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Abstract

Biography of Joy Davidman Lewis and her influence on C.S. Lewis.

Additional Keywords

Davidman, Joy—Biography; Davidman, Joy—Criticism and interpretation; Davidman, Joy—Influence on C.S. Lewis; Davidman, Joy—Religion; Davidman, Joy. Smoke on the Mountain; Lewis, C.S.—Influence of Joy Davidman (Lewis); Lewis, C.S. Till We Have Faces

Joy Davidman Lewis: Author, Editor and Collaborator

Diana Pavlac Glyer

INTRODUCTION

In Richard Attenborough's film *Shadowlands*, C. S. "Jack" Lewis and his brother Warren Lewis are portrayed as a pair of nervous bachelors. In one telling scene, they bustle around their home, The Kilns, as they prepare for a visit from Joy Davidman Gresham. Warren paces back and forth from the kitchen, Jack spills an armload of coal on the rug. As if he were anticipating the most dire of all possible dangers, Warren Lewis predicts, "She'll make you listen to one of her poems, I'll bet you ten bob." He continues, "Then she'll say, 'How do you like it, Mr. Lewis?' and you'll be stumped." Jack grins. "No problem," he replies. "I'll say, 'Mrs. Gresham, only *you* could have written it.'"

Joy arrives at The Kilns with her son Douglas in tow. After some preliminary introductions, Warren turns to Joy and says sweetly, "Jack was particularly hoping you'd introduce him to your poetry." It's a set up, pure and simple. Jack and Joy are evidently embarrassed, then Joy bolsters her courage by reminding herself — and Jack — that she once shared a national poetry prize with Robert Frost. Then she takes a deep breath and recites a poem she has written. But it is not the shallow, flowery, sentimental stuff he was expecting. The poem is based on the experience of men who died fighting the Spanish Civil War. It is entitled "Snow in Madrid":

Softly, so casual,
Lovely, so light, so light.
The cruel sky lets fall
Something one does not fight.
Men before perishing
See with unwounded eye
For once a gentle thing
Fall from the sky (40).¹

Jack is silent for a moment. "It's touching," he says quietly.

And it is. It is touching. It's an impressive scene, funny, warm, engaging. It establishes early in the film that Joy Davidman is no ordinary poet. In this paper, I review her considerable accomplishments as a writer and editor. In addition, Joy and Jack influenced each other's work in many ways, and I describe that influence, particularly their close collaboration on the novel *Till We Have Faces*.

ATHEIST AND COMMUNIST

Joy Davidman was born into a secular Jewish home, and raised in the Bronx. Enormously intelligent, Joy

started reading at age two. At eight, she read H. G. Well's *The Outline of History* and declared that she was an atheist, much to the delight of her father. She completed high school at fourteen, graduated from Hunter College at nineteen, and finished her masters degree at Columbia University by the time she was twenty-one.

Joy tried her hand at teaching, but apparently neither she nor her students enjoyed the experience. So she turned to writing, and writing served as her occupation for the rest of her life. Her son Douglas Gresham has noted, "Mother lived more to write than for anything else" (18).

Joy's first book was *Letter to a Comrade* (1938), a collection of 45 poems which includes "Snow in Madrid," the poem she recites in the *Shadowlands* scene above. Stephen Vincent Benet praises her in the foreword, saying, "Here is what an intelligent, sensitive, and vivid mind thinks about itself and the things of the modern world" (7). *Letter to a Comrade* won the 1939 Russell Loines Memorial Fund Award, and that is the award she shared with Robert Frost.

Two years later, Davidman published her first novel, *Anya* (1940), which brought her further critical acclaim. On the merit of these two books, she was invited to participate in MGM's young scriptwriter's program. She gratefully accepted and moved from New York to Hollywood. But her scripts were not well received. She left Southern California somewhat bitter about the experience.

Returning to New York, she went on staff as a writer, editor, and critic to the communist publication *New Masses*. Joy had become a communist several years before: "I entered the Party with a burst of emotion, without making the slightest effort to study Marxist theory. All I knew was that capitalism wasn't working very well, war was imminent—and socialism promised to change all that" (Soper 19).

While working full time for *New Masses*, she edited two more books of poetry. One was a small collection of poems written by fellow communist Alexander Bergman. It was entitled *They Looked Like Men* (1943). The other was *War Poems of the United Nations* (1943), a sizable anthology of anti-imperialist war poetry featuring 150 writers from 20 different countries. It included contributions from such luminaries as Carl Sandburg, Stephen Vincent Benet, Boris Pasternak and Langston Hughes.

