to come, and the greenness of the garden party as the apex of the green imagery that has been building during the party's preparations. The second unexpected collocation, that of light and darkness at 33 in this chart, is the chiaroscuro generated by the dusky slant of light that makes the road "gleam white" and throws a "deep shade" on the cottages (L171). Based on this chart alone, it might be able to guess the timeframe of the story (in classic modernist fashion, it takes place in a single day) as well as the time of sunset (around location 35 in the chart).

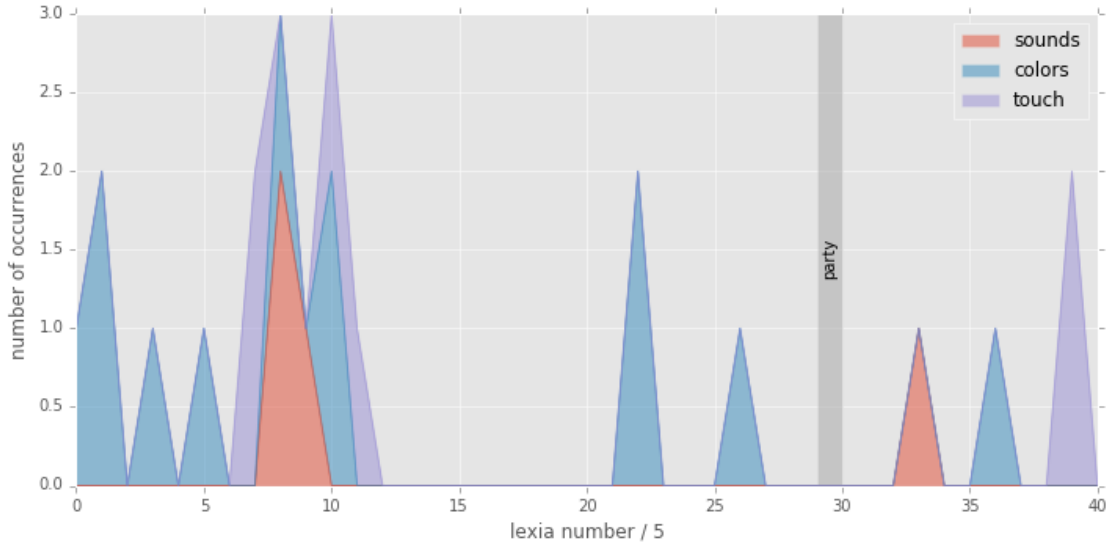

Figure 7: Sounds, Colors, Touch

Sensory descriptions might also be useful to study quantitatively. Figure 7 shows tags of sounds, colors, and touch. A few examples of these are the "chuckling absurd" sound of the piano at L47, the repetition of "pink" in describing the lilies at L53, and Laura's nibble of her mother's ear at L58. Most of the sounds, colors, and touches occur in the first quarter of the story, highlighting the sensory richness of the morning preparations, which contrast greatly with the "dark," "oily" imagery of the cottages. Notably, however, there are none of these impressions during the party itself, or immediately before or after. Only Laura's memory remains, when she recalls "it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange!" (L172).

Many more quantitative literary analyses are made possible by this iterative approach. For a fuller list of tag comparison charts, and to run the Python 3 code against arbitrary collections of tags, see the iPython notebook used to generate these charts.

Iterative criticism is not meant to replace narrative criticism. Nor is it meant to represent the circumscribed totality of what can be said about a literary text. There are some birds-eye readings that simply do not fit into the sentence-level focus given here, and that is especially true of historical and biographical readings. But the insight gained from this inclusive, step-by-step technique might help us to discover things that the teleology of narrative criticism hides. It might help us to, in Barthes's words, "remain attentive to the plural of a text" (11).

Textual Notes

The text of Katherine Mansfield's story presented below is derived from the GITenberg edition of *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. The plain text was marked up using the Extensible Markup Language (XML) format of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). This format, the standard markup language for archival literary projects, is a semantic markup language —unlike markup languages like HTML 4.0, which describe how a text should *look*, i.e. `<i>The Garden Party</i>`, TEI XML describes what the text *is*, i.e. `<title>The Garden Party</title>`. This allows text segments to be selected based on their literary, rather than

textual attributes.

The TEI text is transformed to HTML using `xsltproc` and an XSL stylesheet, and combined with this introductory text, which is transformed from markdown into HTML using `pandoc`. The files are combined using `sed`, and the compilation process automated using a makefile written for `GNU make`. A short jQuery script handles the interactive tag behavior.

Since the text has been broken into segments, pilcrow marks (¶) have been used to denote the beginnings of paragraphs as they appeared in the original text.

This edition has been made using exclusively free and open-source software. This text and the source code for this project is released under the GNU Public License v3, the full text of which is available in the included license.

Instructions

1. Read the full text of the story.
2. Find a passage that interests you, and read the commentary for that passage.
3. Click on a tag in that commentary that interests you. Notice that you're taken to another annotation that has this tag.
4. Continue to follow the tag you've chosen until you've read all annotations with that tag. Alternatively, click on another tag, and follow its thread.

The Garden Party

by Katherine Mansfield

Text	Commentary
¶[1] And after all the weather was ideal.	This sentence begins *in medias res*, as if the reader were joining a conversation that was already taking place. The word "and" also begins about thirty other sentences in the story, or roughly 5% of the story's sentences (see these calculations in the "and" notebook). perfection interruptions medias-res
[2] They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden-party if they had ordered it.	This is the first instance of the adjective "perfect" which will appear three times in the story, highlighting an implicit valuation of weather and other conditions that will be challenged by the carter's death. The absurd notion of ordering weather conditions, while of course not meant unironically, still suggests the imagined reach of the wealth depicted here. Mrs. Sheridan might almost believe, this line seems to say, that the weather conditions themselves might be controlled for a certain price. The implication, then, is that death, another force of nature, might also be controlled, so that it is not allowed to interfere with the perfection of the garden party. perfection class

[3] Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer.

The day is “windless”; this contrasts with L48 where “little faint winds were playing chase.” Since gold is usually a sign of wealth, this color word helps to paint the upper class setting of the story better than a word like “yellow.” The daisies on Laura's hat in L137 are also gold. wind colors blue light silver-gold class

[4] The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seemed to shine.

Like the cook, the gardener is not named, but takes the name of his occupation (see also L75). Since “rosette” in this sense is a flower-shaped area, we see that there has been a transformation from the living flowers of the daisies to the dead (“dark”) patch of grass that bears only the shadow of a flower. The etymology of “rosette” further suggests a metaphorical transformation from daisies (perhaps associated with life in the symbolic economy of the hat in L137) to roses, “the only flowers that impress people,” according to L5. flora green hats

[5] As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden-parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing.

The roses, like workers from L15, are “impressive.” Davis notes that “it is with this view of flowers as socially useful that the workman's spontaneous appreciation of the lavender is contrasted,” referring to L30. flora impressions

[6] Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels.

This is the first instance of the word “green,” a major motif in the story. As in L2, the coincidence of the mass rose blooming with the garden party continues the suggestion that even nature conspires to make the garden party “perfect.” This is one of the factors that makes the carter's death all the more devastating. colors green

¶[7] Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the marquee.

