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Abstract
Considers the importance of the symbolism of the garden, especially from Genesis and medieval literature, in certain works of Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams.

Additional Keywords
Gardens in C.S. Lewis; Gardens in Charles Williams; Gardens in J.R.R. Tolkien; Lewis, C.S. Space Trilogy—Symbolism; Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings—Symbolism; Williams, Charles. Descent Into Hell—Symbolism; George Bolt
The Motif of the Garden in the Novels of J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and C.S. Lewis

Mary Ellen Piits

"It is of the very nature of thought and language," said C. S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love, "to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms." Lewis' own enunciation of this most basic concept of mythopoeia is paralleled by Anne C. Petty's establishing that Tolkien uses a kind of "picture language" as "the vehicle through which myth carries out its function of supplying the human mind with operative symbols for the dispersal of spiritual energy from culture to culture and from age to age." In establishing the importance of the quest in the novels of J. R. R. Tolkien (specifically, The Lord of the Rings trilogy), Charles Williams (Descent into Hell), and C. S. Lewis (the space trilogy), critics have not dealt often with one particular experience shared by several characters in these novels and, indeed, an experience worthy of consideration as a motif in its own right—the character's passing through a garden as part of his journey.

Writing of the enclosed garden in the historically and thematically important Romance of the Rose, Guillaume de Lorris' version, Lewis says:

... (T)he scene is 'at first, a river bank outside a walled garden; later the interior of the garden; and later still, a rose-plot surrounded by a hedge inside the larger garden.' ... (Thus) the scene is 'at first, the river of life in general, in early youth; later, the world of courtly society; later still, the mind of a young girl living in the world of courtly society.' It is not to be supposed, of course, that this allegorical garden is Guillaume's invention. It is the same garden which we have met in Andreas and, before him, in Claudian. In some writers it means Love; in Guillaume it is changed slightly and made to mean the life of the court, considered as the necessary sphere or field for love's operation. But, of course, its classical and erotic models only partially account for it. Deeper than these lies the world-wide dream of the happy garden—the island of the Hesperides, the earthly paradise, Timanogae. The machinery of allegory may always, if we please, be regarded as a system of conduit pipes which thus tap the deep, unfailing sources of poetry in the mind of the folk...

In the Romance the dreamer comes to a fountain, and above it he reads "that this is the same fountain in which Narcissus saw his shadow, for whose love he died." He sees two crystal stones beneath the water, and they reflect the entire garden. Thus the scene is symbolic of both joy and temptation; it is "the mirror perilous and the well of love." The garden with its well or fountain is thus established as an important medieval motif. And Lewis ties the garden to the hero's further development as he writes of the "enlarging of the subject matter" as the modern world nears:

A closed battle-field served Prudentius, and a closed garden Guillaume de Lorris. But if the hero is to be subjected to the appeals both of the false gods and the true, some sort of visionary geography at once becomes necessary, and some amount of journeying. And when a poet has reached this stage it is impossible that he should not begin to incorporate into his allegory certain elements from the romances where the journey with adventures is already the norm; and before he has finished he will find himself making an imaginary country...
wider and more indefinite realities of inner experience. Once again, as long before in Claudian, allegory liberates the mind for free excursions into the merely imaginable... 16

It is not surprising, then, that, following Lewis' own observation that poets eventually left allegory behind and began incorporating other essential elements and expanding into "true experience," Tolkien and Lewis, two medievalists that they were, should incorporate an important motif from their own studies in their major novels, nor is it surprising that Charles Williams includes similar images. The garden theme appears regularly, especially in these writings to be significant, though its significance varies. The garden in the basic Judeo-Christian myth is, of course, Eden—the garden of Paradise, of unfallen man and woman. But the garden takes on additional significance because of the temptation of Eve and Christ present in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucification—praying in his most human moment, "Father, if thou wilt, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42), while his disciples slept in the garden. The garden as paradise figures prominently in the novels of Tolkien; in Williams' Descent into Hell the garden as a place of temptation is the basic form of the motif, and in Lewis' space trilogy both paradise and temptation appear in the garden images.

