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Nancy-Lou Patterson

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Abstract

Examination of Lewis's use of metaphor, biblical imagery, and imagery associated with goddesses in *Till We Have Faces*, especially in the characters of Ungit and Orual.

Additional Keywords

Goddesses—Symbolism; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Orual; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Psyche; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Ungit; Lewis, C.S.—Settings—Glome; Lewis, C.S. *Till We Have Faces*—Symbolism

The Holy House of Ungit

NANCY-LOU PATTERSON

The girl, you remember, had to marry a monster for some reason. And she did. She kissed it as if it were a man. And then, to her relief, it really turned into a man and all went well. The other story is about someone who had to wear a mask; a mask which made him look much nicer than he really was. He had to wear it for years. And when he took it off he found his own face had grown to fit it. He was now really beautiful.

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1956)

Better than anybody else, Doris T. Myers has explained what *Till We Have Faces* is about. It concerns, she says, the fact that Lewis has interpreted the God of Love in the Greek myth of Psyche and Eros in terms of the Christian concept of the God who is Love. Luckily for me, the way is still clear to discuss what *Till We Have Faces* is not about. It is not about evil, or at least, of all his works of fantasy, it is the one that possesses no specific character - and especially no supernatural character - who embodies evil.

Because this is, as I think, true, there is a major character in *Till We Have Faces* who has been, for the most part, misunderstood. That character is Ungit. I think Orual has been misunderstood too, but I'll get to that later. In Peter J. Schakel's *Reason and Imagination in C.S. Lewis: A Study of Till We Have Faces*, Ungit's name does not appear in the Index. It does, however, appear early in his book, as he relates "the pouring of human blood over the stone statue of the Goddess Ungit" to "the cruelty and crudity of that world," that is, of Glome, which Lewis himself called "a little barbarous state." (Schakel, 1984, p. 11) Schakel has accepted at face value what Lewis reportedly told Clyde Kilby about the realism of the setting, concluding with the statement that 1) this is a story where "things simply are themselves," (Schakel, 1984, p. 11) and 2) "the imagined location of the setting is not very important." (Schakel, 1984, p. 184) The implication here is that Ungit merely signifies the benighted state of Glome's religion and culture. In fact, the unimportance of Glome is an important symbol in the novel, and the dark religion of Ungit is at least as symbolic as it is realistic.

The naturalistic interpretation disappears when Schakel discusses what he calls "a central issue of the story, the problem of how Ungit on the one hand and her son on the other can be expressions of the same divine nature." (Schakel, 1984, p. 20) Noting Thomas Howard's comment that Ungit is "a much darker, more bloody, more earthy deity" than the Greek Aphrodite, (Howard, 1988, p. 166, cited in Schakel, 1984, p. 186) he also cites W.D. Norwood Jr., who says that "Ungit-Aphrodite, as she is identified by

the Fox - or Venus - is one 'face of the true God;' i.e. she is God in his [sic] aspect of Love." (Norwood, 1970, p. 255, cited in Howard, 1988, p. 186) According to Schakel, Ungit is a "numinous god, not a god of the rationalists." (Schakel, 1984, p. 21) This dichotomous characterization accords with Schakel's major thesis that *Till We Have Faces* expresses a dichotomy in the writings of Lewis between reason and imagination. Another writer, Robert Holyer, has also discerned a dichotomy in *Till We Have Faces*, "between two variations of the theistic view: the one that ultimate reality is jealous and cruel, the other that it is mysterious and marvelous. (Holyer, 1988, p. 74)

I do not find either/or characterizations fruitful, as I have said in another essay (Patterson, 1985, p. 5), and neither do I accept that Lewis ever wrote from a stance of "mere" realism. His works are endlessly allusive, and in expressing the character of Ungit (she is, I maintain, a character in the story, an active divinity, efficacious and successful) he draws upon his encyclopaedic knowledge, according to the period of his training, to build his characterization of her. The focus is a double one, of course; we see Ungit through the eyes of Orual, the central character of the novel, as well as the eye of our own expectations. So we have been warned!

The basic plot of *Till We Have Faces* is outlined by Orual:

The god of the Grey Mountain, who hates me, is the son of Ungit. He does not, however, live in the house of Ungit, but Ungit sits there alone. In the furthest recess of her house where she sits it is so dark that you cannot see her well, but in the summer enough light may come down from the smoke-holes in the roof to show her a little. She is a black stone without head or hands or face, and a very strong goddess, My old master, whom we called the Fox, said she was the same whom the Greeks call Aphrodite; but I write all names of people and places in our own language. (Lewis, 1956, p. 4; hereinafter cited by page alone.)

This description includes two physical elements: Ungit, who is "a black stone," and "her house." In addition, we have the statements that "she sits," and that she is "Aphrodite," the mother of "the god of the Grey Mountain," who is consequently identifiable as Eros, Aphrodite's son. This last matter will be touched upon in my conclusion; here, I will begin by addressing the first four assertions.

Schakel refers to "the stone statue of the goddess Ungit," but in fact, in Lewis' narration, Orual says simply that "She is a black stone." A stone proper, that is, without parts or passions, We learn only that she is black, that she is a stone, and that she sits. Blackness is a category of feminine divinity in many parts of the world. In Rajasthan,

India, the goddess Kali is embodied in an "archetypal goddess image, a black stone," (Mookerjee, 1988, p. 72) and a photograph of her - clearly and simply a black stone - is illustrated to prove it. While Aphrodite is, in most, but not all, cases associated with the concept "golden," there is nothing golden about Ungit. She is "a black stone," period. J.E. Cirlot says that a "Stone is a symbol of being, of cohesion and harmonious reconciliation with self." (Cirlot, 1962. p. 299)

An example from antiquity is "the Black Stone of Pessinis, an aniconic image of the Phrygian Great Mother taken to Rome during the last of the Punic wars," (Ibid.) but this was a meteorite, like the black stone housed in the Kaaba at Mecca, the *al hadjar alawad*. And Orual writes explicitly that Ungit "had not, like most sacred stones, fallen from the sky," but instead "had pushed her way up out of the earth." (p. 270) She is a stone of earthly rather than extra-terrestrial origin, like the Bethel, of which we read in the Bible: "And this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's House." (*Genesis 28:22*) References to this motif recur throughout the Bible. Phrases using the word "rock" include "the Rock of his salvation," (*Deuteronomy 32:15*); "The Lord is my Rock," (*1 Samuel 22:33*) "The Rock of Israel" (*Ibid.* 23:13; "my strong rock" (*Psalms 31:2*); "set my feet upon a rock" (*Psalms 40:2*); "the rock that is higher than I" (*Psalms 61:2*); "my rock and my salvation" (*Psalms 62:6*); and "my God and the Rock of my salvation" (*Psalms 89:26*). In *Matthew 7:25* we read of what was "founded upon a rock," and of what was "upon this rock," (16:18), and in *I Corinthians 10:4*, that the "Rock was Christ."

The word "stone" is equally evocative; in southern Italy and Great Britain, standing stones as images of the goddess were set up (Gimbutas, 1989, p. 41), and in Greece, Artemis was called "the stony one," while in Mesopotamia, "Ninhursag was called the lady of the stony ground." (Gimbutas, 1989, p. 31) *Psalms 118:22* refers to the "stone which the builders refused," a motif reiterated in the New Testament in references to Christ as the Cornerstone. The New Testament also refers especially to an association of stone with bread, both in *Matthew 7:9* when Jesus asks if a father "will give him a stone" (instead of bread); and in *Luke 4:9*, where Satan tempts the fasting Jesus to "command this stone, that it be made bread." In the same passage as that cited above where Orual says that Ungit is a stone which came up out of the earth, she also states that the stone's surface forms "a face such as you might see in a loaf, swollen, brooding, infinitely female." (p. 270) That is, she looks like a loaf in the way that a stone looks like a loaf. I would note in this context that in coal mines, the surface of the coal deposit that is to be addressed by the miners is called the "coal face," a very black stone indeed.

