Discuss the representation and role of animals in *The Garden Party*.

In my essay, I will attempt to read the stories of *The Garden Party* from a posthumanist lens. Inspiration for this approach comes from the Feminism and Ecology lecture in Gender, Theory, and Literature. Looking at Braidotti’s article, there are a number of ways to approach this:

* First, I am considering looking at unique relationships between animals and humans that de-center Anthropos. A clear examine is in “At The Bay;” the opening scene shows a unique relationship between a dog and man; they seem to rely on each other for emotional and physical support – the dog “looks at him proudly” and the man relies on the dog to help him keep the sheep in line. I could also look at how the relationships between Mr. and Mrs. Dove in the story of the same name are almost used as a model for its two main characters; or how discomfortable the reader feels with “Miss Brill” and her fur. The latter of these acts more emotionally in that the “cry” she thinks she hears reminds us that her scarf was once a being equally as filled with life (Zoe) as Miss Brill herself.
* Second, I could look at Mansfield’s defiance of binaries. As Notes for “The Young Girl” point out, the I-narrator’s gender is left ambiguous (only given away by them asking to smoke, though I still think this leaves it as an open question). I could examine how animals are used, in their own way, to deconstruct binaries. Many times throughout the story, characters pretend to be animals or are compared to animals. In “At the Bay,” characters *become* the animals they are pretending to be (“You are silly, said the proud rooster” … “The bull was very cross with her”). Some characters are even open to change (as with Lottie). I will need to think about this one more and look for other examples.
* Third, I could look at the overwhelming number of animal metaphors (see many below). Many animal metaphors are ones that relate exactly to garden scenes. This possibly acts as a unifying feature of all the stories. It also forms an image of a society who’s sense of identity is dependent, in part, upon its wildlife.

AT THE BAY

* Early discussion of Man walking his dog and sheep heard. Note how the dog “looks at him proudly” when he lights his pipe. They share a unique relationship, almost in sync.
* Pretending to be animals in the washhouse (26-29)
* “The bush quivered in a haze of heat; the sandy road was empty except for the Trouts’ dog Snooker, who lay stretched in the very middle of it. His blue eye was turned up, his legs stuck out stiffly, and he gave an occasional desperate-sounding puff, as much as to say he had decided to make an end of it and was only waiting for some kind cart to come along.”
* Jonathan comparing his situation to that of insects (31)

THE GARDEN PARTY

* “Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket” (38)
* Note on mice and food scraps in “The Daughters of the Late Colonel.”
* “A big dog ran by like a shadow” (49)
* “A shadow, crab-like” (49)

THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LATE COLONEL

* Mice (53)
* Insects (54)
* Like an ant (61)
* Sparrow (69)

MR AND MRS DOVE

* “Like ducklings” (73)
* Comparing doves to relationship

THE YOUNG GIRL

* Bulldogs (79)

MISS BRILL

* The whole story deals with the fur as a central “character.” Will need to incorporate this one for sure.

HER FIRST BALL

* “Chased each other like birds.” (115)

THE STRANGER

* “You should just see little couples parading – little flies walking up and down the dish on the grey crinkled tablecloth.” (127)
* More on flies and spider (127)
* “He was something between the sheep-dog and the shepherd.” (127)
* “She had the courage of a – ” (130)… Could do something possibly with these metaphor left unfinished…
* “Shepherded Janey in” (134)

BANK HOLIDAY

* “like a broken wing.” (139)
* “Pink spider of a hand.” (139)
* Birds tell future (140)

AN IDEAL FAMILY

* “They were like a spider’s – thin, withered.” (148)

**DEATH AND THE ZOË-CENTERED CONTINUUM**

The theme of life and death is central to many, if not all, of Mansfield’s stories in *The Garden Party.* Stories such as “The Stranger,” “The Voyage,” and “The Garden Party” deal directly with characters who have recently died, while others, such as “Her First Ball,” contemplate life’s finitude. Though humans play a key role in Mansfield’s stories, /// Viewing life without circulates beyond humans ///A zoë-centeredness conception of reality, as Braidotti posits in her essay “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism,” upholds *life* as a vital force that extends beyond human-centeredness into a nonhuman-human continuum.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A key instance of zoe-centered depictions of life occur in “At the Bay” with Snooker, the Trout’s dog.