In The Lord of the Rings the Shire becomes the basic garden image; it is a place of greenness, of peace and poetry for Sam Gamgee, faithful servant to Frodo and almost himself an "inert hero" whose mind and heart, is by trade a gardener, who with the help of Lady Galadriel's magic powder, once again brings life and fertility to the Shire. In the course of the trilogy the bees dominate to be destroyed, but it is in the moments of peace and poetry that Tolkien's narrative style itself takes on poetic qualities and it is in these moments that the gardens appear. In the trilogy trees often provide the garden-like settings, though the enclosed garden is occasionally suggested. Tom Bombadil in the first book is not only a cheerful character older even than nature, but a character whose wife, Goldberry, is described as if she herself were a garden:

Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gold was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew. And her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-illies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots. About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthmotes, white water-illies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool.2

Even with the memory of Old Man Willow's attempt to swallow Merry, the Hobbits find in their time with Tom and Goldberry a time of refreshment, of good food and fellowship and rhyme. Tom as master of "the trees and the grasses" and his wife as daughter of the river (1, 176) compliment each other, and their songs may be seen as praising Middle-earth's version of the Chain of Being.8

But the most significant garden in The Fellowship of the Ring is in Caras Galadon, the City of Trees, where Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel live in a chamber high among the mallorn-trees, a "chamber... filled with a soft light," with walls "of green and silver and its roof of gold" (1, 49). And in this episode Tolkien introduces the temptation in the garden, for Galadriel takes Frodo and Sam to her "mirror":

... (Flashing through a high green hedge they came into an enclosed garden. No trees grew there, and it lay open to the sky. The evening star had risen and was shining with white fire above the western woods. Down a long flight of steps the Lady went into a deep green hollow, through which ran murmuring the tinkling stream that issued from the fountain on the hill. At the bottom, upon a low pedestal carved like a branching tree, stood a basin of silver, wide and shallow, and beside it stood a silvery ever (I, 468).

Clearly this resembles the well of Narcissus, for, while Sam sees visions of what is to come and Frodo sees, among other things, the Eoe, the Lady Galadriel is tempted by Frodo's offer of the One Ring; Galadriel, however, triumphs and tells Frodo, "I pass the test... I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel" (I, 497). The temptation past, poetry and peace again reign in Caras Galadorn, but the time comes to leave this paradise. So strong is the quality of paradise in this elven land that Jane C. Nitech compares the travelers to "Adam and Eve forced to leave paradise for the wilderness, although taking with them its memory as a 'paradise within, happier far,' in Miltonic terms," yet still "knowing 'the danger of light and joy,'"9 Not only does this sequence represent one of the most significant uses of the garden motif, but because the gifts of Galadriel help the travelers in their peril and after they return home, it is one of the central passages of the trilogy—a garden within a garden that represents life, love of fellow, and finally, overcoming temptation.

In The Two Towers the moments of peace and poetry are rare, but these interludes on the journey come twice. When Pippin and Merry are rescued by Treebeard, they are in nature's garden—a forest through which sunlight has just pierced, enclosed by "a rock-wall... No trees grew on it." The twigged tops were stretched out stiff and still, as if reaching out to the warmth... early spring or a fleeting vision of it was about them" (II, 81-82). Treebeard is himself a poetic creature, singing and telling legends, and the hobbitt's time with him is also a time of peace and pure delight of fresh and growing—even though the hobbit must first overcome their fear of the name of Fangorn and must later endure great struggles.