Joy edited the book, did many of the translations, and included several of her own poems. Furthermore, when she had trouble getting contributions from British poets,

she wrote a few more poems herself and published them under two pseudonyms: Megan Coombes-Dawson and Hayden Weir. She even made up their biographies, describing the fictional Mr. Weir as a soldier who died a heroic death in battle early in World War II (Dorsett 43).

MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

By the time Joy Davidman reached her thirtieth birthday, she had published a book of original poetry and a novel, tried her hand at scriptwriting, edited two books of poetry, and was working full-time on the staff of a weekly magazine.

She had also married fellow writer William Lindsay Gresham. They had two sons: David was born in March of 1944, and Douglas in November 1945. With marriage and motherhood, Davidman lost interest in communism. She writes, "My little son was a real thing and so was my obligation to him; by comparison, my duty to that imaginary entity the working class seemed the most doubtful of abstractions" (Soper 22).

Joy and her husband Bill were avid readers and writers. Douglas Gresham remembers, "I was always surrounded by books . . . books and writers, and the wide and lively conversation which seemed to be their hallmark" (4). Joy and Bill worked together on many projects, often doing rewrites of books and articles for each other.

Bill Gresham worked extensively with Joy on her next book, a novel entitled *Weeping Bay*. And Joy had a hand in Bill Gresham's two best known novels, *Nightmare Alley* and *Limbo Tower*. Years later, Joy described the working relationship this way: "We were a good team, we each had what the other lacked" (unpublished letter, 26 June 1954).²

CONVERSION

Despite this evidence of a happy and effective collaboration as writers, the marriage itself was quite strained. Bill Gresham was an alcoholic who became violent when drunk; he was also compulsively unfaithful. Financial problems added to the stress. In 1946, Bill suffered a mental collapse. Joy wrote, "One day he telephoned me from his New York office . . . to tell me that he was having a nervous breakdown. He felt his mind going; he couldn't stay where he was and he couldn't bring himself to come home . . . [sic] Then he rang off" (Soper 23). Joy was frantic. She spent the day trying to reach him, but was unsuccessful:

By nightfall there was nothing left to do but wait and see if he turned up, alive or dead. I put the babies to sleep and waited. For the first time in my life I felt helpless; for the first time my pride was forced to admit that I was not, after all, "the master of my fate" and "the captain of my soul." (Soper 23)

Joy felt utterly helpless. Suddenly she experienced what she called a direct perception of God: "There was a Person with me in that room, directly present to my consciousness — a Person so real that all my precious life was by comparison a mere shadow play. And I myself was more alive than I had ever been; it was like waking from

sleep" (Soper 23). Joy found herself on her knees, praying, "I think I must have been the world's most astonished atheist" (Soper 23).

Bill Gresham returned several days later. He found Joy remarkably serene; she told her husband about her experience of God. He expressed that he, too, was interested in Christianity, and they joined a local Presbyterian church. Joy began to read voraciously, trying to make sense of this experience. She writes, "When I read the New Testament, I recognized Him. He was Jesus" (Soper 25). In addition to Bible study and church involvement, Joy and Bill began to read the works of C. S. Lewis

CORRESPONDENCE

The Greshams became good friends with Chad and Eva Walsh, fellow writers who were also fans of C. S. Lewis. Chad Walsh casually mentioned to Joy that Lewis answered every letter he received; Joy seized the opportunity and sent him five single-spaced pages, giving her personal history, and asking questions about her faith. Her letter arrived in England on the 10th of January, 1950; Lewis promptly answered, and Joy was ecstatic:

Just got a letter from Lewis in the mail. I think I told you I'd raised an argument or two on some points? Lord, he knocked my props out from under me unerringly; one shot to a pigeon. I haven't a scrap of my case left. And, what's more, I've seldom enjoyed anything more. Being disposed of so neatly by a master of debate, all fair and square—it seems to be one of the great pleasures of life, though I'd never have suspected it in my arrogant youth. I suppose it's *unfair* tricks of arguments that leave wounds. But after the sort of thing that Lewis does, what I feel is the craftsman's joy at the sight of a superior performance. (qtd in Dorsett 70)³

A TRIP TO ENGLAND

Joy and Jack corresponded regularly for more than two years, from January 1950 through August 1952. During that time, her marriage became increasingly difficult. Bill was a warm, exuberant, fiercely talented and utterly charming person. But he drank, and was violent when drunk: he broke a bottle over Douglas's head, smashed a guitar to smithereens on the tall columns in front of the house, threatened some visitors with a rifle and ended up shooting holes in the ceiling. Their financial situation was in shambles. Bill's Christian commitment became clouded behind his increasing involvement in Dianetics, the I Ching, and Tarot Cards. Perhaps most difficult of all, Bill was compulsively unfaithful and seemed not to understand that his infidelity was a problem. "A man has to recharge his batteries every so often," he remarked cheerfully (qtd in Dorsett 74).

