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Through the Lens of *The Four Loves*: Love in *Perelandra*

by Paulette Sauders

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It is my contention that, when C.S. Lewis wrote his non-fiction treatise, *The Four Loves*, in 1956, he had already been thinking about the various concepts of love for many years. As a matter of fact, he had been including examples of those kinds of love and their perversions in his fiction and other writings since 1936. Each of his novels demonstrates the kinds of loves (and their perversions) that he summarizes in *The Four Loves*, illustrating the various types.

Chad Walsh wrote that, in *Perelandra*, Lewis tries to get his readers “to see the familiar world in a very unfamiliar light” (*Literary Legacy* 109), using “space adventure as the medium for metaphysical, philosophic, religious, and psychological themes” (*Literary Legacy* 83). One of those themes involves the loves that Lewis discusses in *The Four Loves*.

Since *Perelandra* is such a theological and philosophical book, it does not contain nearly as many references to the four loves as Lewis’s other books do. Most of *Perelandra* is taken up by a description of the unusual, watery planet and its floating islands, a description of the Un-man’s long temptation of Queen Tinidril, and a description of Ransom’s attempts to thwart the Un-man and finally destroy it. At the end comes the description of the eldila and the great ceremony honoring Tor and Tinidril for not falling prey to temptation.

However, many of the scenes reveal characters demonstrating the kinds of love Lewis wrote about so consistently in *The Four Loves* and his other novels. For example, in the very beginning of the novel, Ransom’s friend, Lewis, the narrator of the story, exhibits true friendship (*Philia*) when he goes to Ransom’s home to help him—even though he is strongly tempted by the bad eldila not to go, and he becomes more afraid the further he walks. Lewis, in the course of the narration, says of Ransom, “the man is a friend” (*Perelandra* 10), and as he was nearing Ransom’s house, “I was getting nearer at every

stride to the one friend” (*Perelandra* 13).

Thomas Howard points out that, even though it goes against the character Lewis’s better judgment, Lewis helps Ransom to get packed into the “coffin-like vehicle” for the trip to Perelandra (*The Achievement* 97). This shows true friendship and belief in his friend. Regarding this fantastic trip to an unknown world, there is “mutual respect and understanding” between them. *The Four Loves* considers these to be basic characteristics of friendship (95).

Lewis and Ransom are “kindred souls” (*The Four Loves* 92). They are both philologists, university professors, and single, but more importantly, both are concerned with the spiritual part of life, and both call themselves Christians. They are close enough to confide completely in each other.

As Ransom prepares to leave for Perelandra, Ransom and Lewis converse intimately about taking care of Ransom’s affairs while he’s gone. “We laid our heads together and for a long time we talked about those matters which one usually discusses with relatives and not with friends” (*Perelandra* 28), showing how close they really are.

While Ransom and Lewis talk, Lewis realizes his friend may be gone for a long time and thus notes, “I found myself noticing and loving all sorts of little mannerisms and expressions in him. . .” (28). Also, Lewis is such a friend that he is willing to be on call to come back and help Ransom when he returns from outer space—even though Ransom has no idea when that will be (27). In the first part of the novel, the great love and friendship between these two men is exhibited and personified in them.

Although Ransom personifies friendship in the beginning of the story, it soon becomes evident that he also personifies Gift-love (*Agape*) in his willingness to go on such a dangerous trip into the unknown in order to be used by God (Maleldil). He does not even know what God expects of him once he arrives, but he puts his complete trust in the hands of the eldila (angels), knowing that they are God’s instruments.

Ransom’s Gift-love becomes especially evident when he becomes aware of what he has been sent to do—to help keep the newly created man and woman on Perelandra from succumbing to Satan’s temptations. He continuously lays aside his own fears and physical comfort in order to help the Green Lady, Tinidril, resist the Evil One’s subtle, seductive temptations.

For example, when Ransom sees that Weston, the Un-man, the vehicle for the Evil One, is trying to tempt Queen Tinidril to disobey Maleldil, he resolves to stay by her side to protect her from him and

to combat what he has to say to her. But the Un-man does not seem to need to sleep (*Perelandra* 128). Ransom forgoes many hours of sleep—which he truly needs—in order to accomplish this resolution.

“He was dead tired.” Yet, “he did not dare to let the enemy out of his sight for a moment, and everyday its society became more unendurable” (128). A few days later, the narrator notes, “But the enemy was never tired, and Ransom grew more weary all the time. . .” (131). He hates being in the presence of the Evil One and tries to stop it as it maims and kills small animals all around him on the floating islands. But he stays with the Un-man out of love—Gift-love. He wants only the best for Tinidril and her husband and their unborn children.

Ultimately, Ransom wants God’s best for this new planet, fitting very well the description of Gift-love Lewis gives in *The Four Loves* where he says that God’s love is Gift-love (176); it desires only the good of the one loved (197). When a person gives of himself without thought of getting anything in return, that is Gift-love (177). And those characteristics fit Ransom and all he does on *Perelandra*.