Then when Gandalf, Aragorn, and their followers in the divided company come to Broma, where lives the old king Theoden, they, too, find a land where peace and poetry have, at least formerly, existed, though the prevailing mood now is Old must as expressed in the song that Aragorn recalls, which begins, "Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?" (II, 142). Entering the gates of the city, the company find "a broad path... Beside the way in a stone channel a stream of clear water flowed, sparkling and chattering;" then at the top of the hill they find "in the middle of a wide flat land a stone steps of which a bright spring gushed from a stone...; beneath it was a wide basin from which the water spilled and fed the falling stream" (II, 145). This setting is reminiscent of the setting in Galadriel's garden, and in this garden-like setting there is also the feeling of the temptation. Even here bears the name of the traditional serpent-templer, for he is called "Warontongue," and he has seduced the king to inactivity. Yet when Warontongue is discredited, the little group of travelers find help and refreshment from the revived king Theoden.

In the final book of the trilogy, when Aragorn has finally made his way to assume his title as king of Gondor, Gandalf takes Aragorn to Mount Minas Tirith, where they look out over the city, which is "touched by sunlight" so that "all the vale of Anduin was like a garden, and the Mountains of Shadow were veiled in a golden mist" (III, 307). In their conversation Gandalf explains the end of the Third Age of the world and calls Aragorn's realm "the heart of the greater realms that shall be" (III, 307), thus prophesying that this garden will become the center of a greater paradise. Aragorn, looking to his own eventual death, expresses his concern for continuation of the realm and introduces another garden image when he says, "The Tree in the Court of the Fountain, and all with it, will come back to life, and I will see a sign that it will ever be otherwise?" (III, 308). As Gandalf directs him, Aragorn climes to the edge of the snow and finds a tiny tree that bears "one small cluster of flowers whose white petals shone like the sunit snow" (III, 308). Jubilantly he accepts the ring and turns back to the Citadel: "And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom"
In this passage, with syntax echoing the King James Version of the Bible, the narrator heightens the image of the garden of paradise and prepares for the arrival of Arwen Evenstar, Aragorn’s bride. Later when Frodo says farewell to Aragorn and Queen Arwen, they sit beside the fountain, while the Queen sings and the Tree blossoms. With the promise of fruitfulness in all living creatures and with the troubles of the travelers nearly ended, the parting image of Aragorn and his Queen is one of paradise, of the ideal garden.

Then at the end of the third volume the Shire as garden returns. With the help of Lady Galadriel’s life-giving power, Sam the gardener brings the Shire back to greenness, and “Spring surpassed his wildest hopes” (III, 375). The only melion west of the Mountains springs from the seed given to Sam by Galadriel, and the fruitfulness of all creatures is reflected by the birth of Sam and Rose’s first child, whom Frodo names Elanor, after the golden flower of Lothlorien. The Shire is once again a garden, as it was in the beginning, with Sam the gardener as mayor, even as Frodo leaves to assume immortality in the Grey Havens.

The questing figures of Williams’ Descent into Hell (Pauline and Wentworth, whose quests are opposite) find the garden in one of two places that contain that of paradise. Pauline has her first real conversation with Lily Sammile in her grandmother’s garden.10 When Wentworth climbs out the window to meet the succubus Adela, he is led into what seems to be a “wood,” and he hears “the sound of water running, gently, a lulling and a lapping” (84). His thoughts reveal his temptation:

It was good for him to be here... one day he would laugh, but laughter would be tiring here, under trees and leaves..., -eaves and eves...

Many Eves to envy Adams.

He might be back again in Eden, and she be Eve, the only man with all that belonged to the only man. Others... were inconsiderable to the grand life that walked now in this glade. They hardly belonged to it at all they belonged outside, outside the sealed garden... through a secret gate of which he had entered, getting back to himself. He was inside and at peace. He said aloud: "I won’t go back" (85).

The garden of paradise and the garden of loss are effectively combined in this image as the doomed Wentworth begins his own descent into hell.