The two categories - stone versus bread and stone into bread - express duality as a matched set of contraries, and as a transformation from one category to another. Both stones and bread can be transformed; stones from the quarry become stones in the temple, and grain ground,

mixed with moisture, and exposed to leaven, becomes bread in the oven. Marija Gimbutas says that "Bread prepared in a temple was sacred bread, dedicated to a Goddess and used in her rituals." (Gimbutas, 1989: p. 147) Such bread - still made in Europe in rural areas into the 20th century, as in the "Bread Maria," which was "made in the likeness of the pregnant belly of the goddess," and curved hills, including human-made hills such as Silbury Hill, as well as curved stones, whether occurring in nature or shaped by humankind, had the same significance, (Gimbutas, 1983: 149) partly because of having the same curved surface as a woman's pregnant belly, partly because a loaf indeed rises into a smooth curved shape resembling the belly, and partly because in most places, bread was set to rise and then baked upon a hot stone. All of these allusions are present in Lewis' image of Ungit as expressed by Orual. If you ask why a doughy face can also be a belly, you can refer to the bawdy little Baubo who entertained the distraught goddess Demeter when she searched for her lost daughter Persephone, the goddess of the grain seed in the ground, who had been rapt away to the underworld. And if you ask why this symbolism has inspired me to write in such detail, I answer that the first religious symbol I can consciously recall is a Hot-Cross Bun presented to me on Good Friday by my mother when I was about three years old; she told me that it symbolized Jesus and was only available on that one day of the year!

The symbol of the stone also incorporated the union of opposites and the metamorphosis/transformation of stone and water. *Numbers 20:10* refers to "water out of this rock," and *I Corinthians* states, "they drank from a spiritual rock." Both references are to Moses bringing water out of rock; in the Apocrypha, we read in *Wisdom 11:4* that "When they were thirsty, they called upon you, and water was given them out of a flinty rock." The "you" in this passage is Holy Wisdom; the translation is from the New Revised Standard Version. The King James version states that "their thirst was quenched out of a hard stone." Here again we have water *versus* stone and stone becoming water. There may be a similar transformational motif in the New Testament in the motif of both Jesus and Peter (the Rock) walking on water.

Wisdom offers one final, and perhaps most apposite element. Using its language, we can say that Ungit is not "a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand," (*Wisdom 13:10* NRSV) or as the King James version says, in its characteristically salty way, "a stone good for nothing, the work of an ancient hand." She is not, that is, a stone formed "in the likeness of a human being." (*Sirach 6:21*) *Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)* gets in one last sense in which the stone can function: stating of Holy Wisdom that "She will be like a heavy stone to test them," or as the King James version of *Ecclesiastes* says, in words still more potent, "She will lie upon him as a mighty stone of trial." In the Old Testament, even in the Wisdom passages, the rock or stone signifies God; in the Apocrypha, it ("she") signifies Holy Wisdom.



Blackness (as in "a black stone") does not constitute a negative feature in a goddess (or elsewhere, I should think!) In the first place, the terms "black" and (by implication) "white" do not mean in this context absolutely black and absolutely white, but "dark" and "light" as categories of contrast rather than of polarity. The language of color *qua* color (as opposed, for instance, to concepts intended to be taken as negative as regards race or states of enlightenment, both of which I regard as entirely unsuitable forms of discourse) does, in fact, in certain languages, divide all colors into these two categories alone. A photograph in black and white of the spectrum would show you which colors would fall into which category.

All of us, I dare say, have seen, and perhaps collected as a notable object, a black stone. A notable example of images in this category is available in the many European "black virgins," discussed by Ian Begg in *The Cult of the Black Virgin*. These figures, which echo and may even perpetuate the appearance of the goddesses Kali, Lilith, Neith Anath, Hathor, Sekhmet, Artemis, Hecate, Cybele, Isis, Ceres, Demeter, Fortuna, Juno, and Vesta in certain of their manifestations (as well as figures such as the queen of Sheba, the Shulamite, and St. Melania) also echo Aphrodite in that she is "sometimes represented as black, as [in] a small votive statue of her in Cyprus." (Begg, 1985, p. 69) Begg says that "The first glimpse of an ancient statue of the Black Virgin shocks and surprises. Five minutes of contemplation of her suffice to convince that one is in the presence not of some antique doll, but of a great power, the *mana* of the age-old goddess of life, death, and rebirth." (Begg, 1985, pp. 130-131) North American readers who wish to test this hypothesis, or perhaps I should say, share in this experience, are invited to look at any of the many replicas of Our Lady of Guadeloupe (the guardian of the Americas) or of Our Lady of Czestochowa, whose veneration has been much promulgated by Pope John Paul II. Some North American Anglicans may be familiar with Our Lady of Walsingham, whose shrine in England is still a great center of pilgrimage.

In the *Song of Solomon* we read of the lady who says of herself, "I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon," (*Song of Solomon* 1:15) comparing herself to the color of certain textiles. In Buddhism, the dark lady is the black Tara, whose color represents "emptiness," (Galland, 1991, p. 341) interpreted as "the radiant black" of the "vast direct experience of being." (Galland, 1990, p. 3142) With this symbol of "being" as black, I have brought this sequence of symbols full circle to the definition offered by J.E. Cirlot, of stone as a "symbol of being."

I now turn to the second set of categories applied to Ungit - that "she sits" and that she is "Aphrodite." In many ancient cultures, a seated goddess was a goddess undergoing childbirth; (Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 105-106) the seated posture was, and is in many places even today, the posture of childbirth. This accords with, and probably

signifies, what Orual says in her opening statement, that "The god of the Grey Mountain . . . is the son of Ungit." Ungit is thus by definition the mother of that "god." This association of Ungit with childbearing is poignantly evoked in a passage in which Orual encounters a pregnant woman at Ungit's shrine, who tells her that "There's no goddess like Ungit;" I will refer to this episode below. Ungit is in fact associated early on with fecundity; when the King's female slaves produce babies, he exclaims "Anybody'd think this was Ungit's house." (p. 20) Of the girls so produced (no doubt in many cases through couplings with the King himself), some are kept and some are sold, and "some were given to the house of Ungit."

As we have seen, Ungit is defined as Aphrodite in the first passage describing her. Orual's teacher, the Athenian slave Orual calls the "Fox," so defines her. Aphrodite was the mother of Eros, and it is their myth, or rather, the myth of their concourse with Psyche, that is being "retold" in *Till We Have Faces*, which Lewis subtitled, "A Myth Retold." Aphrodite is often defined as the "goddess of love;" Eros, too, is "the god of love," As mother and son they embody not only erotic love, a term based upon the name of Eros and not intended, needless to say, to define their love for each other, but the love of a mother for her son and the love of a son for his mother, and, I have no doubt, certain of the loves that Lewis himself discussed in *The Four Loves*, not least that love called *caritas* and *agape*. A daring thought! But Lewis dares it. Such loves - *agape* not least - are sometimes harsh indeed, as in the case of the God who is love, who showed that love by dying on Calvary.

