

Discussion Guide

Perelandra, chs 1–4



OPEN

My fear was now of another kind. I felt sure that the creature was what we call ‘good’, but I wasn’t sure whether I liked ‘goodness’ so much as I had supposed. This is a very terrible experience. As long as what you are afraid of is something evil, you may still hope that the good may come to your rescue. But suppose you struggle through to the good and find that it also is dreadful? How if food itself turns out to be the very thing you can’t eat, and home the very place you can’t live, and your very comforter the person who makes you uncomfortable? Then, indeed, there is no rescue possible: the last card has been played. For a second or two I was nearly in that condition. Here at last was a bit of that world from beyond the world, which I had always supposed that I loved and desired, breaking through and appearing to my senses: and I didn’t like it, I wanted it to go away. I wanted every possible distance, gulf, curtain, blanket, and barrier to be placed between it and me. But I did not fall quite into the gulf. Oddly enough my very sense of helplessness saved me and steadied me. For now I was quite obviously drawn in. The struggle was over. The next decision did not lie with me.

– *ch 2, p.17*



ENTRY

1. Have you ever had a similar experience to Ransom’s encounter with goodness? When has experience of holiness ever been uncomfortable?



RECALL

1. Describe Lewis’s dread upon approaching Ransom’s cottage. How did Ransom explain what had been happening to Lewis in the “barrage”? *chs 1–2*
2. What is the nature of the mission Ransom is going to undertake? How does Lewis respond to the plans? *ch 2*
3. What kind of transformation in Ransom is previewed as he steps out of the coffin? *ch 2*
4. Describe the unique nature of the surfaces on Perelandra. What effect does this give Ransom? *ch 3*
5. What creatures does Ransom encounter on Perelandra? *ch 3–4*



ANALYSIS

1. What is Ransom’s hypothesis about why he knows so little of the reason that he is being sent to Perelandra? What are his concerns of “megalomania” and is he guilty of it? *ch 2*
2. Ransom experiences a strong sense that he ought not repeat certain sensual pleasures he experiences. What are the reasons he gives for stopping? *ch 3*
3. What happens on Ransom’s first encounter with the green lady? What does the encounter between these two tell you about Ransom’s attitudes? *ch 4*



DIVING DEEPER

He had meant to extract the smallest experimental sip, but the first taste put his caution all to flight. It was, of course, a taste, just as his thirst and hunger had been thirst and hunger. But then it was so different from every other taste that it seemed mere pedantry to call it a taste at all. It was like the discovery of a totally new genus of pleasures: something unheard of among men, out of all reckoning, beyond all covenant. For one draught of this on Earth wars would be fought and nations betrayed. It could not be classified. He could never tell us, when he came back to the world of men, whether it was sharp or sweet, savoury or voluptuous, creamy or piercing. 'Not like that' was all he could ever say to such inquiries. As he let the empty gourd fall from his hand and was about to pluck a second one, it came into his head that he was now neither hungry nor thirsty. And yet to repeat a pleasure so intense and almost so spiritual seemed an obvious thing to do. His reason, or what we commonly take to be reason in our own world, was all in favour of tasting this miracle again; the child-like innocence of fruit, the labours he had undergone, the uncertainty of the future, all seemed to commend the action. Yet something seemed opposed to this 'reason'. It is difficult to suppose that this opposition came from desire, for what desire would turn from so much deliciousness? But for whatever cause, it appeared to him better not to taste again. Perhaps the experience had been so complete that repetition would be a vulgarity—like asking to hear the same symphony twice in a day.

ch. 3, pp. 37–38



REFLECTION

1. What do you make of Ransom's ethics of the danger of "encore"? (You might want to compare this with the *hrossa* Hyoi's comments to Ransom on Malacandra in *Out of the Silent Planet*). Do you think the love of money is used the way Ransom hypothesizes?

A man, or at least a man like Ransom, felt he ought to say grace over it; and so he presently did. The gourds would have required rather an oratorio or a mystical meditation. But the meal had its unexpected high lights. Every now and then one struck a berry which had a bright red centre: and these were so savoury, so memorable among a thousand tastes, that he would have begun to look for them and to feed on them only, but that he was once more forbidden by that same inner adviser which had already spoken to him twice since he came to Perelandra. 'Now on earth,' thought Ransom, 'they'd soon discover how to breed these redhearts, and they'd cost a great deal more than the others.' Money, in fact, would provide the means of saying "more" in a voice that could not be disobeyed.

- ch 4, p. 44

2. How does Ransom's terror of loneliness and then his embarrassment at being laughed at relate to your own experiences of life in community? Does Ransom take himself too seriously? What does it mean to not take oneself too seriously? *ch 4*