

Free Will in *Perelandra*: Fiction is not for the Simple-Minded

by D. Matthew Brown

Unlike in his apologetic works, C. S. Lewis uses the literary devices of fiction to state implicitly what he believes explicitly. *Perelandra* by Lewis is no exception, bearing in the guise of his exceptional storytelling the theological depth that so enriches all of his works. By this mean, Lewis allows the fantastic story of Ransom on the planet Perelandra to tacitly imbue the reader's mind with Lewis's own theology, causing the reader to think that his conclusions with regard to theology in *Perelandra* are his own rather than Lewis's. This is the objective of Lewis's fiction—that a wider audience that is normally hostile to Lewis's explicit works might let down their guard and read a "harmless" fictitious book. What a reader encounters however is a work that's depth and statements of truth are so apparent that he cannot leave the work without making a decision—much like the Bible that Lewis believed.

One aspect of the theological depth in *Perelandra* that Lewis addresses is the nature of the free will of man. As difficult a subject as the free will of man is, Lewis does not simply address the free will of any common man alone, but he also addresses the free will of the prelapsarian man. Lewis attempts to accomplish this impossible task by creating in his mind and on page an unfallen world, namely the planet Perelandra. This Perelandra has as its quasi-human inhabitants Tor and Tinidril, the respective Adam and Eve of the Garden of Eden. With Tor's presence in the novel held till the final chapters of the book, Tinidril is Lewis's character by which he portrays what he believes the actions and rationale of a prelapsarian person would be. Her actions and rationale are then exemplified by the comparing and contrasting of her with the two other main characters in the novel—Ransom, the redeemed man, and Weston, the unredeemed, fallen man enthralled by the influence of Thulcandra, the respective serpent from the Garden of Eden. Thus Lewis elucidates what he believes to be both the nature of the free will of fallen man and the free will of unfallen man in *Perelandra*.

What Lewis attempts to portray in the nature of the free will of Tinidril is at best speculative and incomprehensible to the fallen mind. Since there is no exhaustive account of Eve's encounter with the serpent prior to her fall, Lewis's recreation of the temptation is totally fictitious and possibly erroneous. Nevertheless, Lewis attempts to reveal the nature of Tinidril's unfallen state and free will by several dialogues between her and Ransom and her and Weston. Ransom is the first to encounter Tinidril in Perelandra; he meets her on one of the floating islands that move with and conform to the waves of the sea on the planet. Ransom's first meeting with Tinidril expresses much of Lewis's beliefs of the

prelapsarian condition. When the two first see each other, Tinidril laughs at the sight of Ransom because of his odd appearance, for Tinidril is a green color and Ransom is of piebald coloration—natural white on one side and sun-burned from his interplanetary journey on the other. Her nature is not revealed by her initial response to his appearance alone but also by her rational response the day following: “I was young yesterday,” she said. “When I laughed at you. Now I know that the in your world do not like to be laughed at.” (181). In her response, Tinidril displays a child-like innocence with regard to her actions, but she displays the mind of an adult with her reasoning. Tinidril is ignorant, but she is innocently ignorant. She realizes her lack of wisdom, and, as a child, unquestionably turns to Ransom for his conveyance of knowledge.

Another aspect of Tinidril’s state that Lewis reveals in her and Ransom’s first encounter is her relationship to God—Maleldil in the *Perelandra*. After the two move beyond discussing their appearances, Tinidril, to Ransom’s bewilderment, begins to tell him of the depth of her knowledge of his planet and Malacandra and their relation to the rest of creation. Knowing that *Perelandra* is covered entirely by dense clouds and that Tinidril is the first of the rational creatures on the planet, Ransom asks Tinidril, “How do you know that?” (182). Tinidril answers him, “Maleldil is telling me. . . . It all comes into my mind now . . . I see the big furry creatures, and the white giants--what is it you called them?—the Sorns, and the blue rivers. Oh, what a pleasure it would be to see them with my outward eyes, to touch them, and the stronger because there are no more of that kind to come. It is only in the ancient worlds they linger yet (182-83). This direct cognitive communication with God expresses what Lewis believes to have been the prelapsarian communication between Adam and Eve and God. Adam and Eve were not complete in their knowledge, but God supplied them with knowledge when they needed it. Thus Tinidril is not complete in her knowledge, but her dependence and direct communication with Maleldil allow her to become “older” at the pace that Maleldil desires.