Ungit is the goddess of Glome, a little kingdom which Doris T. Myers situates in time between 310 BCE and 280 BCE (Myers, 1994, pp. 193-194) and in space either "in the Balkans, perhaps not too far from the Danube," or "in the Caucasus Mountains, looking east to the Caspian sea." (Myers, 1994, p. 195) I might care to opt for the first of these locations because that area had been the heart of goddess country circa 6500-3500, as described in Marija Gimbutas in *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1982), a work which Lewis cannot have done more than anticipate! It is in Glome, Myers says, that "The story of Psyche, a real person, becomes a myth which is to be authenticated by the Incarnation of the real God of Love." Myers 1944, p. 190)

In the novel, whatever its larger meaning, Orual is the central character; she tells her own story both in her complaint which opens as we have seen with the statement that "the god of the Grey Mountain [Myers' "God of Love"] . . . hates me," and in her report of the result of presenting the volume containing that complaint, to that God. From Orual we learn, in enormous detail, about Ungit. We also learn all we are to discover about Glome. Two major structures dominate in Glome. One of these is the palace, with its Pillar Room. The other is the House of Ungit.

The palace of Glome is one whose back is "wooden" (p. 51) - this represents the older parts - and possesses a "byre-door" and a "big dunghill," (p. 6) In other words,

the palace combines within itself, as do/did many archaic dwellings, a living quarter for animals with one for humans. Arrangements like this are common in cold countries, especially those with mountainous regions, or those whose immigrants come from such places, because the heat generated by the animals helps to keep the section of the dwelling reserved for humans, warm. The palace is thus a house which also functions as a barn. The 'new parts' (p. 6) of the palace are not wooden, but constructed "of painted brick," with "the skins and heads of animals hung up on the walls," (like those decorating a hunting lodge, for instance), and most particularly, a "Pillar Room" with "a "hearth" - only one, so far as we can tell, so the Pillar Room must be small enough to require only one source of heat. The Palace would obviously be a very archaic and humble structure to Greek eyes. However that may be, Orual's father, the King, acquires a slave to tutor his daughter.

As Orual's confidence in her new teacher grows, she "came to tell him all about Ungit, about the girls who are kept in her house, and the presents that brides have to make to her, and how we sometimes, in a bad year, had to cut someone's throat and pour the blood over her." (p. 7) Blood, girls, and brides are thus associated with Ungit. Hearing this, the Fox comments learnedly, "Yes, she is undoubtedly Aphrodite, though more like the Babylonian than the Greek." (p. 8) In other words, he identifies Ungit with the goddess worshipped in his own culture, a characteristic gesture in classical culture, and then distances himself from her by identifying her with what he regards as "the Babylonian [Aphrodite]" He tells Orual the story of Prince Anchises' encounter with Aphrodite, who "came down the grassy slopes toward his shepherd's hut, lions and lynxes and bears and all sorts of beasts . . . about her fawning like dogs," reminding us of the green lady of Perelandra who first appears to Ransom surrounded by the Perelandrian population of beasts, including an elegant little dragon. Readers who want to know the reach and accuracy of Lewis' knowledge of ancient goddesses can consult Buffie Johnson's study, *Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals* (1981), with both benefit and pleasure. In fact, only a very few animals are associated with Ungit in *Till We Have Faces*, and I will discuss them in due course.

The meeting of prince and goddess in the story of Anchises and Aphrodite, one very unsuitable for any schoolgirl but Orual, ends with the horror of Anchises when "he knew he had lain with a goddess," and exclaims, "Kill me at once," (p. 8) reminding the alert Lewis reader of what the mare Hwin says to Aslan when she encounters Him in *The Horse and His Boy*. From this incident, Orual, the apt pupil, concludes that "if the goddess was more beautiful in Greece she was equally terrible in each." (p. 8) The word "terrible" occurs in the Old Testament. God, for instance, is called "terrible" in *Deuteronomy 7:12*: "for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and a terrible;" in *Job 37-22*, we read that "with God is terrible maj-

esty;" in *Psalms 47:2*, we are told that "the LORD most high is terrible;" and in *Joel 2:11* that "the way of the LORD is great and very terrible."

In a book Lewis is certain to have read, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Jane Harrison writes of "the old radiance of Aphrodite, . . . sobered somehow, grave with the hauntings of earlier godheads." (Harrison, 1907/1962, p. 314) With the onset of science, Harrison says, "only the mystery of life, and love that begets life, remained, intimately realized and utterly unexplained; hence Aphrodite keeps her godhead to the end."

In regard to the Fox's association of Aphrodite with Babylon, Paul Friedrich says that "both sources, the Semitic and the Indo-European, gave substantial input into the great figures of Aphrodite that we find in Homer and Sappho." (Friedrich, 1978, p. 4) The origins of Aphrodite, he says, include Old Europe (7000-3500), "a pre-Hellenic stratum in which women and goddesses supposedly played a preponderant and dominant role;" Neolithic Crete, where Demeter and Persephone were venerated; the "invading Indo-Europeans," much influenced by Cretan imagery but male-dominated; the Sumerian Inanna; the Semitic Ishtar of the Phoenicians, where "Ishtar is attended by 'girl' devotees," (Friedrich, 1978, p. 16); and Egypt, the source of Hathor and Sekhmet, not to say (and he does not say), Isis. The appearance of Ungit is very far indeed from the Aphrodite of Homer's hymn's "Revered, golden-crowned, and beautiful Aphrodite," (Friedrich, 1978, p. 78) she who in Cyprus still appears through Mary under her title "Panghia Aphroditessa." (Friedrich, 1978, p. 71) Interestingly, Friedrich examines Aphrodite's associations, which include, for our purpose, "Mountain Peaks," and the "Aphrodite of the bridal chamber," (Friedrich, 1978, p. 85) relating her to the same lady (or at least an earthly avatar) who appears twice in *That Hideous Strength*, and who may be seen in *Till We Have Faces* (as Ungit) to have arranged the marriage of Psyche (Orual's sister Istra) to Ungit's son.

Christine Downing, who agrees with Bachofen's *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* in "seeing Psyche as an aspect of [Aphrodite] . . . as those who worshipped her [Psyche] - initially, simply because of her physical loveliness - recognize." (Downing, 1981, p. 205) She comments, "How right was C.S. Lewis' decision to retell the tale of Psyche from the perspective of the ugly, jealous, self-righteous older sister who only at the end of her life discovers, 'You, too, are Psyche!'" (Downing, 1981, p. 188)

It is in the role of Ungit as mistress of the bridal chamber that we meet "the priest of Ungit," as preparations are made for a new bride for the King of Glome, the father of Orual (and of her sister Redival). Orual's description of this priest, though superficially interpretable as ironic, is, I hope to prove, accurate, appropriate, and to be taken seriously by the reader as offering both realism and symbolic resonance. Orual says:



I think that what frightened me (in those early days) was the holiness of the smell about him - a temple-smell of blood (mostly of pigeon's blood, but he had sacrificed men, too) and burnt fat and singed hair and wine and stale incense. It was the Ungit smell. (p. 11)

The similarity of this inventory of smells with that of a liturgical church's sanctuary is not, surely, unintentional. I was once told by a minister of the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, the United Church, that he preferred his church to the Anglican because his altar was like a kitchen table, while the Anglican's was like a slaughtering block, presumably basing these similes on the fact that the Anglican Church of Canada's *Book of Common Prayer* refers to the bread and wine of the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ.

