

Katherine Mansfield's 'Miss Brill'

Katherine Mansfield is a well renowned writer who has a larger-than-life insight for the human psyche. She largely wrote short stories and is thought to have revolutionised the modern day short story. In her writing, Mansfield had a tendency to explore our human condition and psyche. She sheds light on how we, as humans, create an illusion to act as a mask. She seems interested in how these masks disguise our real lives. We see this in one of the many stories she crafted, Miss Brill. Miss Brill is a lonely women who puts on a mask, to make it feel like she is part of society. The hypothesis for this essay is 'Katherine Mansfield's Miss Brill is an insightful exploration of the inner self.'

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Critic Robert L Hull says "Miss Brill's world is more than lonely; it is also an existential world in which she finds herself in complete solitude estranged from God, man and more importantly, from herself."⁷ We see this when a young couple comes and sits down next to Miss Brill on the seat in the park, where she watches a young couple in a relationship. Hull says "Miss Brill's world is more than lonely; it is also an existential world in which she finds herself in complete solitude estranged from God, man and more importantly, from herself."⁸ Miss Brill overhears the young lady saying "no, because of that stupid old thing over there."

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Katherine Mansfield believes everyone puts on a mask. Critic Isabelle Meyer says "She herself recognizes this towards the end of the story: her fantasy has transmuted reality, and she can no longer see herself outside her imagined role -she is her mask,"⁹ This tells us that Miss Brill had a mask on all the time. I believe she puts on the mask because she wants to be a part of society.

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Critic Robert Hull says "For her, love - the love of her fur piece, which functions like an unsympathetic mirror into which she cannot see, and the 'vision of love', in which she imagines all those gathered in the park singing and thus communicating with one another - is faintly chill because somehow she has been excommunicated from a real experience of love."¹⁰ We see this in her routine of going to the park looking out for familiar faces who she follows each week. We also see this in her imagination as she thinks she is part of a play. We see this in the story where she says 'Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play.'

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⁷ R L Hull, Alienation in 'Miss Brill', *Studies in Short Fiction* Vol. V, No. 1, Fall., (1967) pp 74-6.

⁸ R L Hull, Alienation in 'Miss Brill', *Studies in Short Fiction* Vol. V, No. 1, Fall., (1967) pp 74-6.

⁹ Isabelle Meyer, 'A Masque of Masks'. *Women's Studies Journal*, December (1988), p 77.

¹⁰ R L Hull, Alienation in 'Miss Brill', *Studies in Short Fiction* Vol. V, No. 1, Fall., (1967) pp 74-6.

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(The student's data evaluation chart was completed, but not included with this exemplar.)