

Douglas E. Woolley
Dr. Leslie Crabtree
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Comparison of the Novels by C. S. Lewis and Albert Camus

Comparing C. S. Lewis' novel *Perelandra* and Albert Camus' novel *The Fall* shows similarities and differences in the way they refer to the Genesis account of the fall of humanity, and often the authors' world views affect their writing. Both novels are similar in that they each describe an ideal pre-fall paradise environment, though the paradises are based on the authors' world view. The novels differ in that Camus describes an actual fall while Lewis describes a resistance to a fall. Due to the fall, Camus' protagonist exiles himself, while there is no need for exile in Lewis' novel.

Both Lewis and Camus describe a pre-fall paradise similar to Eden, but the descriptions differ in accordance with their authors' world view. Holding an atheistic existentialist world view, Camus focuses on a paradise that is experienced subjectively within the protagonist of *The Fall*, John Baptiste Clamence. Clamence describes his personal Eden as a perpetual state of inner "harmony" with "no intermediary between life and me" (Camus 27). He felt especially pleased as a lawyer, knowing that he was doing good deeds in defending widows and orphans and not charging a fee to the poor (17, 20). Clamence describes himself as "above reproach" in his "professional life" (19), never accepting a bribe, never flattering any journalist and says:

My profession satisfied most happily that vocation for summits. It cleansed me of all bitterness toward my neighbor, whom I always obligated without ever owing him anything. It set me above the judge whom I judged in turn, above the defendant whom I forced to gratitude. Just weigh this, *cher monsieur*, I lived with impunity. (25)

Clamence felt "shielded from judgment" (27). In his personal life Clamence was always looking for opportunities to be courteous, helpful, and generous, and he performed acts of kindness such as giving up his seat on public transportation to someone more needy, helping "blind people cross streets," "pushing a stranded car," or giving "alms" (20-21). Clamence was in Eden and had harmony in his life when he did good deeds and felt innocent and not under judgment by others or his conscience.

Lewis also describes a pre-fall paradise, but he holds a Christian theistic world view and portrays an objective paradise environment similar in nature to the historical Genesis account of Eden, in his novel *Perelandra*. The protagonist, Dr. Elwin Ransom from England, journeys to the planet Perelandra, or Venus, where he finds a beautiful paradise of floating islands and fixed lands (Lewis 40, 73) with a pristine ecology "with nothing dead or spoiled" (109) and a naked Green Lady who has the respect, companionship, and obedience of all the animals (54-55, 59, 64-65, 76-77). Resembling Eve and Adam before the fall, the Green Lady and her husband, the King, are the only two humans of their kind on Perelandra (66, 102). They live in innocence and have never disobeyed the commands of their creator, Maleldil; However, the Lady's "purity and peace . . . [are] alive and therefore breakable" (68). Lewis paints a creative picture of an actual Eden on Perelandra that resembles the literal Eden on Earth.

While Camus describes an actual fall by Clamence, Lewis describes how the Green Lady resists the temptation to fall. Clamence walks by a young woman leaning over the side of a

bridge over a river and when he is about fifty yards past there he hears her splash into the water below and stops (Camus 70). Clamence recalls the experience:

I stopped short, but without turning around. Almost at once I heard a cry, repeated several times, which was going downstream; then it suddenly ceased. . . . I wanted to run and yet didn't stir. . . . I was still listening as I stood motionless. Then, slowly under the rain, I went away. I informed no one. (70)

Her fall from the bridge and his neglect to help or call for help caused him to fall from his state of subjective harmony. On the other hand, Lewis' story parallels the historical temptation of Eve by Satan in the form of a serpent; Professor Weston, who is possessed by Satan (Lewis 93-96, 110-11) travels to Perelandra and tries to tempt the Green Lady to yearn for the forbidden fixed lands and live there. However, with some encouragement from Ransom, the Green Lady resists the enemy's repetitive "Third Degree methods" (140) tempting her to disobey Maleldil's command and says to Weston, "I have said already that we are forbidden to dwell on the Fixed Land. Why do you not either talk of something else or stop talking?" (103). Unlike Clamence, the Green Lady did not fall.

While Camus' protagonist exiles himself from Paris to Amsterdam due to his fall, there was no need for an exile of the Green Lady and her husband in Lewis' novel. Having fallen below his moral standards and unable to forgive himself or shake off a feeling of internal and external judgment, Clamence makes an "escape" (Camus 89) and exiles himself from Paris to Amsterdam (6). Additionally, he closed his law office and changed his name and life (125, 138). On the other hand, in *Perelandra*, the Green Lady and her husband remain in a pristine land untainted by original sin as they continue in good status with their creator. The eldil, or angel, of Perelandra blesses the Lady and her husband and says to them, "all these [lands and animals] Maleldil puts into your hand from this day forth as far as you live in time and farther. . . . Give names to all creatures, guide all natures to perfection" (Lewis 206). Thus, the King and Queen are not exiled, unlike Clamence.

Works Cited

- Camus, Albert. *The Fall*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. New York: Random, 1956.
- Lewis, C. S. *Perelandra*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.