The priest of Ungit is present at the girl queen's bed because she is there to conceive Psyche, whom Ungit has destined as a bride for her son, the Mountain God. This priest is dressed in authentic shamanic garb with "skins" and "dried bladders" and "the great mask shaped like a bird's head which hung on his chest." (p. 11) Although at first glance these accouterments suggest Lewis' depiction of the god Tash as a great carrion bird in *The Last Battle* (Patterson, 1990, *passim*), the presence of the bird's head mask may be given another reading. Buffle Johnson says that "a bird's head upon a human figure is one of the most venerable mythological inventions." (Johnson 1988; p.11) A male figure wearing a bird's head mask is painted at the Paleolithic caves of Peche Merle and Lascaux, each one representing a different bird. A "costume of beak, wings, and feathers endowed the wearer with the bird's powers," (Johnson 1988, p. 1) which include "wisdom." (*Ibid.*) The bird-masked figures of the Paleolithic culminated "in a great flowering of the bird cult of the Mother Goddess in the Neolithic era." (Johnson, 1988, p. 9) As usual, Lewis is precisely accurate in his depiction of the priest of Ungit.

The main concern of the priest in this scene is to ask, "Are the young women to be veiled or unveiled?" (p. 11) This is no idle question, but an immediate presentation of the theme of *Till We Have Faces*, which is a play upon the donning and doffing of veils. The King's harsh response, which has led to an entire essay interpreting Orual as the victim of a dysfunctional family, (Williams, 1994, *passim*) is: "'Veils, of course. And good thick veils too.' One of the other girls tittered, and I think that was the first time I clearly understood that I am ugly." (p. 11) In accordance with Glomish religion, the King may have been waxing coarse as well as cruel. The veil, a feature of some aspects of Aphrodite worship, "is analogous to the hymen, which symbolized feminine integrity." (Friedrich 1978: 208) The veil has become a very ambivalent subject, to me as to many others, as a symbol of the suppression of women. Some young Moslem women born in Canada have taken up wearing the *hijab*, not, they say, as a symbol of submission to men, but as a sign of their religious faith. They do this against a certain amount of external opposition and

hence with a certain air of defiance (expressed in assorted Ontario newspapers in articles and letters the editor). After re-reading in *Till We Have Faces* how Orual regards the veil she deliberately takes up for her queenship, I began for the first time really to understand (I don't know why it took me so long; I'm the only woman in my parish who still wears a veil in church) why Queen Orual writes "My second strength lay in my veil." (p. 228)

As Orual's father marries for this second time, she recounts that "we took off layer after layer of her finery," leaving the young bride naked in his bed; and comments that "He made great sacrifices to Ungit after that." (p. 13) His prayers are answered; the child is born - "There must have been some sacrifices too," says Orual; "there was a smell of slaughtering and blood on the floor, and the priest was cleaning his holy knife." (p. 14) The little mother is the sacrifice; she has died giving birth. The King, disappointed because the newborn child is a daughter rather than the son he has desired, asks the priest, "what have you to say for Ungit now?" (p. 15) He adds, "Tell me, prophet, what would happen if I hammered Ungit into powder?" and the Priest, unmoved, retorts, "Ungit hears, King, even at this moment." (p. 15)

The King responds by throwing Orual to the ground as the nearest example of a girl, and condemns her teacher the Fox to hard labor in the mines. As the dejected pair slip away, Orual points "to the ridge of the Grey Mountain, now dark with a white daybreak behind it, seen through the slanting rain." (p. 17) This is the first clear description of the Mountain, which is to play a central role in the book. Obviously, it lies to the east of the royal palace of Glome, and the "white daybreak" suggests, to the alert reader (or at least one exposed as Lewis was to the *Book of Common Prayer*) to "the day-spring from on high" hailed through the Benedictus in Morning Prayer, who is to come from thence.

The Day-spring is the dawn, and even more the dawning Sun of Righteousness, the divine Son of God, and the son of Ungit in *Till We Have Faces*. Lewis' imagery of the Utter East in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* anticipates this. One could add that the West-wind, who meets Psyche when she goes to the Tree as a sacrifice, is the wind who would have blown the *Dawn Treader* steadily toward the east, and is the god who carries Psyche eastward to the mountain fastness where her husband Eros awaits (unless, as I suspect, West-wind and Eros are one and the same).

The above mentioned materials have presented the dyad House of Ungit / Grey Mountain, firmly established as a symbolic pair, and Orual's abusive context has clearly been indicated in various allusions to her miserable palace life. Now we meet the center of Orual's story, her sister Istra, or, as she says, when the Fox asks for that name in Greek, "It would be Psyche, Grandfather." (p. 20) This name appears in the novel for the first time here; it is given by Orual herself. It is useful, perhaps, to note here the two definitions of the name Psyche given in *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* for 1947: "A beautiful princess of whom Venus

became jealous. Cupid, Venus's son, fell in love with Psyche, and Venus imposed many hardships on her, but Psyche was finally reunited with Cupid and made immortal." The definition adds the second meaning: "The human soul, also, the mind; the mental life."

Psyche, like the Grey Mountain (and unlike the House of Ungit), is associated with light. "You would have thought she made bright all the corners of the room where she lay." (p. 20) As the child grows, the Fox and Orual take her out to look toward the Grey Mountain, and Psyche explains prophetically, "When I'm big, . . . I will be a great, great queen, married to the greatest king of all, and he will build me a castle of gold and amber up there on the very top." (p. 23) The phrase "the greatest king of all" is, for Lewis, literally meant. He is thinking of the King of Kings (as celebrated, for instance, by Handel's *Messiah*). When the Fox praises Psyche's beauty, saying she is "prettier than Aphrodite," (p. 23) Orual is afraid; the Fox replies, "The divine nature is not like that. It has no envy." (p. 24)

This passage presents a complete set of viewpoints. First, there is the association of Ungit with "the divine nature." Second, we have the Fox's declaration that the divine nature "has no envy." Third, we have Ungit's contention that it is dangerous (perhaps even blasphemous) to say that Psyche is more beautiful than Aphrodite/Ungit. Who is right? Does the divine nature reside in Ungit? Is the divine nature free of jealousy? If my thesis is correct, the answer to both questions is "Yes," and Orual is right about the first and wrong about the second. Orual's mistake, which concludes Chapter Two, is the pivot of the book, for it is precisely here that her complaint against the gods is situated.

In Chapter Three, the point is reiterated, as Orual's other sister, Redival, now also forced to spend her time with the Fox, surprisingly bows down to Psyche and says to Orual and the Fox, "Why don't you honour the goddess?" (p. 27) A woman has asked Psyche to kiss her child so it will be beautiful, and has "laid down a branch of myrtle . . . and bowed down and put dust on her head" (a symbolic act of humility). Ungit's fears of divine jealousy are again aroused, and Redival wonders slyly what Ungit "thinks of our new goddess." (p. 28) When the Fox wryly replies, "It is not very easy to find out what Ungit thinks," Redival retorts that "it would be easy to find out what the Priest of Ungit thinks." (pp. 28-29) Orual says "All my old fear of the Priest . . . stabbed through me." Priests, she thinks, can be jealous, whether or not jealousy is a trait of the divine nature.

The symbol of the myrtle, offered above to Psyche, is no casual motif. This evergreen plant was one of the flowers used for offerings in Ptolemaic Egypt (Goody, 1993, pp. 42-43), and Theophrates satirized "those superstitious Greeks who hung myrtle wreaths on their household gods." (Goody, 1993, p. 158) Appropriately, "Myrtle was sacred to the Goddess Aphrodite." (Walker 1988: 449) For

the Feast of Booths, a very old Judaic festival, structures made of "cypress branches and myrtle" were erected, "symbolizing happiness and fertility" (see *Nehemiah* 8:15), and in Rome, "successful Roman generals were awarded the crown of myrtle." The Hebrew name for myrtle is *hadas*, as in Hadassah, in *Esther* 2:7. (Zohary, 1982, p. 118) The myrtle's "aromatic branches . . . also figured in betrothal rites" in ancient Greece, where it was explicitly used "because of its association with Aphrodite, as well as for the crowns of initiates into the Eleusian Mysteries." (Thompson and Griswold, 1963, n.p.) Nothing is ever a throwaway with Lewis.

