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The Motif of the Garden in the Novels of J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and C.S. Lewis

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
"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. Pett'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, Timan-gue. 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. This fountain is thus 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. . . .6

It is not surprising, then, that following Lewis' own observation that poets eventually left allegory as a device and began incorporating other conventional elements and expanding into "mixed experience," Tolkien and Lewis, good 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 image, though appearances regularly vary 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 gestured in the Book of Genesis the night before his crucifixion—praying in his most human moment, "Father, if thou wilt be- 

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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 manor 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 Rise. 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." Thus begins Ransom's adventure that will take him first to Malacandra (Mars) and later to Perelandra (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" (GE, 108) made by the elders. In the afternoon he finds himself "on the fringes of a grove and looking straight up the monolithic avenue" (GP, 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 Oyarss, he senses that he must "go up to the crown of the islands", entering the Great Stone Way through a "wide avenue of stones", and back to earth to become the Fisher-King and the Pendragon, as a hero through his quests and his emergence as the Fisher-King.

Perelandra itself is an account of paradise. Significantly, Lewis wrote this Edenic vision, this "prose poem," while he was preparing his Preface to Paradise Lost, and the Miltonic overtones are clear. Ransom's return from Perelandra, described early in the book, occurs "in clear early sunlight in the little wilderness of deep weeds which Ransom's garden had now become" (P, 30), and when he emerges from his coffin-like space vehicle he is covered with Perelandrian flowers. The garden motif is thus established early in the novel, and the narrator takes us back in time as Ransom's awakening on Perelandra, he finds there a "wars, maternal, delicately gorgeous world" (P, 36) in which

the water glistened, 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 Perelandra 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 quintessential form of the scientist instead of a Miltonic toad or serpent." Orchard E. Carnell compares Perelandra and Milton's Eden:

On Perelandra 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.

And as Ransom, through the struggles on Perelandra, learns that "Our mythology is based on a solid reality than we dream" (P, 201), he sees the perfect image of paradise: For as the light reached its perfection and settled itself, as it were, like a lord upon his throne or like wine in a bowl, and filled
the whole flowery cup of the mountain top, every
creamy, with its purity, the holy thing, Parasi
dise 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 Ransoms's quest is hearing 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 involve
ment 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 Kingo
sor's garden? Or the garden in Alios? Or like the
garden on the top of some Mesopotamian zig
zag which probably given rise 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 emergence
from the struggle into a new awareness of each other, into a
nessness 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 Ransoms 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 he were 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
Venus has descended on St. Anne's and Grace Ironwood 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 Ransoms, the Pen
dragon into the Fisher-Ring, to the Lodge to await Mark's com-
ing, with the promise, "You will have no more dreams. Have
children instead." Grand Malady! (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, 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 One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology (University
3 The Allegory of Love, pp. 119-120.
4 Ibid., p. 128
5 Ibid., p. 129.
6 Ibid., p. 260.
7 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.
8 Jane C. Nitzche, Tolkien's Art: A "Mythology for Engl
9 Ibid., p. 109.
10 Charles Williams, Descent into Hell (Grant Rapids, Michi
to this work will be from this edition, with page numbers
indicated in the text.
11 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:
CP. Out of the Silent Planet; F. Perelandra; TH. That Hideous Strength.
12 Dordt Scott Cornell, Bright Shadow of Reality: C. S.
Lewis and the Feeling Intellect (Grand Rapids, Michigan:
13 Kathryn Hume, "C. S. Lewis' Trilogy: A Cosmic Romance,"
MPB, 20, No. 4 (Winter 1974-75), 514.
14 Bright Shadow of Reality, p. 104.
15 Ibid., p. 100.
(continued from page 14)
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Irish Mythological Cycle, continued from p. 9


---. Journal Articles

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


4Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas; (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 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 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 decided, the entire Council hopes that this will be the case - we are setting the book 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 onElvish language and Mythopoeics will be welcome in Mythlore.

Lee Speth, 1981 Chairman, for The Council of Stewards

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