“The bush quivered in a haze of heat; the sandy road was empty except for the Trouts’ dog Snooker, who lay stretched in the very middle of it. His blue eye was turned up, his legs stuck out stiffly, and he gave an occasional desperate-sounding puff, as much as to say he had decided to make an end of it and was only waiting for some kind cart to come along.”

“The Daughters of the Late Colonel.”

* Consideration for mice and its search for food (53)

“Miss Brill”

* Reread short story

ANIMAL-HUMAN ALLIANCES 1

“At The Bay”

* Early discussion of Man walking his dog and sheep heard. Note how the dog “looks at him proudly” when he lights his pipe. They share a unique relationship, almost in sync.
* Jonathan comparing his situation to that of insects (31)

Mr. and Mrs. Dove

ANIMAL-HUMAN ALLIANCES 2

Mr. and Mrs. Dove

“At the Bay”

* Pretending to be animals in the washhouse (26-29)
* The cat articulating its disgust of dog

“The Stranger”

* “He was something between the sheep-dog and the shepherd.” (127)

AN IDEAL FAMILY

* “They were like a spider’s – thin, withered.” (148)

CONCLUSION: A DECENTERED ANTHROPOS

and, I propose, encourages the practice of cross-species alliances. After looking closer at the zoë-centeredness that marks Mansfield’s perception of life, I look at depictions of the nonhuman and their cross-species alliances with humans. Two potential benefits I single out are as follows : 1.) unique physical and emotional support and 2.) new ways to articulate selfhood.

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becoming-imperceptible (zoe-centered) entails

a radical break from established patterns of thought (naturalization)

and introduces a radically immanent relational dimension.45

By “becoming” animals in the Burnell’s washhouse, the attribution of animal qualities serves more than metaphoric principles.

In terms of animal and human actors alike, expanding definitions of life to a continuum allows each species to be articulated

All references to Katherine Mansfield, The Garden Party and Other Stories, (New York: Samuel French, 2010) are included with in-text citations.

I will mainly make use of Braidotti’s theory on Zoë (“Life” that includes nonhumans in its conceptualization) over Bios (exclusively human life), and her theory of becoming-imperceptible from her article “Four Theses on Posthumanist Feminist.”

Attributing “human” characteristics to animals does not entail their privileging. I propose that the breakdown dethrones Anthropos in general, and humanistic traits in particular. A Zoe-centered approach means that reason, individuality, and emotion – those traits traditionally assigned to humans – are not only in humans and nonhumans alike, but are only few of many on a continuum. Notably, I acknowledge that my analysis will, nevertheless, have a humanist bias as I cannot completely step outside (human) ideology or language.

The term “actors” is not to be conflated with narratological discourses on the distinction between fabula and story layers. I derive it from Melinda Harvey’s use of “co-actor” in her article titled “Katherine Mansfield’s Menagerie,” quoted in “Katherine Mansfield's Animal Aesthetic” by Derek Ryan. As a means to demonstrate the breakdown of hierarchy, “actors” will be used as an inclusive term remainder of this essay and will always include different beings on the human-nonhuman continuum.

In her essay, “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism,” Rosi Braidotti discusses the traditional hierarchy of existence that privileges Man as the standard for intelligible life. Based in 17th and 18th century humanism, this framework directly calls for the separation of *Bios* (exclusively human life) from *Zoe* (human and nonhuman life). Recognizing an inherent sexism and ontological elitism (among other problems), Braidotti calls for the decentering of Anthropos in general, and the dismantling of this traditional hierarchy in particular.

opening scene shows the dog and shepherd herding sheep. As Peter Matthews notes, “the sheep dog, rather than the shepherd, is the chief actor in this opening section, and Mansfield describes how Wag not only ‘looked proud’ of his master, but also controls the movements of the groups.”

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)