Whatever may be said about the jealousy of gods, things now begin to go very wrong with the kingdom of Glome: insurrection, bad harvest, and famine. "Now mark the subtlety of the god who is against us." (p. 30) says Orual, building her case. The Fox is taken with the fever and Psyche nurses him back to health. The people of Glome call out to her to deliver healing for their fevers, too, along with food to make up for their lost harvest, crying as she appears, "A goddess, a goddess," and hailing her, as does one woman: "It is Ungit herself in mortal shape." (p. 32) Is this blasphemy? Can a goddess become a young woman? Can God become "man" [sic]?

After the healing, and after Psyche has herself recovered from the fever, the people offer "myrtle branches and garlands and soon honeycakes and then pigeons, which are especially sacred to Ungit." (p. 33) Honey (and bees) and pigeons (or doves) are profoundly significant in the context Lewis uses here. Petronius said that "Mother Earth lies in the world's midst rounded like an egg [more of this below] and all blessings are there inside her as in a honeycomb." (Walker, 1988, p. 5) Bees "were the souls of . . . priestesses who had been in the service of Aphrodite," at the temple of Eryx "where her symbol was a golden honeycomb," (Walker, 1988, p. 414) While bees could symbolize mortality (Walker, 1988, p. 415), honey was also a symbol of resurrection, (Walker, 1988, p. 488) Hence, it is not surprising that Marija Gimbutas says that the Goddess is related to transformation and regeneration, (Gimbutas, 1982, p. 182)

As for the dove goddess (Webster defines "pigeon" as "a dove"), she had her sanctuary at Knossos. (Gimbutas, 1982, p. 146) Barbara Walker remarks that "Despite its later Christianized transformation - as a symbol of the Holy Spirit - the dove formerly represented the specifically sexual aspect of the Goddess." (Walker, 1988, p. 100) There is an element of this in the many images of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary by the angel Gabriel that she is to be the mother of Jesus, in which a dove, surrounded by rays of light, descends on a trajectory suitably directed toward her abdomen, and a lovely symbol it is, too. Finally, the dove is a symbol of Hokmah - Sophia - Sapientia - Holy Wisdom - "the triumphant dove having been the most common symbol of the Goddess's spirit brooding over the waters of creation." (Walker, 1988, p. 206)



Clearly the myrtle, honey cakes, and pigeons are gifts offered to the goddess, presumably Ungit, whose healing power (and perhaps embodiment) is perceived by the Glomish population to be associated with Psyche. As for the Priest of Ungit, he is sick with the fever in his turn, and can do nothing. Everything goes wrong. Illness continues, a second harvest fails (not necessarily implying a second year, since two harvests can be possible in a single year in some latitudes), and now Psyche is seen as the cause of this suffering, as the river dries, the fish die, the cattle and bees perish, the fever continues, lions begin to stalk nearby, and the king's enemies also start to prowl, alerted to Glome's weakness.

Now the Priest of Ungit recovers. "The bearers set down the litter and the Priest was lifted out of it . . . he had the temple girls with him to lead him . . . They looked strange under the sun, with their gilt paps and their huge flaxen wigs and their faces painted till they looked like wooden masks." (p. 42) Led to the Pillar Room, the Priest confronts the King, and

The girls stood stiffly at each side of his chair, their meaningless eyes looking straight out of the mask of their painting. The smell of old age, and the smell of the oils and essences they put on those girls, and the Ungit smell, filled the room, It became very holy. (p. 43)

Again, are these passages, so vivid and so potent, ironic? Is Orual's attributed holiness mistaken? Presumably, at least to judge by the references to painted faces, elaborate wigs, and heavy perfumes, as well as to "meaningless eyes." One could assume that Lewis is alluding to the supposed temple prostitutes which Herodotus depicted in his account of the temple of Ishtar [Mytilla] in Babylon, which is in fact the only actual historic reference, true or not, to this idea. Tikva Frymer-Kensky concludes that "the whole idea of a sex cult - in Israel or in Canaan - is a chimera, the product of ancient and modern sexual fantasies." (Frymer-Kensky, 1992, p. 199) She states flatly that "The whole tradition of . . . ancient pagan religion and its women cultic functionaries as sex partners is a myth," based on the "Western . . . inability to think of roles for women priestesses in any arena other than sexual." (Frymer-Kensky, 1992, p. 202) In fact Lewis does not actually imply that these young priestesses are prostitutes, and I will discuss their symbolic role below, as they reappear much later in the novel,

The priest of Ungit, accompanied by the young women, comes to the King with dire news, Ungit, he says, wants "the Great Offering": (p. 46), the offering of a human life. "The Brute" (p. 47) has been seen walking abroad, and He is "very black and big, a terrible shape" - a shadow, in fact. The source of this particular motif may be the Shadow who pursues Anodos in George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, the book that Lewis said (with accuracy) had "baptized" his imagination.

The Brute is, in a mystery, Ungit herself or Ungit's son, the god of the mountain; or both, The victim is led up the moun-

tain to the Holy Tree, and bound to the Tree and left to become the Brute's Supper and when the Brute is Ungit it lies with the man, and when it is her son it lies with the woman . . . The best in the land is not too good for this office. (pp. 48-49)

The resonance of these interlocking images is, of course, extraordinary, vibrating with hints of the Cross ("the Holy Tree,"), the Eucharist (the "Brute's Supper"), and even, in a quote not cited above, the vows of a religious who becomes the bride of Christ- "the bride of Ungit's Son." (p. 49) No wonder Orual states that "The holiness and horror of divine things were continually thickening in that room." (p. 49)

In corroboration, the Priest states coolly to the protesting King: "Holy places are dark places . . . Holy Wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood." (p. 50) This is the most explicit suggestion by Lewis that Ungit is in fact Holy Wisdom; recent commentators (as well as medieval ones) have specifically associated Christ with Holy Wisdom so that the divine nature appears in the Godhead as both feminine and masculine.

The element of darkness as a category of the divine appears in *Deuteronomy* 5:12 : "The Lord spake with all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of thick darkness;" and in *Psalms* 18:11: "He made darkness his secret place." It has been pointed out that the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon was "a dark windowless room in which the ark was placed." (Coleman and Eisner, 1995; p. 41) One notes that the Ark of the Covenant, which was kept in this dark room, contained the stones which bore the Law; as *Psalms* 18, says: "The Lord is my rock," a motif appropriate to Ungit, who is a rock in a dark place.

At the conclusion of the encounter between the King of Glome and the Priest of Ungit, lots are cast, and Psyche is the chosen sacrifice. Orual, despairing, notices "some temple girls sitting in the hall. From the courtyard came the smell of incense, and sacrifice was going on. Ungit had taken the house; the reek of holiness was everywhere." (p. 62) This passage resembles the "Descent of the Gods:" upon St. Anne's Manor in *That Hideous Strength*, in which Venus's descent is described: "a smell of burning cedar or of incense pervaded the room." Lewis, 1945/1946, p. 382) Even as Orual goes to comfort the imprisoned Psyche, seeking her own solace from her doomed sister, she is forced to hear of Ungit:

"What's a city built on? There is earth beneath. And outside the wall? Doesn't all the food come from there as well as all the danger? . . . More like, yes, even more like the House of -"

"Yes, of Ungit," said I. "Doesn't the whole land smell of her?" (p. 71)

Here too is a whiff of the descending Venus of *That Hideous Strength*, whose coming brings a scent of "ripe fields in August." (Lewis, 1945/1946, p. 382) These evocations of olfactory memory extend to Psyche's experience

of Ungit's son, as she tells Orual, "Do you remember? The colour and the smell, and looking across at the Grey Mountain in the distance?" (p. 74)

In the central scene of confrontation between Orual and Psyche, we indeed see jealousy, but it is not the jealousy of the god - Psyche says "All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me" (p. 76) - but of Orual. A major element in this book, I think, is the jealousy of the unconverted for the converted, the parent who hates to see a daughter marry, the family of a prospective nun, family members for those who become Christian (or any other religion), even Janie Moore when her young companion, C.S. Lewis, turns toward God. Lewis describes the process in *The Screwtape Letters*. And this is not simple jealousy; it is by no means so ignoble as that. Accounts of early Christian martyrs contain passages where friends and family implore them to burn the necessary incense and escape the arena. The apostles themselves never understood beforehand their Lord's intention as He went to the cross.

