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The Blind Eden

The setting and scenery of the garden party accentuates the distinction of the classes in Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party*. Mansfield portrays the garden as heavenly, describing the sky as “veiled with a haze of light gold (245),” and observing that “the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels (246).” The celestial imagery makes the Sheridan garden resemble the sinless paradise of the Bible. Paralleling Adam and Eve’s lack of knowledge about sin in the Garden, Mansfield’s reference to the Garden of Eden underscores the isolated and ignorant nature of the upper class regarding the dark, fallen world in which the lower class resides.

Furthermore, the impoverished are said to be located “at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house (255).” The placement of the Sheridans’ house on a hill emphasizes the contrast in class standing between the Sheridans and the outside world. By placing a physical distance between the upper and lower class, Mansfield underscores the isolation of the Sheridans up on the hill from the knowledge of the reality of the world. Moreover, the hill on which the Sheridans reside on reflects their high social standing and prestige.

The karaka trees also serve to emphasize the isolation of the children from the adults and the outside world. The narrator, Laura, wonders that the karakas “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 (248)?” Like the children, the young karaka trees are hidden behind the marquee- the adults- in the desert island, the mansion. This scene thus parallels and further underscores the situation of the children: isolated and protected by the adults from the outside world.

As a result, Mansfield masterfully parallels the scenery of the novel to the social standing of the people within it, emphasizing the wealthy class’s isolation and blissful ignorance about the outside world.