Douglas Gresham notes how hard this was on Joy:

The continued strain took its inevitable toll, and in 1952 Mother became ill, very ill. I remember her vomiting again and again into a large waxed cardboard container of the kind we used to store food in rented freezer space. I think hepatitis is the most likely diagnosis, looking back. In any case, Dr. Fritz Cohen, who was our family physician, came to the house and said that Mother was severely jaundiced and must

be taken at once to a hospital Fritz Cohen also recommended that upon her release from the hospital, Mother should plan a complete rest, a change of environment and preferably a long vacation. (12)

Dr. Cohen recommended a vacation, and Joy planned an extended visit to England. While Douglas, in his account, emphasizes her health crisis, Joy's own letters emphasize her moral dilemma. She writes, "I'm a fairly bright girl and yet I was so much under Bill's influence that I had to run away from him physically and consult one of the clearest thinkers of our time for help. . . ." (Unpublished letter, 9 July, 1953).⁴ Chad Walsh explained it this way:

I think Joy's trip to England was primarily to take a vacation from a marriage that was growing more and more difficult. I know also that she wanted to meet Lewis, with whom she had corresponded, but I really don't think she was "setting her cap" for him. Anyway, they met, liked and respected each other; she became his secretary.⁵

Walsh strikes the right balance, I think, between Joy's need for a vacation and her desire to meet Lewis. In particular, I find his comment Joy "became his secretary" of great interest, for it emphasizes that Joy became involved with Lewis's writing. During this first visit, Joy read the galleys of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama* (1954), Lewis's contribution to the Oxford History of English Literature, or the OHEL as he called it. Joy writes, "The OHEL volume is going to make people sizzle, it's full of controversial stuff and reversals of conventional judgments. I am the *first* person to see those galleys, and I feel very honored. By the way," she adds, "I also read a lot of Jack's poetry" (qtd in Dorsett 89).⁶

SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN

During this first visit to England, Davidman brought her manuscript of *Smoke on the Mountain*, an interpretation of the Ten Commandments. She writes, "The Ten Commandments seem at first glance irrelevant. We clamor . . . for a new, modern restatement, a positive interpretation in terms of our own time" (19). She argues that in fact we already have a new, positive interpretation of the commandments: the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Her book elaborates these connections.

Joy showed the manuscript to Lewis, and he liked it very much. They revised *Smoke on the Mountain* together. There are about half a dozen direct references to C. S. Lewis in the text. There are a number of indirect references as well, including a reference to God the Lion, apparently influenced by Aslan (29). Davidman dedicated the book to Lewis; Lewis wrote a foreword to the British edition.

It is interesting that *Smoke on the Mountain* anticipates several images and themes that will later appear in *Till We Have Faces*. In this book, for example, Davidman writes at some length about the function of clan fathers in tribal communities. Her description of their power and cruelty captures King Trom of Glome with striking accuracy. In another chapter, Davidman describes various idols, and

her examples include the shapeless, formless, "knarled wooden lump," an image which is, of course, very much like Ungit (34). She also describes the rituals and sacrifices of such a culture:

Sacrifice as much as you please, cajole and flatter as you please, beat your disobedient idol with a big stick if you please—he thing still won't give you what you want. In consequence, all idolatrous cultures tend to get nastier and nastier. If a small bribe doesn't succeed, men raise the ante; they offer more. The idol will not respond to a dance of virgins with flowers? Very well, let's try a dance of warriors mutilating themselves with knives. You have cut off a lock of your hair and laid it before the idol, yet life is still dark? Try cutting your first-born's throat and offering him. (33)

Davidman's discussion of tribal kings, shapeless idols, and the patterns of ritual sacrifice all have echoes in *Till We Have Faces*. In some ways, both books also address the same theme, for throughout the book, Davidman emphasizes that the first commandment, New Testament or Old, is, "Seek first the kingdom of God." She adds, "Seeing God *face to face* is our goal" (122, emphasis added).

JOY MOVES TO ENGLAND

Joy remained in England a little over five months. Just before she headed home, she received a long letter from Bill Gresham which read, in part: "I don't want to cloud your holiday with things that would upset you. Renee and I are in love . . ." (qtd in Dorsett 9). Joy returned to New York on 3 January 1953. Despite her best efforts, the marriage proved irretrievable. She decided to move to London with her two sons to try to rebuild her life. As soon as the divorce was finalized, Bill and Renee were married.