Later, after Pauline has made her offer to assume her long-dead relative’s “burden,” she returns home to find Peter Stanhope approaching. Significantly, she waits “outside her gate” (173). The relationship between Pauline and Peter Stanhope is a spiritual one, the opposite of Wentworth’s relationship with the succubus, and Williams does not have Peter enter the gate; the imagery suggests a purity opposite to Wentworth’s entrance into the “sealed garden.”

The final suggestion of a garden comes when Lily Sammile, whose shed-like residence is at the edge of the cemetery, “close to the cemetery railing,” leans “towards Adela... holding on to a bar of the gate” (194). Lily, the opposite of the Queen and the Tree, blesses the opposite of fertility, and she beckons to Adela to enter her domain (as she earlier beckoned to Pauline outside Pauline’s gate), in an ironic opposite of the garden imagery which Williams has used earlier. Pauline remembers Lily

as something more than an old woman by a gate, or if, then a very old woman indeed by a very great gate, where many go in who choose themselves, the gate of Gomorrah in the Plain, illusion and the end of illusion; the opposite of holy fact, and the contradiction of sacred love (293).

The garden and garden-like images in Williams’ novel thus suggest temptation or the opposite of the real paradise—a fitting suggestion for the subject of the novel.

In C. S. Lewis’ space trilogy, the references to Eden become frequent, the garden images often suggestive of paradise but sometimes also of temptation. The development of Ransom as a hero through his quests and his emergence as the Fisher-King in the third book grow out of his passing through a series of adventures, often connected with a garden, which culminate to Venus’ hovering over St. Anne’s mansion and bringing peace and fruitfulness to a world lately on the brink of destruction.

The trilogy begins with the Pedestrian, who later is found to be a professor of philology on holiday, trying to help a woman find her son and also to find lodging for himself in an attempt to enter the Rime, Ransom first throws his pack over the gate. Once he has done so, Ransom realises: "that he had not till now fully made up his mind—now that he must break into the garden if only in order to recover his pack."11 Thus begins Ransom’s adventure that will take his first to Malacandra (Mars) and later to Perlalanda (Venus) and back to earth to become the Fisher-King and the Pendragon. When Ransom, on Malacandra, is brought to Meldilorn, he finds there “a broad avenue of monoliths—a much larger Stonehenge, stately and vanishing over the crest of the hill into the pale shadow of the flower-trunks,” and there he hears “a faint, continual agitation of silvery sound” (SEP, 108) made by the eldia. In the afternoon he finds himself “on the fringes of a grove and looking straight up the monolithic avenue” (SEP, 110). This is not exactly an earthly garden, but more like an outdoor temple, for the stones bear carvings of apparently historical or mythical meaning, or both. The next day, when he must come before the Gyarsa, he senses that he must “go up to the crown of the island and the grove” (SEP, 118), along the avenue lined by the monoliths. This grove, this garden-like setting, is an appropriate place for his introduction to the Gyarsa.

Perlalanda itself is an account of paradise. Significantly, Lewis wrote this Edenic vision, this “prose poem,” while he was preparing his Preface to Paradise Lost.12 and the Miltonic overtones are clear. Ransom’s return from Perlalanda, described early in the book, occurs “in clear early sunlight in the little wildness of deep weeds which Ransom’s garden had now become” (P, 30), and when he emerges from his coffee-like space vehicle he is covered with Perlandalian flowers. The garden motif is thus established early in the novel, and narrator takes us back in time to Ransom’s awakening on Perlalanda, he describes a "wars, maternal, delicately gorgeous world" (P, 36) in which the water gleamed, the sky burned with gold, but all was rich and dim, and his eyes fed upon it undazzled and unaching. The very names of green and gold, which he used perforce in describing the scene, are too harsh for the tenderness, the muted iridescence... (P, 36).