In her anguish, Orual limps away to bed, wakened on the morning of the Sacrifice to the sound of "temple music, Ungit's music, the drums and horns and rattles and castanets all holy, deadly-dark, detestable, maddening noises." (p. 79) Besides noting the role of the sistrum (a form of rattle) used in the worship of Isis and still used in Egyptian Coptic Christian worship, we can acknowledge that Orual here attributes malignant aural elements to the imagery of Ungit, recalling the "sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music" required by Nebuchadnezzar's image. (see *Samuel* 6:5 and *Daniel* 3:5) Worse still for Orual is the sight of Psyche: "They had painted and gilded and be-wigged her like a temple girl. I could not even tell whether she saw me or not." (p. 80) Many a parent has felt the same as her or his daughter came up the aisle to her wedding, so garmented, veiled, coifed, and otherwise bedizened as to be almost unrecognizable, and so intent upon the face of her future husband that the parents cannot tell whether she sees them or not.

The bereft Orual falls into a long illness. When she recovers, she sets out to rescue, at least, the bones of the sacrificed Psyche. It is at this point that we finally read a detailed description of Ungit's house:

We passed the house of Ungit on our right. Its fashion is thus: great, ancient stones twice the height of a man and four times the thickness of a man, set upright in an egg-shaped ring. They are very ancient, and no one knows who set them up or brought them to that place, or how . . . This is a holy shape, and the priests say it resembles, or (in a mystery) that it really is, the egg from which the whole world was hatched or the womb in which the whole world once lay. . . . There was smoke going up from it as we passed, for the fire before Ungit is always alight. (p. 94)

The primordial egg is an idea originating in the Paleolithic, and elaborately expanded in the very early Neolithic cultures. (Gimbutas, 1982, p. 101) Marija Gimbutas says that "Cucuteni vases" - which were made by a culture in

the Danubian area proposed for Glome by Myers," reveal the formation of the world and beginning of life from an egg in the midst of which a germ resided." (*Ibid.*) The egg can comprise the central or fundamental germ from which being emerged, and/or the universe itself as fully formed. (Newall, 1971, p. 35) It is also "a rich and very ancient symbol of life." (Newall, 1971, p. 45)

The great stones, twice as tall as a man and four times thicker, of which Ungit's house is made, remind us not only of the great orthostatic stones arranged to create sacred sites in Britain including Stonehenge and New Grange, but of stones like the one of which Jacob says, "This stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house." (*Genesis* 28:22) and of the house of Holy Wisdom of which *Proverbs* 9:1 says, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." The pillar motif recurs in the final chapter of *Till We Have Faces*, where in a dream, the Pillar Room of Glome proves to have three layers, each one deeper than the one before.

Orual's journey to reclaim her sister Psyche continues the stream of apparent ironies which can be interpreted not only as reversals caused by her perceptions but images capable of alternative readings. Looking toward the Grey Mountain, she sees "a cursed black valley," (p. 97) like the "valley of the shadow of death" in *Psalms* 23:4, or the "valley that was full of bones" in *Ezekiel* 37:7, or "the valley of decision," where "The sun and the moon shall be darkened and the stars shall withdraw their shining," in *Joel* 3:14-15. Looking upwards she sees "Against the sky, a simple leafless tree," (p. 98) perhaps the cross, often depicted in art as a tree, with its "iron girdle" by which its victims were clasped to it, both empty. Bardia, Orual's military commander and companion, continues the theme by announcing that "We are very near the bad part of the Mountain - I mean the holy part." (p. 100)

Now the moment of enlightenment comes: "the sun - which had been overcast ever since we went down into the black valley - leaped out." (p. 100)

In this sequence, just as Orual has misread her experiences with holy darkness, she now misreads two vivid experiences of holy light. The first is a vision - both physical vision of an actual place and spiritual vision of its profound significance - which is pure Lewis, and pure Narnia:

It was like looking down into a new world. At our feet, cradled amid a vast confusion of mountains, lay a small valley bright as a gem . . . I never saw greener turf. There was gorse in bloom, and wild vines, and many groves of flourishing trees, and great plenty of bright water . . . We were out of the wind now . . . , soon we could hear the chattering of the streams and the sound of bees. (p. 101)

This intense passage brings together every element of Lewis' personal experience of *Sehnsucht*. The phrase "new world" brings with it every concept of newness from Paradise, through the discovery by Europe of the Ameri-



cas - reflected when Miranda says, at the end of *The Tempest*, "O brave new world," (Act V, Scene 1, line 185) - to the concept of "New heavens and new earth" (*Isaiah* 65:17) as expressed in *The Last Battle*, which concludes with the replacement of the extinguished Narnia by a new Narnia, better than before. We read in *Surprised by Joy* of the tiny garden in a tin prepared by Lewis' elder brother Warren in Lewis' childhood, which introduced him to supernal desire. The green turf, "bright as a gem" reminds us that in *The Great Divorce*, the dreaming narrator encounters heavenly grass so immutable that it is as hard as diamonds. The flowering gorse speaks of Lewis' many hillside walks in rural England; the "wild vines" remind us of the romp of Bacchus, Aslan, and the wild girls, which concludes with a miraculous proliferation of grapevines, in *Prince Caspian*; and the "groves of flourishing trees" also make us think of Narnia, where such trees can indeed dance. The phrase "we were out of the wind now" has its source in the paradisaic visit to the back of the North Wind by Little Diamond in George MacDonald's *The Back of the North Wind*.

All these images resonate with the deepest roots of Lewis' spirituality. The passage concludes, in this supernal context, with "the sound of bees," that is, with an image of the divine feminine, of Aphrodite and the house of Ungit.

Ungit, indeed, has a house; here we read of the house of her son, which contains "the most delicate pillared court open to the sky" (p. 114) - a clear doublet for the bright-watered, green-turfed valley which was also open to the sky. And of course, Orual responds, "We must go away at once. This is a terrible place."

And well Orual might fear, since she is, as Psyche tells her, "standing on the stairs of the great gate" (p. 116) of the god's house. Psyche makes this very clear. When asked her consort's name, she replies, "My god, of course," and adds, in a series of profound words which Lewis expected all Christians to echo: "My lover. My husband. The Master of my House." (p. 122) Finally, when asked to describe her divine husband, Psyche reiterates the central theme of the book; she cannot see him, she says, because "He comes to me only in the holy darkness." (p. 123)

At this, Orual rallies. She retorts: "Holy darkness, you call it . . . Faugh! Everything's dark about the gods." (p. 124) As Psyche continues in her efforts to explain, Orual continues with her theme - "Oh, you ought to have been one of Ungit's girls . . . in the dark - all blood and incense and muttering and the reek of burnt fat . . . - dark and holy and horrible." (p. 125)

This sequence concludes with the moment when Orual, who has already been unable to read the meaning of the bright valley, is now vouchsafed a vision of the god's "palace, grey - all things were grey in that time and place - but solid and motionless, wall within wall - pillar and arch and architrave, acres of it, a labyrinthine beauty." (p. 132) Lewis here invokes the great House of the Axe, the

Labyrinth of Crete, which was sacred to the Goddess. Like the mountain, it too is grey, neither black nor white but both at once. Then, alluding to another great house dedicated to a holy Lady, he evokes the cathedrals of medieval Europe: "it was no house ever seen in our land and age. Pinnocks and buttresses leaped up . . . unbelievably tall and slender, pointed and prickly as if stone were shooting out into branch and flower." (p. 132) The house of Ungit, the house of Psyche's God, and the cathedrals of Notre Dame (Our Lady): all are related, all are one in this vision.