Breakfast is interrupted; this continues the theme of interruptions begun in L1. We are never told what text or images the marquee shows, or whether it can be seen from the “mean cottages” at the bottom of the hill. If it is visible from these cottages, this may contribute to Laura's anxiety around L118, especially since Laura is acutely aware of the position of the marquee, helping to decide where to place it in L15–29. interruptions

¶[8] “Where do you want the marquee put, mother?”

¶9 “My dear child, it's no use asking me. I'm determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest.”

In a carnivalesque inversion of generational status, Mrs. Sheridan releases her authority for the duration of the party. This climaxes in L76, when she “echoes” Sadie's question “dreamily.” However, this inversion is not to last very long, since she becomes much more authoritative, and much less dreamy, by L78. coming-of-age carnival inversions

¶10 But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men.

This is the first of eighteen sentences in the story that begins with “but.” These sentences comprise roughly three percent of the total sentences in the story.

¶11 She had washed her hair before breakfast, and she sat drinking her coffee in a green turban, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket.

Laura's sisters Meg and Jose are introduced here, although Laura's brother Laurie won't be introduced until L38. Antony Alpers suggests that the names Meg, Jose, and Laurie may be an homage to characters with those names in Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* (572). Meg and Jose are revealed to be dressed fashionably, both in traditional apparel of distant countries. Meg's “green turban” is either a literal turban, a fashionable adaptation of the middle eastern headdress, or a towel or other cloth wrapped in a similar way, as Mrs. Sheridan seems to suggest in L78, when she tells Meg to take the “wet thing” off of her head. The word “turban” may be etymologically related to “tulip” (_OED_, “turban”). That this is green enhances this botanical reference, and adds another image of floral blossoming that resonates with the theme of sexual awakening. orientalism colors green butterflies

¶12 “You'll have to go, Laura; you're the artistic one.”

¶13 Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter.

Now Laura is the “butterfly” instead of Jose (see L11), “flying” away with her bread-and-butter. By metaphorical extension, Laura is a “social butterfly,” as well, flying from person to person, gathering nectar from each. flora butterflies

14 It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors, and besides, she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.

As “delicious” is typically used to describe the taste of food, its use here to describe the benefits of eating outdoors is a parapraxis of Laura's thought. food

¶15 Four men in their shirt-sleeves stood grouped together on the garden path. They carried staves covered with rolls of canvas, and they had big tool-bags slung on their backs. They looked impressive.

These workers are “impressive” to Laura, possibly for their physical strength (carrying “big tool-bags”) and their state of undress. The roses of L15 are also described as “impressive.” impressions desire

16 Laura wished now that she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn't possibly throw it away. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them.

Laura wishes she was not as delicate, as attention-getting as a butterfly, attracting the smiles from these men that we see in L18 and L19. Her blush might be used here to signal Laura's inability to reconcile her excitement for the men with her social position as their director and deputy employer. She might also feel embarrassed at her liminal state—interrupted in the middle of breakfast—a feeling which she tries to counterbalance by looking “severe.” Regarding Laura's attempt to “look severe and even a little bit short-sighted,” Kleine describes this as Laura's “practic[ing] adult faces” (365). butterflies

¶17 “Good morning,” she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, “Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?”

Laura tries on a metaphorical adult hat in imitating her mother. (She will literally wear an adult's hat in L133.) Her stammering is another instance of interrupted speech. Robert Davis finds this scene to be essential of the story, arguing that “at the core of most scenes is Laura's attempt first to deal with other people or with experience on a mature level in a style—whether verbal or physical—learned from her mother; then her loss of confidence in that style; and finally her retreat to childish responses” (61). Thomas Day applies Bakhtin's discourse theory to the understanding of this passage, arguing that “if you can own another's words, by inflectng them with your own accents … you can exert a degree of ownership over that other which affirms your status within a dominant social group” (130). interruptions coming-of-age voices

¶18 “That's right, miss,” said the tallest of the men, a lanky, freckled fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag, knocked back his straw hat and smiled down at her. “That's about it.”

The man's freckles are a sign that he has spent time outdoors, and his straw hat, inexpensive and practical for the summer, is most likely a sign of his social class. That he smiles “down” on her doesn't merely suggest benign age-based condescension, but is a trigonometric indication of how close they must be standing for this angle to be significant. If we conservatively estimate that their height difference is one foot, and that looking “down” implies a downward angle of at least 20 degrees, then they're standing only 2.75 feet apart. If that angle is more

pronounced, at 30 degrees, then they must be standing a mere 1.73 feet apart. class hats

¶19 His smile was so easy, so friendly that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! And now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. “Cheer up, we won't bite,” their smile seemed to say.

The details Laura notices in the man suggest her desirous gaze toward him. The emphasis she gives them, denoted by the exclamation point, further supports this view. The blue of the man's eyes is unlike the blue of the sky, which in L3 is “veiled with a haze of gold,” sexuality eyes desire colors blue

20 How very nice workmen were! And what a beautiful morning! She mustn't mention the morning; she must be business-like. The marquee.

Like Laura's blush in L16 seems to indicate, she is caught between her childlike desires to celebrate the morning and her adult role as a businessperson. The final sentence here contains just two words, “the marquee.” They are Laura's reminder to herself to stay focused on her task (see also “the telephone” in L42). reminders

¶21 “Well, what about the lily-lawn? Would that do?”

Lilies will also be bought in L52. flora

¶22 And she pointed to the lily-lawn with the hand that didn't hold the bread-and-butter. They turned, they stared in the direction. A little fat chap thrust out his under-lip, and the tall fellow frowned.

¶22 “I don't fancy it,” said he. “Not conspicuous enough. You see, with a thing like a marquee,” and he turned to Laura in his easy way, “you want to put it somewhere where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye, if you follow me.”

Laura's attempted directorship hasn't succeeded, despite her efforts to look “severe” (L16). eyes

¶23 Laura's upbringing made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye. But she did quite follow him.

The onomatopoeic monosyllables of “bang” and “slap” may sound crude to Laura for the level of discourse suggested by their Anglo-Saxon etymology, and by the unnecessary violence they lend to the visual apprehension of the marquee. It is not that the workman isn't aware of more a more polite or Latinate synonym for “bang slap in the eye,” since he uses it (“conspicuous”) earlier in the lexia. Thus, his familiarity is signaled as an intentional and perhaps flirtatious choice. Laura recognizes this, although she doesn't find it unwelcome. Of the line “she did quite follow him,” Davis claims this is “a release from the stiffness of the adult role she has learned from her mother” (62). desire eyes

onomatopoeia

¶24 “A corner of the tennis-court,” she suggested. “But the band's going to be in one corner.”

Since the tennis court is compared to a “pond” in L140, we can assume that it's green. This continues the theme of greenness that began with L6. green

¶25 “H'm, going to have a band, are you?” said another of the workmen. He was pale. He had a haggard look as his dark eyes scanned the tennis-court. What was he thinking?

Laura is also noticing this workman's eyes, which are dark like those of the first workman from L19. eyes

¶26 “Only a very small band,” said Laura gently. Perhaps he wouldn't mind so much if the band was quite small. But the tall fellow interrupted.

Laura deemphasizes the size of the band, to ease the class anxiety she imagines the workman might be experiencing. class

¶27 “Look here, miss, that's the place. Against those trees. Over there. That'll do fine.”