In this enchanted wonderland, drinking from the sensuous bubble-trees, Ransom confronts a re-enactment of the struggle in Eden, in which the body of Weston, possessed by a demonic force, argues at length with the innocent lady of Perlalanda; and eventually Ransom must destroy this evil shell of Weston, the Un-man. “Given the Eden-like crisis,” says Kathryn Hume, “... one does no violence to the story to label this evil possessor Satan himself, here inhabiting the squat form of the scientist instead of a Miltonic toad or serpent.”13 C. S. Lewis compared Perlalanda and Milton’s Eden:

On Perlalanda and in Milton’s Eden, nature is good and man lives in harmony with it. The beasts are friendly and subservient to man. Paradise is inhabited by a single couple. Woman is related to man as man is related to God. And God deals with his people directly, imposing one prohibition.14

And as Ransom, through the struggles on Perlalanda, learns that “Our mythology is based on a solider reality than we dream” (P, 201), he sees the perfect image of paradise:

For as the light reached its perfection and settled itself, it made, as a lord upon his throne or like wine in a bowl, and filled
the whole flowery cup of the mountain top, every
cranny, with its purity, the holy thing, Paradise
itself in its two Persons, Paradise walking
hand in hand, its two bodies shining in the light
like emeralds yet not themselves too bright to
look at, came in sight, . . . And the gods
kneeled and bowed their huge bodies before the
small forms of that young King and Queen (P, 204).

The paradise on Perelandra is a magnificent, sensuous gar­
den, but part of Ransom’s quest is bearing the arguments of
the Un-man and fighting this temptation hand-to-hand until
he destroys it; then the paradise can exist without threat.

Although That Hideous Strength focuses on a more realis­
tic struggle—that of a young couple and their involvement
with the frightening, destructive power of the National
Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.), the garden
motif is especially important to the young couple and to the
conclusion of the novel. In the early part of the book,
Jane Studdock, as she enters the manor at St. Anne’s on her
mission to see Miss Ironwood for help in understanding her
dreams, thinks of her surroundings:

It was a very large garden. It was like—like—
yes, . . . the garden in Peter Rabbit. Or was it
like the garden in the Romance of the Rose? No,
not in the least like really. Or like Kingley’s
garden? Or the garden in Alice? Or like the
garden on the top of some Mesopotamian zigurat
which had probably risen to the whole legend of
Paradise? Or simply like all walled gardens?
Freud said we liked gardens because they were
symbols of the female body. But that must be a
man’s point of view . . . . She shook off all
these ideas about gardens and determined to pull
herself together (THS, 62).

With this explicit garden imagery, as well as the allusions
to other literary gardens, Lewis adds to the garden as para­
dise and the garden as a place of temptation the sexual as­
pect of the garden used by some medieval writers; and this
additional suggestiveness of the garden motif is important
in this novel, for it is the story, first, of Jane’s struggle
with herself and with Mark, second, of Mark’s struggle with
himself and with N.I.C.E., and finally, of their escape
from the struggle into a new awareness of each other, into a
blessness of their marriage, which will now “be fruitful be­
cause it now has meaning and also because from it will be
born a child who will carry on the work of Ransom and the
others,” 15

Near the end of the novel, a dazed Mark Studdock leaves
Belbury in a horrible confusion of mechanical chaos, human
chaos, and (innocent) bestial chaos. He leaves behind him
his ambition, dehumanized “human engineering,” and the detachment
that has made him a poor excuse for a husband; and he stumbles
toward St. Anne’s and Jane, feeling less than worthy of
Jane’s love. He thinks that he has
behaved as if here native to that fenced garden
and even its natural possessor.

All this, which should have been uneasy joy, was
torment to him, for it came too late. He was
discovering the hedge after he had plucked the
rose, and not only plucked it but torn it all
to pieces and crumpled it with hot, thumb-like,
greedy fingers? How had he dared? (THS, 381).

