The Mythology of *Perelandra*

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Abstract
Discusses the mythology of Lewis's *Perelandra*, finding its sources primarily in the Bible, with a few classical allusions.

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C. S. Lewis' novel Perelandra is a myth for our time. It is a reworking of Christian, Arthurian, and Greek myths into a cosmic whole. Lewis has developed a fanciful but internally consistent world view that embraces space ships and talking beasts, fallen Man and men from Mars. Perelandra opens with Ransom's journey and return as told by his friend Lewis. Thus we see through the eyes of the initiate the appearance of the Oyarsa, whose presence seemed to abolish the earthly horizontal. Malacandra himself seemed to stand straight by some different system of reference; he made the room appear aslant. When Lewis first perceived this being he instantly knew it was 'good,' but began to doubt whether he liked goodness as much as he had supposed. The division between natural and supernatural had broken down, and only at its disappearance did Lewis realize what a comfort it had been. This abolishing of earthly systems of reference has a two-fold function in the novel. It immediately establishes a sense of 'otherness' in the eldila, and it serves to demonstrate that the earth, Thulcandra, is out of harmony with the rest of the universe. It is the earth, not the Oyarsa, who is aslant.

Ransom's arrival in Perelandra is set down as related to Lewis after his return. He said that the smells of the floating island where he found himself created a new type of hunger and thirst, 'a longing that seemed to flow over from the body into the soul and which was heaven to feel.' (PERE, 41) This example of sehnsucht is the theme of the entire novel. It is the sense of inexpressible loss experienced on earth and the necessity to prevent that loss on Perelandra. This desire was heightened after he awoke on the Forbidden Land and caught the night-breath on the floating islands drifting toward him:

The cord of longing which drew him to the invisible isle seemed to him... to have been fastened long, long before his coming to Perelandra, long before the earliest times that memory could recover in his childhood, before his birth, before the birth of man himself, before the origin of time. (PERE, 103)

C. S. Lewis related that he began the composition of the novel by "seeing pictures" of the floating island. The story came later, for something had to happen on that island if he were to write a novel. Lewis said that the story could have been quite different than "paradise retained" except that he was interested in that myth on other grounds. (DOW, 97) Because the theme of soul of Perelandra is Paradise and the action only a means to capture that soul, Lewis employed an abundance of mythic references to give the "feel" he intended.

The first of these occurs when Ransom awakes after his first night on Perelandra. There was a tree of heraldic color, with silver leaves and golden fruit, and around its base was curled a dragon. "He recognized the garden of the Hesperides at once." (PERE, 45) Note that nothing happens in this mythic reference. The garden was in ITSELF a myth without Herakles to steal apples. Ransom wondered "were all the things which appeared as mythology on earth scattered through other worlds as realities?" (PERE, 45) And the thesis of the trilogy seems to be that indeed they are. Ransom himself had the feeling he was not "following an adventure but...enacting a myth." (PERE, 47)

Lewis developed original myth in the Forbidden Land. Preparation for it begins when Ransom finds berries with a satisfying taste. But occasionally one of the berries had a red center and was delicious to the point of ecstasy. He reflected that on earth red-centered berries would be specially produced; they would become terribly expensive; men would steal and kill to get them. Perhaps this desire to unroll life, to repeat a pleasure, was the root of all evil. Of course money is the root of all evil, but perhaps it is chiefly valued as a power to repeat pleasure, as a defense against chance. (PERE, 44) This was the temptation of the Fixed Land—to own things and know where to find them, to know where one would be the next morning, to control one's own destiny rather than trusting Palaelid.

The Edenic Myth

There are three central myths in Perelandra, all scriptural. The first is the Edenic myth, complete with a masterful temptation scene that surpasses Milton in understanding; the flaws which Lewis lists in his Preface to Paradise Lost are the very things which he has successfully avoided. Lewis' Satan is never magnificent (as Milton's Satan is in the first two books). After Ransom is kept awake for hours by the Unman saying "Ransom...Nothing" he perceives the falsity of the old maxim that Satan is a gentleman. The Unman demonstrates none of the suave Mephistopheles or the sombre Satan from Paradise Lost, but only imbecility whenever away from the Green Lady. His intelligence seemed overpowering in debate, but it was
to him merely a tool to be cast aside like his pretended interest in the descendants of Eve. He delighted in mystifying his visitors, who were whirligig, obliques. Ranso-
son's first real glimpse of the Uman ripping up frogs with his fingernails was a revelation of an evil so far beyond vice as the lady's innocence was beyond virtue. The sight of that pure evil caused him to faint. On recovery he agreed with the old philosophers and poets that the sight of the devils could be one of the worst torments in Hell. One Face beheld gives unspeakable joy; one face given there is no recovery. (PERE, 126) Another myth had become fact.