The workmen refer to them as “trees,” but Laura prefers the more specific appellation given in L28. flora

¶28 Against the karakas. Then the karaka-trees would be hidden. And they were so lovely, with their broad, gleaming leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. Must they be hidden by a marquee?

In this thought, Laura corrects the specificity of the workman, substituting “trees” for “karakas.” Karaka trees are native to New Zealand—by no means a “desert” island, but an island nonetheless. Karakas bear clusters of highly poisonous yellow fruit. Like the blue sky which is “veiled” by the gold haze in L3, the trees are yellowed by this poisonous fruit. The perfect day, as well, will soon be interrupted with the news of the carter's death. flora colors interruptions perfection light

¶29 They must. Already the men had shouldered their staves and were making for the place.

The metonymy of “shouldered” (a body part instead of the more abstract verbs “lifted” or “carried”) suggests Laura's attention to the men's shoulders.

30 Only the tall fellow was left. He bent down, pinched a sprig of lavender, put his thumb and forefinger to his nose and snuffed up the smell. When Laura saw that gesture she forgot all about the karakas in her wonder at him caring for things like that—caring for the smell of lavender. How many men that she knew would have done such a thing?

Laura is pleasantly surprised by the workman's sensitivity to the pleasure of the lavender smell. This observation immediately fuels her evaluation of this man as special, different from the “many men that she knew.” flora desire fingers

31 Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for her friends rather than the silly boys she

Laura's sexual desire blends with her desire for an authenticity that she believes exists across class lines. Suddenly, the males of her age and

danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like these.

social class seem unappealing—they are mere "boys" compared to these "men." She prefers the workman's sensitivity to the "silly" dances of these boys. desire class

¶32 It's all the fault, she decided, as the tall fellow drew something on the back of an envelope, something that was to be looped up or left to hang, of these absurd class distinctions.

The figurative interruptions of the previous lexias are here literally manifested in this interrupted sentence. Laura's thought is suspended, unable to complete itself, while she watches the workman draw on the envelope. interruptions class envelope

33 Well, for her part, she didn't feel them.

Laura feels that the class barriers don't apply to her. This could be read as evidence of the naturalizing function of this ideology: that it makes the class barriers seem invisible or inapplicable. class

34 Not a bit, not an atom…

The ellipsis at the end of this line is the first of several to appear in the story. Laura's interrupted thought from L32 is literally manifested here in the trailing off suggested by the ellipsis. Since the series that begins "not a" features progressively smaller units, perhaps this trailing off can be partially explained because, in the scientific sense at least, an atom may not be subdivided and maintain its elemental properties. interruptions

35 And now there came the chock-chock of wooden hammers. Some one whistled, some one sang out, "Are you right there, matey?" "Matey!" The friendliness of it, the—the—

Laura's thought interruptions intensify here, trailing off even mid-clause. interruptions onomatopoeia sound

36 Just to prove how happy she was, just to show the tall fellow how at home she felt, and how she despised stupid conventions, Laura took a big bite of her bread-and-butter as she stared at the little drawing. She felt just like a work-girl.

The "little drawing" here is probably the workman's drawing of "something that was to be looped up or left to hang" from L32. Laura is trying to ingratiate herself with the workmen by showing that she is comfortable around them, and taking an interest in their work. Laura is also trying to "prove how happy she was," that is, to force an outward appearance of happiness which her experience, presumably, does not reflect. happiness

¶37 "Laura, Laura, where are you? Telephone, Laura!" a voice cried from the house.

We are not told who this is, but it is probably Mrs. Sheridan. Day cites this use of the term "voice" along with the other uses (see the "voices" tag) as evidence that "Mansfield insists on the significance of the word 'voice' to the point of echoing the verbal tics of some of her characters who tend to over-wear the

words they acquire" (131). voices

¶38 "Coming!" Away she skimmed, over the lawn, up the path, up the steps, across the veranda, and into the porch. In the hall her father and Laurie were brushing their hats ready to go to the office.

This sequence of prepositional phrases gives an idea of the size of the estate. The men's office destination and the care they give to their hats shows them to be white-collar workers, but not ones so rich that they don't have to brush their hats themselves. hats

¶39 "I say, Laura," said Laurie very fast, "you might just give a squiz at my coat before this afternoon. See if it wants pressing."

Our introduction to Laura's brother Laurie portrays him as someone with an ease of speech evidenced by his use of New Zealand slang ("squiz" roughly means "look"). Day contends that "Mansfield's use of vernacular voices in 'The Garden Party' alludes to this dimension in ways that interrogate the power on which it is premised, the story enacting … a drama of displacement and devolutionary identity, with the mother country and its colonial offspring as the macrocosmic protagonists or antagonists" (135).

¶40 "I will," said she. Suddenly she couldn't stop herself. She ran at Laurie and gave him a small, quick squeeze. "Oh, I do love parties, don't you?" gasped Laura.

Laura's syntactic construction asks her brother for emotional affirmation—the tag question "don't you" mirrors her final question "isn't life?". Severin argues that these tag questions "creates a façade of open dialogue by giving the appearance of soliciting opinion and presenting choice. In reality, however, these structures obtain assent by reducing the likelihood for challenge" (3). Although Severin may be right about the implications of some of these questions, such as Jose's "Aren't I in a good voice mummy?" of L72, his hypothesis doesn't seem as applicable in this lexia. inversions touch

¶41 "Ra-ther," said Laurie's warm, boyish voice, and he squeezed his sister too, and gave her a gentle push. "Dash off to the telephone, old girl."

Here Laura and Laurie are figuratively compared to children—Laurie with his "boyish" voice, and Laura, whom Laurie calls "old girl." Although "old" is undoubtedly used here as a mark of affection rather than in its literal meaning, the contradiction resonates somewhat with the contradictions of adolescence—a space of the overlapping of childhood and adulthood. coming-of-age touch voices

¶42 The telephone.

The two-word sentence "the telephone" recalls another two-word sentence Laura thinks in L20: "the marquee." Here, Laura is distracted, and reminds herself of what she is supposed to be doing. reminders

[43] “Yes, yes; oh yes. Kitty? Good morning, dear. Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted of course. It will only be a very scratch meal—just the sandwich crusts and broken meringue-shells and what's left over. Yes, isn't it a perfect morning? Your white? Oh, I certainly should. One moment—hold the line. Mother's calling.” And Laura sat back. “What, mother? Can't hear.”

Laura doesn't answer the phone “hello?", but rather “yes, yes.” We only hear one half of this telephone conversation, and so it appears fragmented—it is as if Laura's speech is interrupted by the pace of the conversation. Kitty might be inviting herself to tea afterwards, if Laura says that only “a very scratch meal” will remain by then, but since Laura takes the leftovers to the carter's house around L161, there might not be even these sandwich crusts remaining. food interruptions perfection

¶[44] Mrs. Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. “Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had on last Sunday.”

Mrs. Sheridan's voice here “floats” like a butterfly. voices butterflies hats

¶[45] “Mother says you're to wear that *sweet* hat you had on last Sunday. Good. One o'clock. Bye-bye.”

Day suggests that “sweet” is italicized here to indicate that this wording is not Laura's, but that she is again “copying her mother's voice” (L17).

¶[46] Laura put back the receiver, flung her arms over her head, took a deep breath, stretched and let them fall. “Huh,” she sighed, and the moment after the sigh she sat up quickly. She was still, listening. All the doors in the house seemed to be open. The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. The green baize door that led to the kitchen regions swung open and shut with a muffled thud.