With this rich garden imagery, almost directly from the
Romance of the Rose and filled with sexual overtones, Lewis
sets the tone for the conclusion of the book. By this time
Yevnus has descended to St. Anne’s, and C. S. Lewis
says, “A great dome of light stands over the whole garden. Look:
The elephants are dancing” (THS, 378). While the elephants
and all the other animals that escaped from the destruc­tion
of Belbury are dancing, Jane is sent by Ransom, the Pen­
dragon, to be the Fisher- King, to the Lodge to await Mark’s com­
ing, with the promise, “You will have no more dreams. Have
children instead.” (THS, 380). And Jane
goes out of the big house “into the liquid light and super­
natural warmth of the garden and across the wet lawn . . .
going down all the time, down to the lodge, descending
the ladder of humility” (THS, 382). Passing through this last
garden downward into humility, Jane comes to the same true humanity that Mark has just realized as he, too, made his
way toward the Lodge. The trial is over; the garden motif
has prepared the reader for the microcosmic paradise that is
about to begin for Jane and Mark and for the larger paradise
that can exist after the destruction of N.I.C.E.

With the authors’ knowledge of the long tradition of
literary garden motifs, with Lewis’ writing about these gar­
dens in his literary criticism, and with the frequent appear­
ance of gardens or of garden-like scenes in the novels of
Tolkien, Williams, and Lewis, we should be safe in assuming
that these writers consciously included the garden as motif.
Certainly, in terms of the rich symbolism handed down by a
long literary heritage, the link between the quest and the
garden merits attention. And the garden images serve to
introduce themes, to reinforce themes, to link the parts of
a novel or a trilogy, and to add to the reader’s pleasure.

Footnotes

1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 44.
2 The Allegory of Love, pp. 119-120.
3 Ibid., p. 128.
4 Ibid., p. 15.
5 Ibid., p. 260.
6 J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring: being the
first part of The Lord of the Rings (New York: Ballantine
will be from the Ballantine editions and will be identified
by volume and page number in the text.
7 Jane C. Nitze, Tolkien’s Art: A “Mythology for Eng­
8 Ibid., p. 109.
9 Charles Williams, Descent into Hell (Grand Rapids, Michi­
ences to this work will be from this edition, with page num­ ers indicated in the text.
10 C. S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (New York: Macmillan
Paperbacks, 1965), p. 10. All references to the space
trilogy will be from the Macmillan Paperbacks and will be
identified in the text by page numbers with the following abbreviations: OSP. Out of the Silent Planet; P, Perelandra;
THS, That Hideous Strength.
11 C. S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (New York: Macmillan
12 Bright Shadow of Reality, p. 104.
13 Bright Shadow of Reality, p. 104.
14 Ibid., p. 100.
continued on page 42
a friendly instructor if they would do this. Additional copies of the flyer will be sent on request.

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Bibliography


Irish Mythological Cycle, continued from p. 9


Journal Articles


"Felicitous Space" continued from page 17 be taken from this edition; page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.


"Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 15. Subsequent quotations will be taken from this edition; page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis.


PARMA ELDALAMBERON

The Council of Stewards regrets to announce that Parma Eldalamberon, the Mythopoeic Society's Elvish language journal, must be officially discontinued. It has been three years since Parma 5 appeared, and a long series of letters and personal approaches to the Parma staff has failed to bring another issue demonstrably nearer to publication.

While the Mythopoeic Linguistic Fellowship, a special activity group, has always undertaken production of the magazine, the Society as a whole owns Parma, is financially responsible for it, and is legally obligated to fulfill subscriptions. The Stewards have acted unanimously in the light of these responsibilities.

Though the magazine may someday be reconstituted, it is indeed the entire Council hopes that this will be the case - we are setting the books in order by addressing an offer of settlement to current Parma subscribers. Any revival will be announced.

Meanwhile our readers and members are asked not to send Parma subscription money to the Society. Back issues remain available. Articles on Mythopoeic languages will be welcome in Mythlore.

Lee Speth, 1981 Chairman, for The Council of Stewards

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Corbin Scott Camell, Editor.