A Hierarchy of Love: Myth in C.S. Lewis's Perelandra

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Abstract

In C.S. Lewis's Perelandra, the transposed creature is drawn up into its "kindly stede" as a sacramental symbol of Christ through that fictional planet’s unbroken relationship between meaning and form. Although Perelandra's "wheels-within-wheels" hierarchy may at first seem reminiscent of Catholicism’s teachings on symbol, as a Protestant, Lewis believes that human beings cannot be truly sacramental symbols until the return of Christ. Lewis's optimistic depiction of a cosmic hierarchy is one of perfect love: superiors rule their subordinates with agape, and creatures who discover their submissive roles reciprocate with eros or adoring love. Every created being in Perelandra is part of the cosmic hierarchy and therefore must fill both of these mythical roles in their turn; thus happiness and meaning depend upon one conforming to one’s position. God works to bring the three main characters--Ransom, Tor, and Tinidril--to maturity in their objective mythical roles, ultimately causing those roles to conform their bodies into sacramental images of Christ.