Green baize doors were typically the doors that divide the servant's quarters from the rest of the house. Green baize, a thick fabric, serves to muffle the sounds from either side, effectively serving as a class barrier. Baize of this color is also used to cover billiards tables, where the dark green color resembles a lawn. The green color, thus, resonates with the usage of “green,” to describe the bushes in L6. colors green sounds voices class

[47] And now there came a long, chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors.

The piano, which is soon to play the role of the chorus or the court jester, telling uncomfortable truths still unknown to the characters, is introduced here as “chuckling,” almost in a kind of perverse pleasure of its ironic knowledge. The piano's sound joins “class distinctions” of L32 and later (L112), Laura herself, as something “absurd.” sounds absurdity

[48] But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase, in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors.

The air was not always like this, since it was described in L3 as “windless.” Since the day's windlessness was given as a sign of its perfection, the “little faint winds” are a sign of the day's perfection starting to unravel, playfully, starting with the edges of the house. play wind

49 And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm little silver star. She could have kissed it.

This sensory attention to natural details parallels that of the workman who smells the lavender in L30. Laura's affection for the sun spot shows her desire to kiss. The description of the sun spot as "silver" suggests that not only the photograph frame, but also the inkpot lid might be made of silver. (In L116, Jose imagines the smoke from the house as "silver.") Davis argues that this scene shows Laura's childlike "impulsive sentimentality" (62). play light silver-gold

¶50 The front door bell pealed, and there sounded the rustle of Sadie's print skirt on the stairs. A man's voice murmured; Sadie answered, careless, "I'm sure I don't know. Wait. I'll ask Mrs Sheridan."

The florist, who is mentioned in L52, but who is nameless, is not heard to speak here, only to "murmur." voice sounds

¶51 "What is it, Sadie?" Laura came into the hall.

¶52 "It's the florist, Miss Laura."

¶53 It was, indeed. There, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies—canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems.

Sexual imagery abounds here in these "wide open," "pink lilies" that are "almost frighteningly alive." The obvious comparison is to Laura, who is, evidenced by her desirous glances in L19, experiencing a kind of sexual awakening. sexuality flora colors

¶54 "O-oh, Sadie!" said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan. She crouched down as if to warm herself at that blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

The sensual imagery of L53 intensifies here, in the moan of pleasure, and her experience of the lilies as a "blaze" she desires to "warm herself" against. sexuality flora colors fingers

¶55 "It's some mistake," she said faintly. "Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother."

The almost limitless power of "ordering," in the hands of the wealthy, is that which L2 seems to suggest could order even weather conditions.

¶56 But at that moment Mrs. Sheridan joined them.

¶57 "It's quite right," she said calmly. "Yes, I ordered them. Aren't they lovely?" She pressed Laura's arm. "I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window. And I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall

touch

have enough canna lilies. The garden-party will be a good excuse."

¶58 "But I thought you said you didn't mean to interfere," said Laura. Sadie had gone. The florist's man was still outside at his van. She put her arm round her mother's neck and gently, very gently, she bit her mother's ear.

This playful gesture expresses Laura's simultaneous affection for and annoyance toward her mother. touch

¶59 "My darling child, you wouldn't like a logical mother, would you? Don't do that. Here's the man."

The role-reversal of L9 continues. carnival

¶60 He carried more lilies still, another whole tray.

¶61 "Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please," said Mrs. Sheridan. "Don't you agree, Laura?"

¶62 "Oh, I *do*, mother."

¶63 In the drawing-room Meg, Jose and good little Hans had at last succeeded in moving the piano.

¶64 "Now, if we put this chesterfield against the wall and move everything out of the room except the chairs, don't you think?"

Jose uses the brand name of the piano rather than its generic term, signaling her as one of a class that discriminates between brands of pianos. class

¶65 "Quite."

This one-word answer of Meg's, an intensifier, recalls her brother Laurie's "ra-ther" of L41.

¶66 "Hans, move these tables into the smoking-room, and bring a sweeper to take these marks off the carpet and—one moment, Hans—" Jose loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her. She always made them feel they were taking part in some drama. "Tell mother and Miss Laura to come here at once.

"They loved obeying her" is more likely Jose's thought, rather than Hans's. Citing the "drama" that she imagines, Kleine argues that "Jose's attitude toward life is essentially theatrical … Her thespianism stems from a defect, not an excess, of imagination. Jose believes people (especially servants) are a game you play and, despite her undeniable skill at the game, she cannot respect people, since to play the game at all you must make them into dolls" (367). servants class

¶67 "Very good, Miss Jose."

¶68 She turned to Meg. “I want to hear what the piano sounds like, just in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon. Let's try over 'This life is Weary.'”

As in the narration of L69, Jose considers the music to come from the piano itself, rather than Meg, who will play it. Jose wants to sing, and is planning to sing, but constructs her sentence in the passive, as it will be a task asked of her. This is an indication of Jose's false modesty.

¶69 *Pom!* Ta-ta-ta *Tee*-ta! The piano burst out so passionately that Jose's face changed. She clasped her hands. She looked mournfully and enigmatically at her mother and Laura as they came in.

Because we're hearing Jose's thoughts now, it is the piano, and not its player Meg, that is “passionate.” Jose's “enigmatic” mournfulness is probably her acting out the part of the mourner to fit the subject of the sad song to follow. The insincerity of this mournfulness is apparent, and sets the stage for Jose's indifference to the carter's death, which climaxes in L119. This nearly mocking mourning contrasts sharply with the literally mournful woman in L185. death mourning sound onomatopoeia

¶70 “This Life is *Wee*-ary,
A Tear—a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
This Life is Wee-ary,
A Tear—a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
And then... Good-bye!”

“Weeary” could be read as one answer to the question Laura poses in L204: “isn't life...” The ellipsis in the last line of this stanza accentuates the interruption: since the construction “a love that [verb], and then...” suggests that a verb will follow, the sudden salutation “good-bye” stops both the sentence and this segment of the song, in the same way that the garden party is interrupted by the carter's death. music interruptions

¶71 But at the word “Good-bye,” and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile.

Jose is again portrayed as disingenuous: although she is smiling, it is unsympathetic.

¶72 “Aren't I in good voice, mummy?” she beamed.

We see that Jose's motivations for singing are more concerned with her vanity than with the pleasure of singing or of entertaining others. voices

¶73 “This Life is *Wee*-ary,
Hope comes to Die.
A Dream—a Wa-kening.”

“Hope comes to Die” could be read as a synechdoche of the story: a promising garden party interrupted by a death. As in L191, death is compared with dreaming. death dreams

¶74 But now Sadie interrupted them. “What is it, Sadie?”

interruptions

¶75 “If you please, m'm, cook says have you got the flags for the sandwiches?”

While Sadie and Hans are referred to by name, the cook is only referred to as “cook,” as is the gardener. Notably, “cook” remains uncapitalized, suggesting that it is indeed the occupation meant here, and not a name for the cook. servants class food

¶76 “The flags for the sandwiches, Sadie?” echoed Mrs. Sheridan dreamily. And the children knew by her face that she hadn't got them. “Let me see.” And she said to Sadie firmly, “Tell cook I'll let her have them in ten minutes.”