Dr. Kilby suggests that the best part of the entire novel is the fact that we are not supposed to believe that the Fall was a reasoned affair, but rather "the result of a nice balancing of dialectic in which the ego and will of man concluded to reject the notion of their dependence upon God." Eve learned that the Fall was forbidden only because the lady was so slighted. To be sure, to command where she would be, to reject the wave, to remove her hand from Maleldil's—this was the temptation. (PERE, 288)

Charles Moorman contends that the temptation turns on the question of the fortunate fall. This is a valid point. After the Uman had expounded that doctrine to the lady, Ransom had the feeling that the whole universe waited for her answer. There was so much truth in the charge, and just enough falsehood to be treacherous. His reply is the climax of the argumentative part of the struggle:

"Of course good came of it. Is Maleldil a beast that we can stop his path, or a leaf that we can twist his shape? Whatever you do, He will make good of it. But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed Him... (PERE, 121)

The Redeemer Myth

At this point John Brinini charges that Lewis used Ransom as deus ex machina, rescuing an Eve who is too weak to stand alone. He states that this leads to another weakness in the plot—Ransom is hailed by Adam and Eve as the Savior of Perelandra. Mr. Brinini, however, has missed the point of the entire novel in dismissing the savior image as a weakness of plot. For the physical totalities and the metaphysical totalities are both contained and brought into focus the second major theme of the novel, the Redeemer myth. It is essential to realize that Perelandra is not Eden revisited. Ransom found that his own parallel of the situation broke down because Beth-lehem came between them. The universe had turned a corner, and now God works through man. (PERE, 144) Ransom did feelHorror at the crudeness of physical combat. It would injure and spiritually destroy both the potential of mere mythology." (PERE, 143) And this yields another significant statement on the nature of myth: Ransom (was) becoming aware that the triple distinction between soul and body and of both from fact was purely terrestrial—was part and parcel of that unhappy division between soul and body which resulted from the Fall. (PERE, 143) Sacraments were a reminder on earth that the Incarnation was the beginning of its disappearance, and on Perelandra the distinction was completely without meaning. Anything that happened there would seem like myth on earth.

As Ransom began to take on the role of the redeemer he began to see just how much the Incarnation had altered the universe; Maleldil never repeated Himself. Once God had become the divine foe of His body He worked through men. (PERE, 143) The voice told him "It is not for nothing that you are named Ransom." (PERE, 145) This seemed the more striking to Ransom as a philosopher. For he knew he was derived from "Randolph's son." He began to perceive that the accidental and the designed are another distinction meaningless outside of earth, once one sees the large pattern. The old controversy about free will and predestination became meaningless, even silly. (PERE, 145) (Later we learned that Dr. Ransom's first name is also significant. "Elwin, friend of the eldil.") Then the Voice said "My name is Elwin." Ransom knew that if he failed to prevent the Fall another way would be provided, a way more costly and more wonderful than even the Incarnation on Tellus.

The Christian image is more potent than Lewis realized when he wrote the volume. Lewis himself stated that Ransom was like Christ only in the sense that all men are called upon to enact Christ; fiction just chooses spectacular examples. But the parallels to scripture are too numerous to warrant that conclusion. Ransom is wounded in the heel; he smashes the Unman's head with a rock to fulfill the Genesis prophecy that He (Christ) shall bruise your head, and you (Satan) shall bruise his heel." Ransom's descent into the earth and the region of fire parallels Christ's descent into Hell. Ransom was apparently in the earth about three days, and emerged into a scene of breathtaking spring beauty that recalls the resurrection. He "ascended" at the end of the novel, carried in the white coffin back to earth. In the next volume he rules in Logres, as Christ ruling over the faithful. In That Hideous Strength the Christ image is continued, with Ransom acting only bread or wine (the elements of the Sacrament) and later truly ascending into Heaven, or Luz.

The Apocalyptic Myth

The third central myth in the apocalyptic. In the introduction we learned that the Black Archon was planning an attack on Perelandra. The attack came in the person of Weston, and Ransom is called upon to enact the part of the Redeemer for the planet. In the temptation that Ooms used in the Italian Epic, but after the triumph she and the King are hailed in all their ceremonial names: "Oyarsa-Perelandra, the Adam, the Crown, Tor and Tindriel, Baru and Baru'ah, Ask and Em-bla, Yatsur and Yatsurah." (PERE, 206) For the first time Ransom saw the actuality of Man as animal rationale—"This living Paradise, the Lord and Lady as the resolution of discord, the bridge that spans what would else be a chasm in creation, the keystone of the whole arch." (PERE, 206) They united the beasts with the eldils, the corporeal with the spiritual. This was the morning day, the beginning—or not even the beginning. It was the "wiring of true forever" in order that the world may then begin. (PERE, 212) What we call the apocalypse they called the beginning, when the great smoke rises and the heavenly powers fall upon the earth, and the moon is broken; its fragments fall into the world and cause a great smoke to arise and blot out the sun. Evil will show itself stripped of disguise—plagues and horrors will do their work as time. But all will be cleansed when Maleldil Himself descends unveiled. That will be the Morning, the Great Dance. And yet even now is the Great Dance in which Ransom saw revealed the harmony of the cosmos. This is the myth that cannot be forgotten, the great hymn of praise to Male-
edil:

There is no way out of the center save into the Bent Will into which you are called. Blessed be He... There seems no plan because it is all plan: There seems no center because it is all center. Blessed be He! (PERE, 216)

Classical and Biblical Allusions

Perelandra is full of tantalizing hints and quies-
He wished he could renew the pagan practice of propitiating local gods, not in insult to Maleldil, but merely as an apology for trespass. (PERE, 176) After he came out of the cave he found a forest for dwarfs and saw mountain mice the size of bees, horses the size of mice, and singing beasts. (PERE, 189)

The mythic element is heightened in the final triumph of the novel. The rejoicing of Revelation is apparent in the cry "Today is the morning day." (PERE, 196) The Oyarsa reveal themselves in tornadoes of light, in the wheels of Ezekiel, and finally as huge white human-like forms, with colors pulsing through and around them. The Oyarsa of Mars was a "cold and morning color, a little metallic--pure, hard, bracing," while the Oyarsa of Venus "glowed with a warm splendor, full of the sugary metal--biscuit, sugar." (PERE, 196) Their faces were primitive like "Archaic statues from Aegina." They revealed the true meaning of gender of which sex is only an adaptation. The one was masculine, not male; the other feminine, not female. They were Mars and Venus, Ares and Aphrodite. Ransom asked how they were made known to the poets of Tellus: "Not an observation but an enactment." (PERE, 210) This mention of Uar is preparation for the next volume, That Invisible Strength, which adds the Arthurian myth to Lewis' own cosmic myth. Out of the Silent Planet was the first stating of the cosmic myth, but only in Perelandra was it fully developed. In creating his mythic framework, Lewis employed a wealth of Biblical and classical allusions--notably the Edenic, the Redeemer, the Apocalypse. In the world of Perelandra, myth has become fact.

Footnotes

World of Fanzines

by Bernie Zuber

This review column is to acquaint readers of Mythlore with fannish, the publication of science fiction and fantasy fans. I have placed some emphasis on Tolkien-oriented fantasy fanzines because I felt our readers' interest would obviously be in that direction. A review of the Tolkien Society of America's Tolkien Journal would have been most appropriate but I haven't read a new issue. #10 is out as I write this but haven't received it yet and there's another reason I couldn't review it. This issue of Mythlore is also issue #12 of Tolkien Journal so it would be rather awkward for TJ #12 to review TJ #10, wouldn't it? Well, so much for that review.

Unicorn, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall-Winter 1969, is published by Karen Rockow (1153 E. 26th St., Brooklyn, NY 11210). Its 28 pages are beautifully printed for only 50¢ a copy (plus 10¢ postage) or four issues for $2.00. The number of subscribers was limited to 300 copies and the one I read was numbered 287, so I don't know if any others are available. Future issues should be worthwhile though, so you should try to subscribe.

I had thought that Unicorn was strictly a fantasy fanzine, but I found out that it is exactly what the editor calls it, an independent miscellaneous journal. The highlight of this issue consists of excerpts from a speech given by I. F. Stone at Harvard for a Vietnam Moratorium become an appearance. This publishes a paper in Washington, D.C. called I. F. Stone's Weekly. It is usually quite critical of administration policies, particularly about the Vietnam war. Although I felt that these excerpts from his speech were quite informative, I felt that Mr. Stone is another one of these people who are very good at criticism but somehow fail to explain in detail exactly what should be done. It isn't until the very end of his speech that he makes a broad statement making the Harvard students to work toward uniting the people of the world.

And when they told him this, Ransom at last understood why mythology was what it was--gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility. (PERE, 201-202)

This quotation is one of the most significant statements that Lewis made about mythology. The Latin phrase is often (and validly) quoted as a synopsis of his theory of mythology: it is "Gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility."

Thus the novel ends with a combination of classical images. Lewis made reference to the fact that Ransom will not find it easy to die after living in Perelandra; for was it not true that earlier generations on earth, closer to Paradise, had lived for centuries? Ransom replied that "Most take it only for a Story or a Poetry"--but it was revealed as very Truth. There is a mention of Uar, the place where Maleldil taught Tor of good and evil, and the very mention of that name seems "Not an observation but an enactment." (PERE, 210) This mention of Uar is preparation for the next volume, That Invisible Strength, which adds the Arthurian myth to Lewis' own cosmic myth. Out of the Silent Planet was the first stating of the cosmic myth, but only in Perelandra was it fully developed. In creating his mythic framework, Lewis employed a wealth of Biblical and classical allusions--notably the Edenic, the Redeemer, the Apocalypse. In the world of Perelandra, myth has become fact.

The most attractive thing about this issue of Unicorn is Tim Kirk's art. Tim, who is Karen's art editor by long distance, has done front and back covers featuring a very funny unicorn. His illustration for one of the poems for surpasses the poem itself. There are three other artists represented in this issue, but Tim is still my favorite.