Tinidril’s child-like dependence, her innocent rationale, and her unbarred communication with God all contribute to Lewis’s unveiling of the nature of her free will. To reveal that nature, Lewis introduces to the story Weston—a scientist from Thulcandra that has a bent toward evil. Weston however is not merely an human; he is an human whose body is inhabited by the ruler of Thulcandra—the tempter of *Perelandra*. Weston’s objective is to deceive Tinidril into moving off of the floating islands to the land that is fixed—to do what Maleldil had forbidden her and Tor to do. Though Maleldil gave her knowledge when she met Ransom, Maleldil did not give her any knowledge when she met Weston. This fact gives the reader insight into Lewis’s belief of the nature of free will. By introducing two influences that are not Maleldil himself, Lewis expresses that Tinidril’s free will is not a total free will. While Tinidril has the freedom to choose to stay on the floating islands or to stay on the fixed land, she is not totally ignorant and unreasonable. All that she has known up to this point is that Maleldil is good and that Maleldil has made her “older” by her acquaintance with Ransom. Thus she had both the

spiritual, cognitive relationship with Maleldil and the physical, rational relationship with Ransom prior to Weston's appearance. Unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden, Tinidril is confronted by two physical, rational beings—one good and one bad and is then forced to make a decision. As the odds would have it, Tinidril stands firm in her innocence and Ransom ultimately defeats Thulcandra in a physical struggle, him being inhibited by the weakness of Weston's body. After the defeat of Weston/Thulcandra, Tinidril and Tor are confirmed in their innocent state, and thus, where paradise was lost in the Garden of Eden, paradise is retained on Perelandra.

The natures and free wills of Ransom and Weston are very different, and yet they are very similar. The static nature of the characters of Ransom and Weston almost make both of them inhuman, leaving very little possibility for a real correlation with normal human nature and free will. Ransom is a Christian, but he is not a very dynamic Christian. The fault perhaps is the nature of the genre, for science fiction does normally produce unchanging characters. Perhaps the best way to label Ransom for reason of evaluation is a seasoned Christian—one who is old in the faith and has endured many trials. Ransom never seems to question the plans and work of Maleldil, except with regard to his own weaknesses and role in the history of Perelandra. Even then, his questioning of Maleldil in that regard is more a statement of his own pious humility than it is of his lack of faith. Ransom is however not perfect, which is seen in the book in his tendency to oversleep thus allowing Weston time alone to tempt Tinidril to stay on the fixed land. Despite Ransom's apparent weaknesses, the reader is never in doubt of his perseverance because of the telling of his return from Perelandra that proceeds the details of his journey to Perelandra. Therefore within the confines of *Perelandra*, Ransom's will is fixed, and almost cannot be called free. Yes, Ransom does have the freedom to choose one decision or another, but ultimately his will always takes him the way of Maleldil. The details of his journey on Perelandra are oftentimes hidden from him, but Ransom always walks by faith and thereby Maleldil's sovereign guidance he accomplishes the task that was set before him—to be a type of ransom for the planet of Perelandra.

Weston on the other hand, while the antithesis of Ransom, is similar in the nature of his free will. Like Ransom, in the confines of *Perelandra*, Weston is a static character and does nothing in the story that ought to surprise the reader. His static nature also makes him seem inhuman, for as Ransom was always inclined toward the good of Maleldil Weston was always inclined toward evil. This inclination of Weston is clearly seen within the text:

We all have all often spoken . . . of a devilish smile. Now [Ransom] realised that he had never taken the words seriously. The smile [of Weston] was not bitter, nor raging, nor, in an ordinary sense, sinister; it was not even mocking. It seemed to summon Ransom, with horrible naïveté of welcome, into the world of its own pleasures, as if all men were at one in those pleasures, as if they were the most natural thing in the world and no dispute could ever have occurred about them. It was not furtive, nor ashamed, it had nothing of the conspirator in it. It did not defy goodness, it ignored it to the point of annihilation. Ransom perceived that he had never seen anything but half-hearted and

uneasy attempts at evil. This creature was whole-hearted. The extremity of its evil had passed beyond all struggle into some state which bore a horrible similarity to innocence (217-18).

While Ransom was confirmed in his goodness, Weston was confirmed in his evilness. The life that Weston had lived up to that point had allowed his will to be totally taken from him, quite the opposite of what he had intended. Lewis in the lives of Ransom and Weston thusly shows the end of all free will—captivity. Either one can be like Ransom and become captive to Maleldil and thus captive to God, or one can be like Weston and thus captive to Thulandra, i.e. Satan. One is captivity and yet true freedom in that one desires what one ought, the other is perceived freedom and yet true captivity in that one desires what one ought not and will never obtain.

By the end of his novel, Lewis addresses the free will of man without addressing the free will of man. By his choice of using static characters, Lewis fantasizes how free will would appear in an unfallen woman, in a fallen redeemed man confirmed in his goodness, and in a fallen man confirmed in his evilness. Though it might not have been his intentions, his attempts to delve into what so many have pondered since the race was founded confirm the depth of the matter of free will and the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God. The matter of free will in light of the absolute providence of God is a matter that cannot be explained by mere men, just as the name of Ransom cannot be explained by mere men in *Perelandra*:

“It is not nothing that you are named Ransom,” said [a] Voice. . . . [Ransom] had known for many years that his surname was derived not from *ransom* but from *Ranolf's son*. It would never have occurred to him thus to associate the two words. To connect the name Ransom with the act of ransoming would have been for him a mere pun. But even his voluble self did not now dare suggest that the Voice was making a play upon words. All of a sudden in a moment of time he perceived that what was, to human philologists, a merely accidental resemblance of two sounds, was in truth no accident. The whole distinction between things accidental and things designed, like the distinction between fact and myth, was purely terrestrial (243).