A note in the Norton Anthology edition of this story explains that these are “little paper flags stuck in a plate of small triangular sandwiches indicated what is inside the sandwiches,” which is “an English custom adopted by the New Zealand middle class as a sign of gentility” (Greenblatt, 2649). servants class food dreams

¶77 Sadie went.

This is the shortest paragraph that isn't dialogue, tied with L190, “Laura came.” There is a symmetry to these two paragraphs, both of which plainly describe movement. However, when Sadie goes, it is only to the kitchen; when Laura comes, she comes into the room where the dead man lies.

¶78 “Now, Laura,” said her mother quickly, “come with me into the smoking-room. I've got the names somewhere on the back of an envelope. You'll have to write them out for me. Meg, go upstairs this minute and take that wet thing off your head. Jose, run and finish dressing this instant. Do you hear me, children, or shall I have to tell your father when he comes home to-night? And—and, Jose, pacify cook if you do go into the kitchen, will you? I'm terrified of her this morning.”

Mrs. Sheridan orders her children around with an authority that is a decided departure from her attitude in L9. “The names,” as Greenblatt et al. explain, are likely “the names of the sandwich fillings to be written on each flag” (2649). She has written them “on the back of an envelope”; the workman in L32 also draws something on the back of an envelope. Could this be the same envelope, stolen by one of the girls as Mrs. Sheridan suspects in L80, used by one of the workmen as scrap paper, and replaced behind the dining room clock, where it is found in L79? food envelope

¶79 The envelope was found at last behind the dining-room clock, though how it had got there Mrs. Sheridan could not imagine.

envelope

¶80 “One of you children must have stolen it out of my bag, because I remember vividly —cream cheese and lemon-curd. Have you done that?”

Mrs. Sheridan interrupts her accusation to recall one of the sandwich fillings. This interrupted utterance is especially fluid, since the causal language blurs the boundary between the two thoughts. Does Mrs. Sheridan “remember vividly” the cream cheese and lemon-curd, or does she remember the reason Laura stole the envelope? Similarly, does the question “have you done that” refer to the theft of the envelope, or to the writing of the sandwich ingredients on the flag? interruptions

ambiguity food

¶81 “Yes.”

It is unclear what question this answers (see the note to L80)—“have you stolen the envelope” or “did you write down the sandwich ingredients”? ambiguity

¶82 “Egg and—” Mrs. Sheridan held the envelope away from her. “It looks like mice. It can't be mice, can it?”

Mrs. Sheridan appears to be farsighted, since she holds the envelope away from her so that it might appear clearer, and even then, she mistakes “olive” for “mice” (see L83). envelope

¶83 “Olive, pet,” said Laura, looking over her shoulder.

food

¶84 “Yes, of course, olive. What a horrible combination it sounds. Egg and olive.”

If these are black olives, this detail might be read as subtly foreshadowing the death to come later in the story. Their mistaken association with mice, and Mrs. Sheridan's descriptor “horrible” further cement this view, especially since the term is used by Cook in L103 and Mr. Sheridan in L158 to describe the carter's death. Furthermore, since an egg is a pre-birth state, the olives appear in contrast to be even more of a image of postmortem decay. food death

¶85 They were finished at last, and Laura took them off to the kitchen. She found Jose there pacifying the cook, who did not look at all terrifying.

Here, Cook is referred to as “the cook.”

¶86 “I have never seen such exquisite sandwiches,” said Jose's rapturous voice. “How many kinds did you say there were, cook? Fifteen?”

¶87 “Fifteen, Miss Jose.”

¶88 “Well, cook, I congratulate you.”

¶89 Cook swept up crusts with the long sandwich knife, and smiled broadly.

¶90 “Godber's has come,” announced Sadie, issuing out of the pantry. She had seen the man pass the window.

Iversen suggests that, since Godber's man bears of the news of the carter's death, one could say that “GOD-ber's man comes as an angel of death” (11).

¶91 That meant the cream puffs had come. Godber's were famous for their cream puffs. Nobody ever thought of making them at home.

¶92 “Bring them in and put them on the table, my girl,” ordered cook.

¶93 Sadie brought them in and went back to the door. Of course Laura and Jose were far too grown-up to really care about such things. All the same, they couldn't help agreeing that the puffs looked very attractive. Very. Cook began arranging them, shaking off the extra icing sugar.

Laura and Jose are torn between their desire for these cream puffs and their “grown-up” sensibilities that tell them they shouldn't care too much about cream puffs. This is analogous to Laura's desire for the workmen—she knows that she is of a different class from them, yet she couldn't help but finding them attractive. food coming-of-age

¶94 “Don't they carry one back to all one's parties?” said Laura.

¶95 “I suppose they do,” said practical Jose, who never liked to be carried back. “They look beautifully light and feathery, I must say.”

¶96 “Have one each, my dears,” said cook in her comfortable voice. “Yer ma won't know.”

Cook knows that the girls' comments about the cream puffs speak to a desire for them, so she allows them to eat some. voices

¶97 Oh, impossible. Fancy cream puffs so soon after breakfast. The very idea made one shudder. All the same, two minutes later Jose and Laura were licking their fingers with that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream.

The impossibility here is the contradiction between the girls' desire for these cream puffs and their knowledge that this is socially inappropriate. The girls' sensual enjoyment of these cream puffs parallels the workman's earlier (L30) enjoyment of the scent of lavender. fingers sexuality food

¶98 “Let's go into the garden, out by the back way,” suggested Laura. “I want to see how the men are getting on with the marquee. They're such awfully nice men.”

The fact that this urge of Laura's immediately follows her sensual enjoyment of the cream puffs in L97 supports a reading of this lexia and L97 as sexually suggestive.

¶99 But the back door was blocked by cook, Sadie, Godber's man and Hans.

The servants are all gathered by the back door, forming a physical class-based boundary that prevents Laura from leaving to see the workmen. servants

¶100 Something had happened.

This is the second-shortest sentence in the story, and by far the most vague. ambiguity

¶101 “Tuk-tuk-tuk,” clucked cook like an agitated hen. Sadie had her hand clapped to her cheek as though she had toothache. Hans's face was screwed up in the effort to understand. Only Godber's man seemed to be enjoying himself; it was his story.

None of these reactions to the carter's death are at all as mournful as Jose's face in L69. Godber's man is amused, Hans is confused, Sadie seems to be in pain, and Cook makes farm noises. death animals

¶102 “What's the matter? What's happened?”

Noticing their puzzling reactions, Laura immediately understands that something is wrong. The suspense about what has happened takes three paragraphs, of which this is the third.

¶103 “There's been a horrible accident,” said cook. “A man killed.”

death

¶104 “A man killed! Where? How? When?”

death

¶105 But Godber's man wasn't going to have his story snatched from under his very nose.

¶106 “Know those little cottages just below here, miss?” Know them? Of course, she knew them. “Well, there's a young chap living there, name of Scott, a carter. His horse shied at a traction-engine, corner of Hawke Street this morning, and he was thrown out on the back of his head. Killed.”

The cause of this death, arguably, is the meeting of an old technology (a horse) with a new technology (a traction-engine). death

¶107 “Dead!” Laura stared at Godber's man.

death

¶108 “Dead when they picked him up,” said Godber's man with relish. “They were taking the body home as I come up here.” And he said to the cook, “He's left a wife and five little ones.”

