Friends of Bloomsbury

KATHERINE MANSFIELD (OCT. 14, 1888 – JAN. 9, 1923) AND T.S. ELIOT (SEP. 26, 1888 – JAN. 4, 1965)
Katherine Mansfield Beauchamp Murry (14 October 1888 – 9 January 1923) was a prominent modernist writer of short fiction who was born and brought up in colonial New Zealand and wrote under the pen name of Katherine Mansfield.
Mansfield and Bloomsbury

- Mansfield was friends with Virginia Woolf.
- She is said to have had an affair with the philosopher Bertrand Russell.
- She also befriended D.H. Lawrence and Lytton Strachey.
- Woolf said she ‘stank like a civet cat that has taken to street walking’ but admitted that she loved her ‘I suppose in my own way’. When Mansfield died, Woolf claimed that Mansfield’s work “was the only writing I have ever been jealous of.”

Portrait of Mansfield, 1918 by Anne Estelle Rice
Mansfield refers to Wilde in her journal:

- “Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you. Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always reaching for new sensations. ... Be afraid of nothing ...” Oscar Wilde.
- “To love madly — perhaps is not wise — yet should you love madly — it is far wiser than not to love at all.” Middleton Murray.
- Mansfield wanted to claim the sexual and intellectual freedom of the artist and felt that intensity was the touchstone of experience.
Mansfield – The Master of the Short Story

One of Mansfield’s innovations was the “plotless story.”

Mansfield was inspired in her stories by post-impressionism and fauvism.
Fauvism is the style of les Fauves (French for "the wild beasts"), a short-lived and loose group of early twentieth-century modern artists whose works emphasized painterly qualities and strong color over the representational and realistic values retained by impressionism. While Fauvism as a style began around 1900 and continued beyond 1910, the movement as such lasted only a few years, 1904-1908, and had three exhibitions. The leaders of the movement were Henri Matisse and André Derain.

Henri Matisse, La femme au chapeau (1905 - oil on canvas). It depicts Henri Matisse’s wife Amelie
Mansfield and Fauvism

Mansfield uses Fauvist techniques to describe the abundance of flowers, the sandwiches with flags, the fancy cream puffs.

“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?” (23)
Does the desire to see everything in the world through an aesthetic lens make one unsympathetic to suffering?

Laura is “the artistic one”
Laura’s dilemma in the story:

• She becomes more and more aware of class differences and does not seem to agree with her family’s and especially her mother’s classist attitude.
• Yet she cannot avoid reproducing these attitudes herself.
Laura and Class

- She tries to look “severe and even a little bit short-sighted” like her mother and to behave “business-like” when she approaches the workmen.

- Laura is constantly testing her own sense of the world against parental teaching: “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.”

- She decides that she has “silly boys” instead of workmen for friends because “of these absurd class distinctions. Well, for her part, she didn’t feel them. Not a bit, not an atom.”

- The story demonstrates, however, that the opposite is true: she is so aware of social class that she is surprised that the workmen have ordinary human responses, like smelling lavender.
Jose’s exaggerated reaction to such a minor offence to custom indicates her narrow-mindedness. The lower classes seem less restricted.

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.

— Katherine Mansfield —
Contrast between Laura and her Mother and Sister

- Jose “loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her. She always made them feel they were taking part in some drama.”
- When Jose sings “This Life is Weary,” her performative nature is emphasized once again
Cancelling the party

- “Of course we can’t do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don’t be so extravagant.”

- Note the ironic use of the word extravagant. Of course, the party with its fifteen different kinds of sandwiches, its abundance of flowers, and its fancy cream puffs is what is really extravagant.

- Later on, Jose minimizes the death by thinking of the dead man as a “drunken workman” (page 27).
"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?"
Description of the lower-class cottages:

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. 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. 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. (page 27)

The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade.
"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. 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...
When Mrs. Sheridan places her hat on Laura’s head, she passes on “the Sheridan heritage of snobbery, restricted social views, narrowness of vision – the garden party syndrome” (Magalaner).

When Laura looks in the mirror, she is reclaimed by the material pleasures of the Sheridan world.
Laura’s epiphany or “unexplained epiphany”

Question for discussion:

- Does Laura separate herself from the frivolity of her privileged family?
Laura’s epiphany or “unexplained epiphany”

Question for discussion:

- Does Laura separate herself from the frivolity of her privileged family?
- Mansfield said that the story incorporates all aspects of life, including death, so it may be that Laura incorporates poverty and death into her “artistic” vision. However, this aestheticization of poverty is also a way of distancing oneself from social circumstances.
“The Daughter of the Late Colonel” was the story that Mansfield specifically described as “the outcome of the Prelude method – it just unfolds and opens.” A prelude is a short musical composition that is part of a set. Like her short story entitled “Prelude,” the story is organized into twelve sections. Each of the story’s sections unfurls into the next, frequently opening with an echo of the sisters’ earlier, random thoughts (for example, see the transition between sections V and VI).
Mansfield’s Prelude Method in Daughters of the Late Colonel

- There is a disparity between the sisters’ vagueness and the clear narrative structure, which contributes to the story’s ironic effects.
- It helps the reader to recognize the deterministic structures that trap the two sisters, organizing their lives for them before they have time to take action.
- From another perspective, the ways in which the characters’ illogical mental lives flow over the boundaries of the different sections of the stories makes a mockery of attempts to organize experience into tidy categories.
“Josephine made no reply. She had flown off on one of her tangents. She had suddenly thought of Cyril. Wasn't it more usual for the only grandson to have the watch? And then dear Cyril was so appreciative and a gold watch meant so much to a young man…” (45).

“I seem to remember last time he came there was some little trouble about the time.” (49).
Are the Pinner sisters capable of starting a new life after their father death? Will they be able to construct identities outside of this (internalized) patriarchal authority?

The story is full of rhetorical questions, unfinished sentences, hesitancies and procrastinations, which show the fear and desolation of the daughters who are now outside their father’s jurisdiction: “We miss our dear father so much”, “Father’s dead” is replaced with “father’s head”, “On the morning – well, on the last morning”
The sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and the photographs. Josephine watched it. (page 52)

Why did the photographs of dead people always fade so? wondered Josephine.
Unexplained epiphany at the end of the story.

The sisters seem comical and child-like and fall back into familiar patterns of communication.
Thomas Stearns Eliot OM (September 26, 1888 – January 4, 1965) was an American publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and "arguably the most important English-language poet of the 20th century." Although he was born an American, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1914 (at age 25) and was naturalised as a British subject in 1927 at age 39.
Modernist themes in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

- Stream of consciousness
- Modernity – the cityscape
- Alienation
- Fragmentation
- Allusions

The Hogarth Press published Eliot’s Poems in 1919. Later, the Woolfs published the first English edition of The Waste Land. The Hogarth Press was founded by the Woolfs in 1917. In the early years it was a hand press in the dining room at Hogarth House in Richmond, England
On 19 October 1918, Leonard Woolf wrote to Eliot:

My wife and I have started a small private Printing Press, and we print and publish privately short works which would not otherwise find a publisher easily. We have been told by Roger Fry that you have some poems which you wish to find a publisher for. We both very much liked your book Prufrock; and I wonder whether you would care to look at the poems with a view to printing them.
Conclusion

- Alienation from modernity and the inability to act.
- Both “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” are full of hesitations.
- Both thematize the uncertain relations between men and women.