

Observing Oppositions of Two Worlds from The Garden Party – Exploitation to the lower class by Capitalism

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Abstract. The Garden Party, written by Katherine Mansfield who the mother of New Zealand modernist literature, takes the protagonist, Laura as the basis and her development as a clue to reveal the pheromone of increasing exploitation of the lower class by capitalism and the hesitation of the middle class when they face with the two under the impact of industrial civilization in the 20th century. This thesis analyzes the three relationships between capitalism and the middle class, capitalism and the lower class, and the middle class and the lower class in the novel. The author not only critiques the nature of the opposite world, but also ponders on how to reconcile the conflict of exploitation in the future.

Keywords: The Garden Party; capitalism; middle class; lower class; opposition.

1. Introduction

Katherine Mansfield is well known as a modernist litterateur. In 1920s, she began to write modernist literature, however, her works did not resonate with people at the time and was overlooked in studies of capitalist critical literature. Ling Shuzhen raises her ideas that Katherine Mansfield's "*The Garden Party*, completed in 1922, is apparently a cry against corruption. The author criticized the tangible corruption in Western society during the First World War in the novel. "[1] This reveals that Mansfield opposes the corrupting values of Western capitalism. For this reason, analyzing her works is important for understanding the exploitation of the lower class by capitalism in the 20th century.

Lenin pointed out, "It is precisely the parasitism and decay of capitalism, characteristic of its highest historical stage of development, i.e., imperialism." [2] In the 20th century, Europe was at a period of destruction and reinvention, coexisting with resplendence and turbulence. The increasing development of science and technology conflicts with social labor, which aggravates the exploitation of the lower class by capitalism. This problem leads to the confrontation between the two worlds and social relations are no longer based on human beings as the first carrier, but on science, technology, and machinery. The lower class is oppressed by the middle class and capitalists while suffering from the competition brought by technological progress. *The Garden Party* points out the class corruption while provokes a deep thought on the opposition of the two worlds. It shows the insight of Mansfield's idea that capitalism is materially based on exploitation as essence.

2. The two worlds of The Garden Party

The Garden Party tells the story about the Laura who comes from a middle-class family. She suddenly hears that her family's carter died in an accident when her mother, Sheridan holds a garden party. Laura is in deep sorrow at this accident, so she wants to stop the party in memory of the carter, but she was refused and preached by her mother. The reader can feel the scene from the perspective of Laura, and always feel the confrontation and whoop of the two worlds in various contradictions and struggles.

2.1 Capitalism and middle class

The middle class is a class linked to private ownership, which will be eliminated with the development of society. The law of capital accumulation creates the objective conditions for the gradual elimination of this class [3].

Mansfield describes the detailed luxurious and chaotic life of the middle class in the capitalist society. In *The Garden Party*, the descriptions of the environment and the living environment are evident, for example, the weather is satisfactory, and the florist mows lawn, and a hundred roses have bloomed. These descriptions show the benefits that capitalism brought to the lives of the middle class of the time, and the middle class think that they deserved these benefits. In *The Garden Party*, the golden chrysanthemum hat is vital prop which appears throughout the novel. This hat is given to Laura by Sheridan, which expresses that capitalism can easily control the social status of the middle class and the inheritance of ideology. It is obvious that the middle class support the capitalism without doubt in the social environment at that time. The two belong to a symbiotic relationship of mutual need and mutual maintenance. Under the maintenance of capitalism, the middle class began to enjoy and exploit at the same time.

2.2 Capitalism and lower class

“All feudal relations are involved in the movement of capital and thus transformed into relations of commodity interests. The distinctions of all industry are abstracted into the opposition of capital and labor in the general movement. All distinctions of class are divided into the distinction between the proletarian and the prolific, all incorporated into the unity of capital.” [4] In the world view of capitalist, it is common that people are unequal, and capitalism use the fear of money among the lower class to make the myth of capitalism flourish in that society.

The Garden Party illustrates the exploitation of the lower class by capitalism, such as the band playing, the tea prepared by the servants, and the well-mowed lawn, etc. These enjoyable things are given specific values by capital. The lower class creates value for capital by their labor, but there is no difference between their labor and instrument in the eyes of capital. The lower class strive to work to get a better life, but they are lashed by capital while working to create more wealth for capital. At the beginning of *The Garden Party*, the young man who catches the carriage lived in a simple and crude house under the slope, while Laura, who can hear his death, is standing in a large house with garden currently. The slop and the house are separated by a street, but it becomes a clear line between classes. This is the oppression of capitalism on the lower class. The house should be used for living, but capital gives it other meanings and it is labeled with price, which can be transformed, owned, and seen as a symbol of wealth and status. In the novel, we can witness a decayed empire with full money, which is established by sweat and toil of the lower-class people.