¶109 “Jose, come here.” Laura caught hold of her sister's sleeve and dragged her through the kitchen to the other side of the green baize door. There she paused and leaned against it. “Jose!” she said, horrified, “however are we going to stop everything?”

For Laura and Jose to talk about the possibility of cancelling the garden party, they do so in isolation from the servants, lest they appear insensitive. The green baize door that made its first appearance in L46 appears here again, serving to muffle the conversations between the two social classes. green class dividers

¶110 “Stop everything, Laura!” cried Jose in astonishment. “What do you mean?”

¶111 “Stop the garden-party, of course.” Why did Jose pretend?

¶112 But Jose was still more amazed. “Stop the garden-party? My dear Laura, don't be so absurd. Of course we can't do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don't be so extravagant.”

The irony is that the party, not its would-be cancellation, is extravagant. Iversen notes that “Laura's sympathy is *extravagant* in the precise etymological sense of the word: it wanders beyond the bounds of the garden” (12). absurdity

¶113 “But we can't possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front gate.”

¶114 That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between.

Now we are hearing Jose's thoughts, as suggested by the use of the term “extravagant” (see L112). She thinks about the geography of the region, which is almost medieval with its castle at the top of the hill and its lower-class houses “at the very bottom.” Like the green baize doors in L46 and L109, the “broad road” is the dividing line between the two social classes. class dividers

115 True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans.

As soon as Jose has begun to understand (“true,” she admits) Laura's point from L113 that they “can't possibly have a garden-party with a man dead just outside the front gate,” she dismisses it, seemingly on the basis of the dead man's poverty. Jose thinks derisively about the “little mean” cottages and, by extension, the people in them. That their gardens have only “sick hens” recalls L101, where cook is seen to “cluck” “like an agitated hen.” Their color scheme—“chocolate brown” stands in contrast to the white theme of the party. class colors animals

116 The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys.

Here silver, the color of a precious metal, is used to describe the smoke from the Sheridans' house, thereby associating it with wealth. colors class silver-gold

117 Washerwomen lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler, and a man whose house-front was studded all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed. When the Sheridans were little they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting language and of what they might catch. But since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls

Most of the these occupations belong to the service industry. The occupants of this lane repair the shoes, sweep the chimneys, and wash the clothes of the members of those classes that can afford these services. The exception here is the bird farmer. If he cultivates chickens, this might be another association between chickens and the lower

sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and sordid. They came out with a shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went.

class. Furthermore, the children of this neighborhood are said to "swarm" like birds or like insects. servants class birds

¶118 "And just think of what the band would sound like to that poor woman," said Laura.

Laura already suspects that members of lower classes might disapprove of the band at the garden party (L24-L26).

¶119 "Oh, Laura!" Jose began to be seriously annoyed. "If you're going to stop a band playing every time some one has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous life. I'm every bit as sorry about it as you. I feel just as sympathetic." Her eyes hardened. She looked at her sister just as she used to when they were little and fighting together. "You won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental," she said softly.

Again, we see that Jose's words do not reflect her real sentiments. Although she says that she feels "just as sympathetic," we see her eyes "harden," and she denigrates this same sympathy as impractically sentimental. eyes

¶120 "Drunk! Who said he was drunk?" Laura turned furiously on Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, "I'm going straight up to tell mother."

¶121 "Do, dear," cooed Jose.

Jose's coo here signals passive aggression and a knowledge of the futility of Laura's endeavor.

¶122 "Mother, can I come into your room?" Laura turned the big glass door-knob.

¶123 "Of course, child. Why, what's the matter? What's given you such a colour?" And Mrs. Sheridan turned round from her dressing-table. She was trying on a new hat.

¶124 "Mother, a man's been killed," began Laura.

¶125 "*Not* in the garden?" interrupted her mother.

Mrs. Sheridan is only concerned about this man's death if it has in some way disrupted her party.

¶126 "No, no!"

See Laura's "yes, yes" at L43.

¶127 "Oh, what a fright you gave me!" Mrs. Sheridan sighed with relief, and took off the big hat and held it on her knees.

The extent of Mrs. Sheridan's relief here is commiserate with her indifference to the carter's death.

¶128 “But listen, mother,” said Laura. Breathless, half-choking, she told the dreadful story. “Of course, we can't have our party, can we?” she pleaded. “The band and everybody arriving. They'd hear us, mother; they're nearly neighbours!”

¶129 To Laura's astonishment her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to bear because she seemed amused. She refused to take Laura seriously.

¶130 “But, my dear child, use your common sense. It's only by accident we've heard of it. If some one had died there normally—and I can't understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes—we should still be having our party, shouldn't we?”

Mrs. Sheridan imagines that death is expected of these people, given the poverty of their housing. Therefore, she seems to argue, this event is so common that it must be treated with indifference.

¶131 Laura had to say “yes” to that, but she felt it was all wrong. She sat down on her mother's sofa and pinched the cushion frill.

Laura's anxiety comes from the tension between what she has to admit is “common sense” and what she feels is right.
conflicting-emotion

¶132 “Mother, isn't it terribly heartless of us?” she asked.

¶133 “Darling!” Mrs. Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her she had popped it on. “My child!” said her mother, “the hat is yours. It's made for you. It's much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!” And she held up her hand-mirror.

The implication of Mrs. Sheridan's gesture is that wealth, here represented by this hat, can buy absolution from guilt over this affront to mourning. The way Mrs. Sheridan puts it directly on Laura's head leads Magalaner to call this a “coronation,” whereby Mrs. Sheridan “symbolically transfer[s] to Laura the Sheridan heritage of snobbery, restricted social views, narrowness of vision” (116-117).

¶134 “But, mother,” Laura began again. She couldn't look at herself; she turned aside.

¶135 This time Mrs. Sheridan lost patience just as Jose had done.

¶136 “You are being very absurd, Laura,” she said coldly. “People like that don't expect sacrifices from us. And it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment as you're doing now.”

¶137 “I don't understand,” said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon.

The hat is almost a mock-mourning hat: black, but trimmed with gold flowers. The microcosm of this hat seems to portray a mourning scene interrupted by a garden party: all black, but with gold flowers. As in the previous references to gold and silver, the gold here is a sign of wealth, and the daisies signify life. colors black flora silver-gold hats

138 Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan...

The discourse here becomes progressively interior. “Is mother right? she thought” is a third-person perspective, “and now she hoped her mother was right” is a more knowing and more authoritatively subjective stance, and “am I being extravagant” is fully subjective, spoken from a first-person perspective.

¶139 Lunch was over by half-past one. By half-past two they were all ready for the fray. The green-coated band had arrived and was established in a corner of the tennis-court.

A considerable amount of time passes between L138 and here. green time

¶140 “My dear!” trilled Kitty Maitland, “aren't they too like frogs for words? You ought to have arranged them round the pond with the conductor in the middle on a leaf.”

The band, as members of lower classes, are compared to animals, not unlike the way Sadie is compared to a chicken in L101. (Of course, there is a certain irony that this remark comes from a woman nicknamed “Kitty.”) Since they are all dressed or “coated” in green (see L139), and since the tennis court is most likely also green (see L24), the metaphor of the pond is more than just an extension of the frog metaphor. green animals

¶141 Laurie arrived and hailed them on his way to dress. At the sight of him Laura remembered the accident again. She wanted to tell him. If Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right. And she followed him into the hall.