When Ransom physically fights the Un-man, he suffers great pain as the creature’s long “nails were ripping great strips off his back” (*Perelandra* 153). He feels “pain as his fist crashed against the jawbone—it seemed almost to have broken his knuckles. . .” (152). The Un-man’s “nails tore fiercely down his cheek and the pain put an end to the blows” that he was trying to deliver to its chest (154). But throughout the fight, even when the Evil One savagely bites Ransom’s heel so that the blood flows and cannot ever after be stopped, “His own pains, where it tore him, somehow failed to matter” (156). He is so intent on doing what is best for Tinidril and *Perelandra* that the pain does not matter. Since he will not personally gain anything from this battle except injury, Ransom truly manifests Gift-love.

Since Ransom—the lead character—personifies Gift-love, it becomes obvious that this kind of love is one of the main themes of the whole book—especially God’s Gift-love.

Toward the end of the novel, when the great ceremony is to begin, honoring the King and Queen of *Perelandra* for not succumbing to the Evil One’s temptations, the Oyarsa (archangel) of the planet *Malacandra* and the Oyarsa of *Perelandra* appear to Ransom and then take on somewhat human forms. The expression of their faces reflects “charity. But it was terrifyingly different from the expression of human charity. . .” (199). Instead, “Pure, spiritual, intellectual love shot from their faces like barbed lightning” (199–200).

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When King Tor and Queen Tinidril arrive for the ceremony, Tor asks the Oyarsa of Perelandra what she will do now that the King and Queen will be the rulers of the planet. Then he asks the Oyarsa to stay with them on the planet, “both for the love we bear you and also that you may strengthen us with counsel. . .” (207). Next, Queen Tinidril speaks of the “love and trust” existing between Maleldil and herself and Tor (208). King Tor continues the ceremony by speaking eloquently, in response to Ransom, about the gift given him—the rule of his world: “All is gift. . . . Through many different kinds of love and labour, the gift comes to me” (209). In every part of the ceremony, love—Gift-love—is mentioned and extolled.

Then the greatest expression of love for God is presented as all participate in a series of great doxologies, praising God for His love.

In the plan of the Great Dance . . . all the patterns [are] linked and looped together by the unions of a kneeling with a sceptered love. Blessed be He! (217).

He has immeasurable use for each thing that is made, that His love and splendor may flow forth like a strong river which has need of a great watercourse and fills alike the deep pools and the little crannies. . . . We also have need beyond measure of all that He has made. Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely necessary to you, and for your delight I was made. Blessed be He! (217)

He has no need at all of anything that is made. . . . [W]hat all add to Him is nothing. . . . Love me, my brothers, for I am infinitely superfluous, and your love shall be like His, born neither of your need nor of my deserving, but a plain bounty. Blessed be He! (217)

And Tor’s farewell as Ransom prepares to leave them is also a doxology and benediction: “Speak of us always to Maleldil as we speak always of you. The splendor, the love, and the strength be upon you” (222). God’s love (Gift-love) is praised in all of these passages.

Gift-love is the major kind of love spoken of and exemplified throughout *Perelandra*, but romantic love (*Eros*), tinged with Gift-love, is also demonstrated through the lives and words of King Tor and Queen Tinidril.

When Tinidril sees Ransom (from a distance) for the first time, she thinks he is Tor, her husband, so her “eyes looked at his full of love and welcome” (54). Then she realizes it is someone else, and her expression changes to surprise. This is Ransom’s first indication of the great love between Tinidril and Tor.

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During the period when Weston, the Un-Man, is tempting Tinidril to disobey Maleldil, Ransom detects Tinidril's love for her husband many times. For example, the Evil One tells the Green Lady that the new knowledge he is giving her will make her husband the King "love you more" because she is wiser than he is (105). However, she responds, "But how could anyone love anything more? It is like saying a thing could be bigger than itself" (106).

When the Un-man tries to tempt the Queen to disobey Maleldil by telling her she needs to be unselfish and self-sacrificing and daring for her husband's sake, the only times she seems to consider his words are when she responds "out of love for the King . . ." (132-33).

And when Tinidril and Tor come walking to the great ceremony at the end of the novel, they come "walking hand in hand," signifying their love for each other (204).

Of course, Tinidril's love for her husband is more than Eros alone. It also includes Gift-love. Evan Gibson points out that when Tinidril is tempted by the Un-man to sin, the demon-possessed figure describes how the daughters of Eve have surpassed their mother in greatness and abilities. Upon hearing this, however, instead of giving in to disobedience, the Queen praises Maleldil. According to Evan Gibson:

She rejoices that perhaps her daughters will be greater than she. Her imagination . . . is delighted at the thought of relinquishing her position as Queen and Lady to descendants who will exceed her as much as she does the beasts. And so her selfless love defeats him, and the first temptation fails. (Gibson, *C. S. Lewis: Spinner of Tales* 59).

This "selfless love" is Gift-love, the same kind that Ransom personifies. Like Ransom, Tinidril desires only the good of the ones she loves—her husband and future children. She desires to give of herself without thought of getting anything in return. This is true Gift-love according to *The Four Loves* (176-77).