By November, Joy had settled into her flat in London and enrolled the boys in boarding school. She planned to make her living as a writer, but it was a struggle. She wrote articles for women's magazines, a venue she found particularly distasteful: "I've got a couple of good story ideas cooking myself, if I get strength to do them. I got a sob-filled story about an Unwed Mother off last week, but I loathed doing it—I just can't get my mind round the ladies' magazines gloop . . ." (unpublished letter, 19 May 1954).⁷ She wrote articles for the religious market and a great deal of poetry. She worked on three books: a novel entitled *Britannia*, a religious work entitled *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, and a biography of Mme. De Maintenon called *Queen Cinderella*, a book she did in collaboration with Warren Lewis.⁸ *Britannia* was rejected by the publishers; the other two were never finished.

TILL WE HAVE FACES

While Joy Davidman struggled to make progress on various writing projects, Jack Lewis experienced a significant professional breakthrough. In June of 1954, Lewis accepted the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, a position that had been created for him. In many ways, the change from being a don at Magdalen, Oxford, to holding a chair at Magdalene, Cambridge, was a very posi-

tive one. He wrote to Mary Shelbourne, "Did I tell you I've been made a professor at Cambridge? It means rather less work for rather more pay" (*American Lady* 35).

But in March of 1955, Joy reported that Jack's new academic position had had an unfortunate side effect: "For the first time in his life he has plenty of leisure to write—no pupils, no exams, no college meetings; just a nice quiet room and all the time in the world. So the inevitable has happened; he's dried up" (unpublished letter, 16 March 1955).⁹ Lewis had writer's block. Joy added, "He is quite worried about it. I imagine, though, he'll be turning out fiction soon again."

She was right: he was soon turning out fiction again, and she was an important part of the process. Joy reports, "One night he was lamenting that he couldn't get a good idea for a book. We kicked a few ideas around till one came to life. Then we had another whisky each and bounced it back and forth between us" (qtd in Dorsett 116). The idea that "came to life" was to re-write the myth of Cupid and Psyche.

This idea was actually one that Lewis had been mulling over since his undergraduate days, but he had not been able to find the right form for the work. He writes of this struggle in an early diary entry written on 9 September 1923: "My head is very full of my old idea of a poem on my own version of the Cupid and Psyche story.... I have tried it twice before, once in couplet and once in ballad form" (qtd in Hooper 246). This third attempt to write the poem failed after 146 lines. Thirty-two years later, following his late night conversation with Joy Davidman, he re-envisioned the work as a novel.

In addition to form, there is another significant change that marked this new beginning. When Lewis had first attempted this story, he was not yet a Christian: "In my pre-Christian days she [Orual] was to be in the right, and the gods in the wrong" (qtd in Hooper 251). Writing now from a decidedly Christian perspective, Lewis changed the very center of the story, from an angry and justified accusation of the gods to a new awareness that the problem lies with us and we must learn to put aside excuses and defenses:

How can they (i.e. the gods) meet us face to face till we have faces? The idea was that a human being must become real before it can expect to receive any message from the superhuman; that is, it must be speaking in its own voice (not one of its borrowed voices), expressing its actual desires (not what it imagines that it desires), being for good or ill itself, not any mask, veil or *persona*. (qtd in Hooper 252)

Although *Till We Have Faces* was based on a very old idea, this was to be a very different story.

Having hit upon the right form and a new purpose, Lewis wrote the book at an astonishing pace. Joy wrote to Bill Gresham, "His methods of work amaze me... The next day, without further planning, he wrote the first chapter! I read it and made some criticisms (feels quite like old

times); he did it over & went on with the next" (unpublished letter, 23 March 1955).¹⁰

The book continued in this way: they would plan a chapter, Jack would quickly draft it, Joy would critique it, Jack would revise it, they would plan the next. Only a month later, Joy wrote to Bill, "He is now three quarters of the way through his new book... (Dorsett 117). She added, with obvious pleasure, "he finds my advice indispensable" (Dorsett 117).

Joy was in her element, for she saw her real strength as this kind of collaboration. It was the kind of coaching and rewriting she had done with Bill Gresham ("feels like old times"). In fact, she had worked in this way with a number of writers, including her work as editor of *War Poems of the United Nations* and in her position on the staff of *New Masses*. For all of her accomplishments and accolades as a writer, Joy felt that ultimately she was better as an "editor-collaborator" than as an author of original material:

I don't kid myself in these matters – what-ever my talents as an independent writer, my *real* gift is as a sort of editor-collaborator like Max Perkins, and I'm happiest when I'm doing something like that. Though I can't write one tenth as well as Jack, I can tell him how to write more like himself! (qtd in Dorsett 116-117)

Joy was involved in each step of Jack's writing process. They would brainstorm ideas together before the text was written. She would carefully read and critique each chapter, making specific suggestions for needed changes. She would problem solve when the writing bogged down. And she would encourage, asking how the project was coming along, expressing ongoing interest in the work and in the writer. In an unpublished interview with Lyle Dorsett, Douglas Gresham observed, "I think any writer who is married to another writer must do this to a certain extent."¹¹

It is clear that Joy was extensively involved in the project. But can we draw any conclusions about ways she influenced the actual text?