¶142 “Laurie!”

¶143 “Hallo!” He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled his eyes at her. “My word, Laura! You do look stunning,” said Laurie. “What an absolutely

topping hat!”

¶144 Laura said faintly “Is it?” and smiled up at Laurie, and didn't tell him after all.

As Mrs. Sheridan had intended, the hat interrupts Laura's sympathy for the carter, and she forgets to tell Laurie about about the accident. interruptions

¶145 Soon after that people began coming in streams. The band struck up; the hired waiters ran from the house to the marquee. Wherever you looked there were couples strolling, bending to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted in the Sheridans' garden for this one afternoon, on their way to—where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy, to press hands, press cheeks, smile into eyes.

The actual party only takes place in five lexias —between here and L150. This represents less than 2.5% of the entire story. birds flora eyes happiness

¶146 “Darling Laura, how well you look!”

party

¶147 “What a becoming hat, child!”

Although the ostensible use of this term “becoming” is “befitting, suitable,” the choice of this word also suggests Laura's wearing of this adult hat as a sign of “becoming” an adult. party

¶148 “Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look so striking.”

Laura is here associated with Spain, just as Meg was earlier associated with the Middle East, and Jose with Japan. The reasons for these associations are unclear, except that they are all countries that are very distant from New Zealand, where this story takes place. party

¶149 And Laura, glowing, answered softly, “Have you had tea? Won't you have an ice? The passion-fruit ices really are rather special.” She ran to her father and begged him. “Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink?”

party

¶150 And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed.

The garden party is suddenly over, having only taken place between L145 and here. We are reminded that, despite the story's title, its focus is on the peripheries of the garden party—preparations, ramifications, and surrounding events—rather than the party itself. The metaphor of the closing flower is one that harbingers the coming of the mourning scene, and also reprises the themes of coming-of-age and lost innocence. flora

coming-of-age death party

¶151 “Never a more delightful garden-party… ” “The greatest success… ” “Quite the most… ”

¶152 Laura helped her mother with the good-byes. They stood side by side in the porch till it was all over.

¶153 “All over, all over, thank heaven,” said Mrs. Sheridan. “Round up the others, Laura. Let's go and have some fresh coffee. I'm exhausted. Yes, it's been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties! Why will you children insist on giving parties!” And they all of them sat down in the deserted marquee.

¶154 “Have a sandwich, daddy dear. I wrote the flag.”

¶155 “Thanks.” Mr. Sheridan took a bite and the sandwich was gone. He took another. “I suppose you didn't hear of a beastly accident that happened to-day?” he said.

¶156 “My dear,” said Mrs. Sheridan, holding up her hand, “we did. It nearly ruined the party. Laura insisted we should put it off.”

¶157 “Oh, mother!” Laura didn't want to be teased about it.

¶158 “It was a horrible affair all the same,” said Mr. Sheridan. “The chap was married too. Lived just below in the lane, and leaves a wife and half a dozen kiddies, so they say.”

The informality of Mr. Sheridan's language (“chap,” “kiddies”) is indicative of his feelings about the death. death

¶159 An awkward little silence fell. Mrs. Sheridan fidgeted with her cup. Really, it was very tactless of father…

Mrs. Sheridan might be thinking of Mr. Sheridan's choice of language in L158, but she might also be thinking that it was tactless of him to bring up the matter of death to begin with, since the intrusion of thoughts of death seem to silence the conversation. death

¶160 Suddenly she looked up. There on the table were all those sandwiches, cakes, puffs, all uneaten, all going to be wasted. She had one of

food

her brilliant ideas.

¶161 “I know,” she said. “Let's make up a basket. Let's send that poor creature some of this perfectly good food. At any rate, it will be the greatest treat for the children. Don't you agree? And she's sure to have neighbours calling in and so on. What a point to have it all ready prepared. Laura!” She jumped up. “Get me the big basket out of the stairs cupboard.”

¶162 “But, mother, do you really think it's a good idea?” said Laura.

¶163 Again, how curious, she seemed to be different from them all. To take scraps from their party. Would the poor woman really like that?

Although Mrs. Sheridan argues that this gift is valuable, comprised of “perfectly good food” (L161), Laura recognizes this gesture of giving away one's waste as patronizing, since it assumes that the waste of the upper classes is good enough to be the food of the cottages. Laura experiences an inner conflict here, since her intuitive ethical sense conflicts with her desire to heed her mother's advice. conflicting-emotions

¶164 “Of course! What's the matter with you to-day? An hour or two ago you were insisting on us being sympathetic, and now—”

interruptions

¶165 Oh well! Laura ran for the basket. It was filled, it was heaped by her mother.

¶166 “Take it yourself, darling,” said she. “Run down just as you are. No, wait, take the arum lilies too. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.”

Arum lilies are usually white, which would be an inappropriate color for mourning. flora class

¶167 “The stems will ruin her lace frock,” said practical Jose.

Davis claims Laura is wearing white lace, but apart from the fact that this would be a likely color to wear to a garden party, there doesn't seem to be any textual evidence to support this (63). flora

¶168 So they would. Just in time. “Only the basket, then. And, Laura!”—her mother followed her out of the marquee—“don't on any account—”

We are never told what it is that Mrs. Sheridan insists Laura avoid “on any account,” but it might be something akin to inviting them to the house. Iversen posits that it's “go in and see the dead man,” and Taylor similarly imagines that it's “look at the dead man,” but Mrs. Sheridan would undoubtedly be more

concerned with how she will be affected by Laura's visit than how Laura might be affected by it (26). interruptions

¶169 "What mother?"

¶170 No, better not put such ideas into the child's head! "Nothing! Run along."

¶171 It was just growing dusky as Laura shut their garden gates. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade.

The diving line between these two classes is literalized here as lightand darkness. Taylor compares this journey to a journey into Avernus, with the dog as Cerberus and the road the river Styx (364). class darkness light

172 How quiet it seemed after the afternoon. Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn't realize it. Why couldn't she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, "Yes, it was the most successful party."

What Laura remembers about the party are sensory impressions: tactile ("kisses"), aural ("voices," "tinkling," "laughter"), and olfactory ("the smell of crushed grass"). Visual memories are noticably absent here, as she descends into the darkness of the lane. Laura is suprised by her own insensitivity to the carter's death; "how strange!" seems to echo "how curious" from L163, where she notices that her feelings about this death are not shared by her family members. sounds voices light conflicting-emotions

¶173 Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls and men's tweed caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings; the children played in the doorways. A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crab-like, moved across the window.

Although a crab is invoked here to describe the literal creepiness of the shadow on the window (and by extension, perhaps, the person that casts the shadow), there is nonetheless an implicit association, given the economic hierarchy of this story, between bottom-feeding, scavenging crabs and the people that live at the bottom of this hill, to whom Laura is about to give food scraps. darkness

174 Laura bent her head and hurried on. She wished now she had put on a coat. How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer—if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come; she knew all along it was a mistake. Should she go back even now?

The ostentatiousness of the hat is out-of-place in this locale, especially after this death has occured. Later, she will beg forgiveness for the hat from the dead man himself (L194). light

¶175 No, too late. This was the house. It must be. A dark knot of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch sat in a chair, watching. She had her feet on a

voices darkness

newspaper. The voices stopped as Laura drew near. The group parted. It was as though she was expected, as though they had known she was coming here.