Then, out it goes; "the whole thing was vanished." Orual's quest is hopeless. In a heart-rending parody of the Holy Trinity, Orual imagines Psyche in the hands of "some holy and sickening thing, ghostly [the Holy Ghost] or demonlike [the Father] or bestial [Jesus, the Lamb of God] or all three (there's no telling with gods) - enjoyed her at its will." (p. 137)

Making her sad way home, Orual passes "in sight of the house of Ungit" (p. 138) and decides that "Psyche should not - least of all, contentedly - make sport for a demon." That has been the final "sin" committed by Psyche against Orual: that she is contented in her love for someone - anyone - else. With this specific fact - Orual cannot endure to see Psyche happy with anyone else - Book I of *Till We Have Faces* is almost exactly halfway through. From this point on to the end of Book I, we hear very little of Ungit. Orual returns to her father's little palace, then sets out again to the mountain valley and presses upon Psyche to light a lamp in the great palace's bedroom, with the result that Psyche is condemned to exile and Orual is condemned to take up Psyche's tasks. Orual leaves the blighted valley, now "all bare rock, raw earth, and foul water," (p. 175) and goes back home to the rest of her life.

Her father dies; Ungit replaces him; the old priest of Ungit dies, and a new priest comes to replace him, too. In a brief reference to Ungit, we learn that she is "now weakened," that "her house was not so dark," that "it smelled cleaner and less holy," and that the new priest has set up "a woman-shaped image in Greek fashion - in front of the old shapeless stone." (p. 234) Orual, having enacted all possible reforms, sets out to visit the neighboring kingdoms with which she has long since made peace.

In the last chapter of Book I, Orual and her party of young travelers, seek to visit "a natural hot springs," (p. 239) with its echoes of healing spas and underworld places, located, naturally, in "a warm green valley." Orual goes ahead alone toward the sound of "a temple bell." (p. 240) There she finds "a mossy place free of trees" with a little temple, "no bigger than a peasant's hut but built of pure white stone" - white stone, mind you - with "the small thatched house" of its priest behind it. (p. 240) The temple is cool and silent, empty and clean, and "There was on the altar the image of a woman about two feet high carved in wood" with "no painting or gilding but only the natural pale color of the wood." (p. 241) The face of this image is veiled.

In exchange for an offering of coins, the priest tells the story of this "very young goddess," whose name, we discover, is Istra, Psyche's Glomish name. In this story, Ungit is jealous of Psyche and causes her to be sacrificed; Psyche is rescued by Ungit's son, "the most beautiful of the gods," (p. 24-2) and taken to his palace, where she is forbidden to see his face. So far, so good, from Orual's viewpoint. But then she is told that Psyche's sisters had visited Psyche and "seen the beautiful palace" of the god. (p. 243) She exclaims, "They saw the palace?" and the priest retorts, "of course they saw the palace! They weren't blind." (p. 243) The sisters destroyed Psyche's happiness, he explains, "out of jealousy." Orual rages, "Jealousy? I jealous of Psyche?" On her way home she decides to write a condemnation of the gods and make her case against them; Book I has been that book. In it, she has asked the central question of Lewis' novel: "Why must holy places be dark places?" (p. 249)

Book II gives Orual's answer. As she sorts through her memories, fulfilling the task of Psyche, to sort through the mixed seeds, she learns that her love for the Fox and for Psyche has broken the heart of her sister Redival, and that her close advisor, the brave Bardia, has been worked to death by her demands upon him. In this descent to reality, Orual again encounters Ungit.

At the yearly ceremony of "the year's birth," despite all the new priest's liturgical reforms, "there had been censuring and slaughtering, the pouring of wine and the pouring of blood, and dancing and feasting and towsing of girls, and burning of fat, all night long." Into this setting comes Orual, to seat herself "on the flat stone which is my place opposite the sacred stone which is Ungit herself." (p. 369) She and the goddess are face to face. She continues: "I saw the terrible girls sitting in rows down both sides of the house, each cross-legged at the door of her cell." (p. 269) The phrase "terrible girls" used here suggests the question asked about the Shulamite (whoever she is) in *The Song of Solomon* (6:10): "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" The "terrible girls" are potential brides of the goddess's son; we recall that Psyche was dressed in their characteristic garb when she was presented to Him, and note that Psyche's mother, the little bride of the King of Glome, was arrayed in the same way. The cells of these formally garbed girls are thus to be compared with the cells of nuns, the Brides of Christ.

In this same passage we learn that Ungit "had not, like most sacred stones, fallen from the sky," but "had pushed her way up out of the earth," as I recounted above. The priest explains to Orual that Ungit "signifies the earth, which is the womb and mother of all living things" (p. 270) - in clear concert with much contemporary environmentalist symbolism. He also answers Orual's question as to whether Ungit is "the mother of the God of the Mountain" in the affirmative.

These teachings gradually become clear to Orual when a

peasant woman, weeping, enters with an offering of "a live pigeon," (p. 271) and, after the sacrifice, rises "calm, patient, able for whatever she had to do." (p. 272) One thinks of the Blessed Virgin Mary offering two pigeons at the Temple of Jerusalem, so that she may taken her Son home with her. "There's no goddess like Ungit," the peasant woman assures Orual, and when asked why she has made her offering to the stone instead of to the new statue, she explains simply, of the latter, that "There's no comfort in her." (p. 272)

Orual goes home, trembling on the brink of enlightenment. As she first meditates, and then drifts into sleep after her long night, her father stands before her and orders her to come with him "to the Pillar Room." (p. 274) There was a Pillar Room in the brick portion of the palace of Glome. But the reference is to something deeper, literally deeper; when Orual accompanies him to that Pillar Room, he commands her to break through the floor, no doubt also composed of brick. Beneath, they encounter "another Pillar Room, exactly like the one we had left, except that it was smaller and all made (floor, walls, and pillars) of raw earth." (p. 274) The phrase "raw earth" has already been used in Ungit's experience of the mountainside valley after Psyche has gone into exile, above. This earthen level (bricks are made of earth, too) is surely under the sway of Earth herself. Then they dig still deeper, to "another pillar room, but this was of living rock." The expression "living rock" besides partially echoing the term "raw rock" also used above in regard to the abandoned valley, resonates powerfully in this setting. At the literal level, it is the actual rock of which the earth is made, rather than a rock hewn or worn away and thus free-standing. At the allegorical level it can be compared to the many rocks set up upon the earth in the Old Testament, each of which seems in their narrative settings to have been unhewn rock, rock detached from "living rock" but still maintaining its properties. As this is the third pillar room, it can be associated with the "house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the Pillar and ground of the house," (*I Timothy* 3:15) and to *Revelation* 7:2 in which we read that of "Him that overcometh I will make a pillar in the temple of my God." I have already referred above to the house that Wisdom built, for which she hewed out seven pillars. As the pillar rooms descend, level by level, they become more and more like the House of Ungit with its great pillars.