2.3 Middle class and lower class

Although Laura comes from a wealthy family with high-brow cultural education, who belongs to the typical urban middle class. However, she expresses her good feeling and appreciation for the lower class in a unique and spontaneous way. [5]

There are three conflicts taking place between Laura and her mother in the novel. The first time is when Laura hears that the carter died thus asks her mother to halt the party to mourn the carter. The second time is when Sheridan lets Laura put on hat, and the third time is when Sheridan wants to give the food to the carter's family without halting the party. It is a condescend charity, which means that Sheridan intends to earn good reputation for herself by giving leftover food. These three conflicts seem to show a conflict between Sheridan and Laura about life and social experience, but in essence they are the inner introspection of the marginalized middle class represented by Laura in the face of the lower-class people. “One perception drives her to develop sympathy and affection for the working class, and the other drives her to conform the way of life, values and moral norms of her own class.” [5]

This contradictory and complex inner activities can be found many times in *The Garden Party*. Laura came to the carter's home with sympathy, but she feels uncomfortable and wants to go back to her home. At the end of the novel, the intermittent conversation between Laura and her brother also reflects the fact that although Laura feels that something has changed in her life, but it seems that nothing has changed. Does Laura, who belongs to middle class, really empathize with what the lower-class people are experiencing and feel the same pain of life? I think the answer is no. In the description of *The Garden Party*, it is obvious that both the new middle class represented by Laura and the old middle class represented by her mother, both lack the basic respect for the lower class from the bottom of their hearts, and they manifest arrogance and prejudice against the lower class that is difficult to eliminate. Even if the new middle class such as Laura has sympathy for the lower class, it is superficial hypocrisy that stays on the surface. Both the old and the new middle class have a huge gap with the lower class, which exists in every aspect such as lifestyle, values, and consumption. As long as capitalism and exploitation exist, this is a problem that can not be dealt with and eliminated.

"Throughout Laura's subject world entangled conflicting relationships, rebellion against the moral prejudices of the middle-class, and rationalized self and materialized self, are unfolded on multiple levels, which makes Laura's subject is full of contradictions and fractures." [5] On the other hand, the author also uses the omniscient and internal perspectives to narrate the class conflicts. For example, a large passage in the novel describes the farmhouses where the lower classes live: "The smoke from their chimneys was all poor, unlike the big silvery straight streams of smoke from the chimneys of Laura's parents' house." This not only reflects the class difference, but also narrates objectively that Laura's values were also influenced by her family. As Laura grows up, her sensitive mind clashes with these deep-rooted ideas. The presence of an omniscient perspective makes these conflicts more real. The end of the novel also unfolds through the omniscient perspective, which makes the narrative more peaceful. Laura also understands in a real sense that the gap between classes is irreconcilable. Sympathy cannot change the status quo. The author uses the internal perspective of Laura, a character in the novel, to describe the class gap: "She found herself in a small, crooked, low kitchen with a light full of black smoke." The author uses the words "low," "short," and "small" to describe the kitchen, and the kitchen lights are full of black smoke. Through Laura's point of view, the reader feels the living conditions of the lower class people, because Laura was originally a lady of an aristocratic family. When Laura sees a scene very different from her own life, she must tell the truth, which not only increases the authenticity of the novel, but also further strengthens the class contradictions and conflicts in the novel.

From Laura's unique perspective, the author not only citizens that middle class has lack of understanding of the nature of the problem, but also expresses hope for change of the middle class in the future.

3. Conclusion

Mansfield is inspired by the background of the countries, such as New Zealand entering in modern industry culture in 20th century to write *The Garden Party*. Facing with the huge reformation of productivity, different classes have their own reflection. From the unique perspective, the author analyzes the conflicts between different class, which means that the social problems brought about by the conflicts between the two worlds (exploit and exploited) with the rapid development of science and technology in the West. For example, how to reconcile the decay of capitalism? How to survive in face of the conflicts between the two worlds? The author's value has important meaning for the development of all classes in modern society.

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