¶176 Laura was terribly nervous. Tossing the velvet ribbon over her shoulder, she said to a woman standing by, “Is this Mrs. Scott's house?” and the woman, smiling queerly, said, “It is, my lass.”

Day compares this coming scene and the one to follow to fairy tales. Laura, carrying a basket like Little Red Riding Hood, “enters the Hansel and Gretelesque 'chocolate brown' (L115) cottage, meets a woman whose sly voice is a clue to her type, and gets the traditional traumatic lesson in children's morality” (137).

¶177 Oh, to be away from this! She actually said, “Help me, God,” as she walked up the tiny path and knocked. To be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women's shawls even. I'll just leave the basket and go, she decided. I shan't even wait for it to be emptied.

¶178 Then the door opened. A little woman in black showed in the gloom.

black

¶179 Laura said, “Are you Mrs. Scott?” But to her horror the woman answered, “Walk in please, miss,” and she was shut in the passage.

¶180 “No,” said Laura, “I don't want to come in. I only want to leave this basket. Mother sent—”

Laura does not want to take responsibility for the basket, and so she makes it clear that it was her mother's idea to send it.

¶181 The little woman in the gloomy passage seemed not to have heard her. “Step this way, please, miss,” she said in an oily voice, and Laura followed her.

“Oily” is an unusual adjective for a voice, and suggests a voice that has changed by mourning, or a voice that is is some way diseased or unclean. oil

¶182 She found herself in a wretched little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp. There was a woman sitting before the fire.

Like the “smoky” lane of L173, the room itself is filled with smoke. This lamp is likely an oil lamp, rather than a gas or electric lamp, an association that recalls the woman's “oily” voice of L181 and “oily” smile of L187. oil

¶183 “Em,” said the little creature who had let her in. “Em! It's a young lady.” She turned to Laura. She said meaningly, “I'm 'er sister, miss. You'll excuse 'er, won't you?”

¶184 “Oh, but of course!” said Laura. “Please, please don't disturb her. I—I only want to leave—”

¶185 But at that moment the woman at the fire turned round. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible. She seemed as though she couldn't understand why Laura was there. What did it mean? Why was this stranger standing in the kitchen with a basket? What was it all about? And the poor face puckered up again.

Although we know her name is Em Scott, she is rendered here as “the woman at the fire,” possibly because she appears to Laura here more as a form with a “puffed up” face than as “Em” or “Mrs. Scott.” eyes colors

¶186 “All right, my dear,” said the other. “I'll thenk the young lady.”

¶187 And again she began, “You'll excuse her, miss, I'm sure,” and her face, swollen too, tried an oily smile.

Em's sister's smile, like her voice in L181, is “oily.” oil

¶188 Laura only wanted to get out, to get away. She was back in the passage. The door opened. She walked straight through into the bedroom, where the dead man was lying.

death

¶189 “You'd like a look at 'im, wouldn't you?” said Em's sister, and she brushed past Laura over to the bed. “Don't be afraid, my lass,"—and now her voice sounded fond and sly, and fondly she drew down the sheet—“'e looks a picture. There's nothing to show. Come along, my dear.”

voices death

¶190 Laura came.

¶191 There lay a young man, fast asleep —sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream.

Death is compared to dreaming in the song in L73. dreams death

192 What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy… happy… All is well, said that sleeping

This is Laura's inner attempt to reconcile the mirth of the garden party with the morbid reality of the dead carter. Mansfield blends scenes from the party with a view of death as “sleeping,” and blends them so well that it is difficult to tell whether “happy… happy…”

face. This is just as it should be. I am content.

refers to the "they" who "were laughing" at the garden party or the dead carter whose face says "all is well." Davis calls these lines "insistent repetition and sentimental metaphors" that "indicate the childishness of her thoughts," but given the other references to sleeping and dreaming, and their associations, there is more to this metaphor than sentimentality (64). happiness ambiguity

¶193 But all the same you had to cry, and she couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him. Laura gave a loud childish sob.

If Laura believes the dead man to be "happy" or "sleeping" per L192, then this would not elicit her sob. But since Laura knows that the appropriate social reaction to death is crying ("all the same you had to cry"), she "giv[es]" this sob, not unlike the way she "proves" her happiness in L36.

¶194 "Forgive my hat," she said.

This is the "something" from L193 that she must say to the dead carter. Her hat might be inappropriate to the somber occasion for its decorative gaiety (trimmed with gold daisies), but it could also be that it functions as a marker of adulthood, and given Laura's "childish sob" in L193, the hat seems out-of-place. Davis notices that Laura says "my hat" here, instead of "the … hat," from L174, arguing that "in accepting the hat … she accepts intuitively its symbolic components," namely, that it symbolizes the life represented by the garden party (65). Talyor suggests that in this moment Laura "rejects at last the meaningless dream of the garden party and stands now on the threshold of the real world, sinister at first, but now transmuted into beauty by the dream of death" (362). coming-of-age hats

¶195 And this time she didn't wait for Em's sister. She found her way out of the door, down the path, past all those dark people. At the corner of the lane she met Laurie.

The "dusk" of L171 has now turned to night—the scene where Laura visit the dead man perfectly coincided with nightfall. darkness

¶196 He stepped out of the shadow. "Is that you, Laura?"

darkness

¶197 "Yes."

¶198 "Mother was getting anxious. Was it all right?"

It is likely that Mrs. Sheridan is more anxious about Laura spending time with "people like that" (L136) than with Laura's emotional experience with encountering death.

¶199 “Yes, quite. Oh, Laurie!” She took his arm, she pressed up against him.

Here again, Laura “has to say yes” (L131) to this question, since she believes (or tells herself) that the carter is “happy” and “sleeping” (L192). Her emotional experience of the cottage encounter, however, was overwhelming. touch

¶200 “I say, you're not crying, are you?” asked her brother.

¶201 Laura shook her head. She was.

This is the most literal manifestation of the conflicting feelings Laura has been experiencing in this story. inversions conflicting-emotions

¶202 Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. “Don't cry,” he said in his warm, loving voice. “Was it awful?”

touch

¶203 “No,” sobbed Laura. “It was simply marvellous. But Laurie—” She stopped, she looked at her brother.

“Simply marvelous” sounds like more of a platitudinous description of a garden party than a description of an encounter with death. However, Laura thinks of the dead man in L192 as a “marvel.” This phrase thus conveys both Laura's denial of her emotional state, evidenced most literally in L201, and also her concept of the death as something to be “marveled” at, wondered, perhaps as a kind of *memento mori*. inversions

204 “Isn't life,” she stammered, “isn't life—” But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

In true modernist fashion, the story ends without resolution, without answering this question. This is part of what, for Walker, “leaves readers with a feeling of dissatisfaction, a vague sense that the story somehow does not realize its potential” (354). As Severn puts it, this line “denies the reader access to what presumably would be a final, authoritative pronouncement regarding the outcome of the day's events” (2). Walker suggests that this question might be completed with “myserious, or surprising, or something else,” but a more likely answer, given indirectly by the song in L70, is “weary” (358). interruptions

¶205 “*Isn't* it, darling?” said Laurie.

Laurie's affirmative question here mirrors Laura's tag question constructions from L40.

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