Just as the novel starts with an emphasis upon friendship (between Ransom and Lewis), *Perelandra* ends with an emphasis on the friendship that has developed between Ransom and Tinidril and Tor. For example, at one point, when Ransom joins Tinidril while the Un-man is talking to her, tempting her, "she was clearly pleased to see him [Ransom]" (133).

Later, when the King and Queen arrive at the great ceremony, "The eyes of the Queen looked upon him [Ransom] with love and recognition . . ." (205), signifying the friendship that has grown out of

their many hours of talking together and out of his willingness to help her and to destroy Weston's evil (Hannay, *C. S. Lewis* 96).

Tor, also, speaks of praise and honor for Ransom for keeping the Evil One from him and Tinidril; then he speaks to Ransom and thanks him "and both kissed him, mouth to mouth and heart to heart." They also want him to "sit between them" out of their love for him, but he cannot bring himself to do so (207-208).

After the great ceremony, Tor notices Ransom's bleeding heel (the Evil One had bitten his heel in their battle [cf. Genesis 3.15]), and out of concern for him wants to help him. "Sit down, friend," said Tor, 'and let me wash your foot in this pool'" (220). Tor tries to help his wounded friend out of love for him, but he can do no good for the injury.

Tor and Tinidril feel real hesitation and sadness when it is time for Ransom to leave their planet. In the year the three have been together, real friendship has grown. They are "kindred souls" (*Four Loves* 92), having faced the Evil One together and defeated him—having "shared dangers and hardships" as *The Four Loves* puts it (95). A "mutual respect and understanding" (*Four Loves* 95) has developed among them, and each honors the others for what they have done on Perelandra. They fit the description of friendship Lewis gives in *The Four Loves* perfectly.

As Ransom prepares to leave Perelandra, Tor and Tinidril "bent down and kissed him" (*Perelandra* 222), and as he leaves, Tor and Tinidril say together, "Farewell, Friend and Saviour, farewell" (222).

Besides friendship, one other note about love should be added regarding the novel *Perelandra*. Lewis's book *The Weight of Glory* includes much on the subject of love and on "unselfishness." Here is one excerpt from *The Weight of Glory*:

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought [was] the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you had asked almost any of the great Christians of old, he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative idea of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the main point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. (*Weight of Glory* 3)

In like fashion, in *Perelandra*, the Evil One keeps telling Tinidril that she needs to exhibit "unselfishness," "self-sacrifice and self-dedication" toward her husband and future children (132). This shows

the way Satan distorts the concept of Gift-love for his own purposes.

As Lewis suggests in *The Weight of Glory*, and as Screwtape suggests in *The Screwtape Letters*, Satan tries to substitute “the negative ‘unselfishness’ for the Enemy’s [God’s] positive charity” so that he “can, from the very outset, teach a man to surrender benefits, not that others may be happy in having them, but that he may be unselfish in forgoing them” (*Screwtape Letters* 121). This same image is consistently drawn in *Perelandra*. The Evil One harps on Tinidril’s need for unselfishness page after page, day after day, hoping to get her to disobey God on that pretext (104-139).

In addition, when Ransom responds to the Evil One’s constant plea to Tinidril for “unselfishness,” Ransom uses examples just like the ones Lewis uses in *The Four Loves*. Ransom says that “he’d seen this kind of ‘unselfishness’ in action” in “women making themselves sick with hunger rather than begin the meal before the man of the house returned, though they knew perfectly well that there was nothing he disliked more . . .” (*Perelandra* 132).

This example (as well as others not quoted) sounds like Mrs. Fidget, the woman in *The Four Loves* who “lived for her family,” unselfishly working “her fingers to the bone” for them, but in the process showing no Gift-love or concern for what is *best* for the members of the family (75). It is as if people like this are “martyrs” to their families and they want everyone to know about it. They also sound like Pam, the mother in *The Great Divorce*, who cried, “I gave up my whole life” for my son Michael (*Great Divorce* 92). However, her “unselfishness” turns into selfish possessiveness of her son and ruins his life and the lives of the rest of the family members (94).

Lewis is very consistent in all of his books, both fiction and non-fiction, in the way he presents “unselfishness” as perverted, possessive Affection (Storge), opposed to Gift-love, the greatest of loves.

Stella Gibbons summarizes Lewis’s presentations of love in his fiction:

It cannot be denied that Lewis’s view of love was both high and severe. Between human beings, in its best form, he seems to have seen it as a form of charity, burningly strong and tempered by a detached intelligence and an unswerving watch upon itself to guard against the smallest hint of the usual heated, half-selfish, satisfyingly sloppy romanticism ever intruding. (96)

Throughout *Perelandra* Lewis demonstrates many of the kinds of love (and their perversions) that he wants his readers to be aware

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of. These types of love come alive when included in his captivating novels, especially in *Perelandra*. Corbin Scott Carnell, who knew Lewis personally, believes that Lewis had a consistent purpose in his works: “To awaken a desire for love and goodness—this was Lewis’s purpose in almost everything he wrote. (*Bright Shadow* 161)

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