The King of Glome asks Orual the question she has, all this time, herself been asking: "Who is Ungit?" (p. 276) Looking into a mirror, she sees her own face, "the face of Ungit as I had seen it that day in her house," and answers, "I am Ungit." (p. 276) This "Ungit" is not the Ungit of the devout peasant woman who went away justified. It is the face of Orual herself, and thus of Ungit as Orual has known her: "I was that. . . all devouring, womblike, yet barren thing." Orual has been barren, but Ungit has been fruitful; she is the mother of the Mountain God. Orual, gazing all the while at her own face, presses on: "Glome was like a web - I the swollen spider, squat in its center, gorged with men's lives." (p. 276)

Exactly. This image, most probably borrowed from Tolkien's evil Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings*, is not Ungit, but Orual herself, who has, indeed, done the evils she now recognizes in the mirror image of herself. She now determines to take off her veil and "go bareface." (p. 273) Still in error, she thinks that, as she supposes to be true of Ungit, she has "become what people called holy." (p. 278) Indeed, she thinks she may even "be the Shadowbrute also." (p. 268) Bowed down by these grossly mistaken projections, she goes to the river to drown herself. A god bars her way: "Die before you die. There is no chance after," he commands her. Protesting, she replies, "Lord, I am Ungit." (p. 279) But there is no spoken answer. How could there be? What she has said is non-sense.

Mara E. Donaldson, in her little known but significant study, *Holy Places are Dark Places: C.S. Lewis and Paul Ricoeur* superbly interprets Orual's sin as being "not the Augustinian one of pride, which is what a naive first reading would suggest. Rather it is closer to those recent proposals concerning sin proffered by such theologians as Judith Plaskow. We must distinguish Orual's manifest prideful, possessive craving for Psyche, which indeed is destructive rather than constructive, from its 'sinful' presupposition of being allowed to have no-self at all (i.e., she is veiled and hidden from herself' and others), rather than too much self." (Donaldson, 1988, p. 80)

Alone, Orual is left to discover the answer to her own conundrum. Now she is offered another dream, not yet knowing that these dreams are in fact the god's answers. In this dream she carries out the tasks assigned to Psyche as penance for trying to see her divine husband's face before the time was ripe. Seeing a flock of sheep with "fleeces of such bright gold that I could not look steadily at them" (p. 283) she is trampled by "their gladness" but lives to see "another woman" gleaning the strands of their wool. (p. 284) This woman, Orual says, has "won without effort what utmost effort would not win for me." (p. 284)

Still thinking she must try not to be Ungit, she passes the spring season at her queenly tasks, continuing to believe that she "had at least loved Psyche truly." (p. 285) Again, she has a vision: she walks "over burning sands, carrying an empty bowl," which she must fill with "the water of death, and bring "back without spilling a drop and give . . . to Ungit." (p. 286) These burning sands suggest Canto XIV of Dante's *Inferno*, which Dorothy L. Sayers describes as "a desert of Burning Sand, under a rain of perpetual fire," (Dante/Sayers, 1949, p. 156) where, in 11. 28-30;

And slowly, slowly dropping over all
The sand, there drifted down huge flakes of fire,
As Alpine snows in windless weather fall.

This is the place of "the Violent against God, Nature, and Art," according to Miss Sayers.

In the seeming "hundred years" of these labors, Orual is approached by "an eagle from the gods," which is appropriate to the eagle as a symbol "of the spiritual

principle." (Cirlot, 1962, p. 87) Asked who she is, she now answers correctly: "Queen of Glome," and realizes she is carrying "not a bowl but a book," indeed, her own "complaint against the gods." In the myth of Psyche and Eros, the bowl contains a "magical beauty ointment." (Monaghan, 1981, p. 247), that is, Beauty, the trait which Orual does not believe herself to possess. This is the last of the three tasks of Psyche, which have included "sorting over night a roomful of seeds, catching the sun-sheep's fleece," and "traveling to the underworld to ask for . . . Persephone's ointment."

Orual is flown once again to a vast cave, filled with "a great assembly." (p. 288) This time she stands upon a single pillar, confronted by the ghosts of Batta, the King, the Fox, and many others. There, the judge orders her to be uncovered, of veil and all else, and commanded to read her complaint.

"I know what you'll say," she says, "You will say the real gods are not at all like Ungit, and that I was shown a real god and the house of a real god and ought to have known it." (p. 290) Of course, it is not true that the real gods are not like Ungit. And, still in her delusion, Orual comes to the nugget of her complaint. The gods are terrible, she declares, because "we want to be our own." This is in fact her final error. Her situation is not that she wants to belong to herself, or even that she wants Psyche to belong to her. It is her deepest, most desperate plight that she belongs to nobody, that she has been unable to accept all efforts to love and befriend her.

There is an immense silence, as this final untruth rings in her ears. And she recognizes what her complaint has actually been, and how false it is in the face of Reality. "There was given to me a certainty that this, at last, was my real voice," that is, this was the false substance of her complaint, as the gods had always heard it. The judge asks, "Are you answered?" and we see that the answer has in fact been silence. She replies, having at last perceived the emptiness of her complaint, "Yes," (p. 293) the beginning of the affirmation which makes love possible.

Following this silent enlightenment, she encounters the Fox. He leads her to "a cool chamber, walls on three sides of us, but on the fourth side only pillars and arches . . . Beyond and between the light pillars and soft leaves I saw level grass and shining water," in a reiteration of all Lewis has used in this book as symbols of mystical illumination. Shown a series of painted images on the three walls, she is led to recognize that she has borne all the pains of Psyche's tasks, just as Psyche has endured so much from her before. Now they "stood in a fair, grassy court, with blue, fresh sky above us; mountain sky." (p. 305) This court is obviously a part of the great House of the God of Love, Psyche's husband. That god now arrives. "The pillars on the far side of the pool flushed with his presence." (p. 307) And in the pool, Orual sees the reflection of herself and Psyche, both beautiful and both individual. "You also are Psyche," the "great voice" intones. Orual was never Ungit; how could

she be? She and Psyche are both the brides of Ungit's Son, the God who is Love.

In her last words of Book II, Orual tells us, "I know, now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer." (p. 308)

In the Note which concludes *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis claims that "The central alteration in my own version consists in making Psyche's palace visible to normal mortal eyes," (p. 313) and that "Nothing was farther from my aim than to recapture the peculiar quality of the Metamorphoses - that strange compound of picaresque novel, horror comic, mystagogue's tract, pornography, and stylistic experiment." (p. 313) Even at this last, he engages in misdirection! For *Till We Have Faces* has been all five of these, turning each element - picaresque novel, horror comic, mystagogue's tract, pornography (think of what you thought about Ungit's girls) and stylistic experiment - upon its head in turn.

The complexly interlocked meanings of *Till We Have Faces* and of its central metaphor, in which Orual is asked, "Are you answered?" and concludes in the end by telling her Lord, "You are yourself the answer," have been discussed by many authors. Two of these who address the meanings and metaphors most successfully are Doris Myers and Mara Donaldson, as I have already demonstrated.

Doris Myers says that Lewis is proof that "language [is] a relationship, manifesting itself through metaphor, between the human mind and the universe." (Myers, 1994, p. 87) Mara Donaldson adds that "Narrative needs to be understood as an interplay between temporality, which gives sequential specificity to the logic of metaphor, and the logic of metaphor, which gives significance to that temporality." (Donaldson, 1988, p. 98) At what Christians regard as the watershed of history, Pontius Pilate (he whose name is uttered everywhere the Creed is recited) asks "What is truth?" Truth stands before him, bound and silent. He who is asked the question is Himself the answer.

Nancy-Lou Patterson
Walsingham House, Waterloo, Ontario
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