A FIRST PERSON NARRATOR

Some have suggested that since the entire novel is written in Orual's voice, in the first person with a female narrator, that the narrator's voice is not that of Lewis but of Joy Davidman. This seems logical enough, but there are a number of problems with this facile assumption. First, it was not at all unusual for Lewis to use *persona* in writing both fiction and nonfiction works. *Persona* is employed, for example, in *Out of the Silent Planet*, where Lewis himself comes in at the end of the story to explain the story's "fiction." Lewis uses *persona* in *The Great Divorce*, another book entirely in first person. In *Letters to Malcolm*, Lewis adopts a *persona* for the author of the letters as well as the recipient. And certainly no one has suggested that since *The Screwtape Letters* uses the personal voice of Uncle Screwtape that a demon is somehow responsible for the narrative.

Furthermore, Lewis says explicitly that the use of a first

person female narrator, the voice of Psyche's older sister, was integral to the story from the first time he had considered it 32 years before: "The idea of re-writing the old myth . . . has been in my mind ever since I was an undergraduate and *it always involved writing through the mouth of the elder sister*" (qtd in Hooper 251, emphasis added).

In addition, some have suggested that the strongest evidence that Orual is Joy Davidman is found in the very first paragraph of the novel. The description of Orual, they say, bears a startling resemblance to Joy Davidman, who was old, divorced from her husband, lonely in England, and ravaged by radiation treatments for advanced cancer:

I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of the gods. I have no husband nor child, nor hardly a friend, through whom they can hurt me. My body, this lean carrion that still has to be washed and fed and have clothes hung about it daily with so many changes, they may kill as soon as they please" (7).

It is tempting to draw such parallels. But in the spring of 1955, when this was written, Joy was barely forty years old. She was surrounded by friends, and she was busy raising two active young boys. Any hint of cancer was more than a year away, a year after *Till We Have Faces* was written and published.

Finally, some scholars observe a certain irony in the descriptions of Orual as a woman of masculine strength and skill, for descriptions of Joy Davidman often focus on just that quality.

Jerome Hoffman, one of Joy's students, described her as "unattractive physically, not particularly ugly or interesting, but rather dumpy and though obviously female, rather unfeminine" (qtd in Dorsett 445). Chad Walsh put it this way, "Joy was not the sort of woman to be typecast as a heroine of courtly romances. She was too direct—even 'masculine,' some might say, meaning that she had plenty of brains in her head, and did not hesitate to use them in debate with a sweetheart, husband, or anyone else" (122).

Orual likewise does not have curls of gold, she is not petite and fragile, she is not lean and elegant, she is not dainty and demure. Orual is completely at home in the Pillar Room and on the battlefield; her accomplishments as queen are the accomplishments of a smart and active ruler:

What did I not do? I had all the laws revised and cut in stone in the center of the city. I narrowed and deepened the Shen-nit till barges could come up to our gates. I made a bridge where the old ford had been. I made cisterns so that we should not go thirsty whenever there was a dry year. I became wise about stock and bought in good bulls and rams and bettered our breeds. I did and I did and I did—and what does it matter what I did? I cared for all these things only as a man cares for a hunt or a game . . . (206)

There may be just a little of Joy Davidman's character in Orual, in her wise decisions as queen, in her efforts to work things out logically, in her boldness to write out her

complaint and face down the gods. Orual is also a skilled with a sword, and Chad Walsh writes that Joy "had a particular knack for wielding the sword of her wit to cut away intellectual nonsense. . ." (138).

A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

While I believe that we must exercise caution in making too close an association between Orual and Davidman as individuals, some influence on Orual's character seems evident. Furthermore, some evidence of Davidman's perspective seems evident as well. Davidman noted that she could "tell Jack how to write more like himself," but at the same time she observed that she told him how to write "from a woman's point of view."

It has been frequently observed that Lewis is quite skillful in maintaining the fiction of a woman narrator. To catalogue all of the ways in which this perspective is played out is beyond the scope of this study. I will mention just two such places. One is in Orual's description of the great banquet held in her honor after she slays Trunia. She says, "I had never seen men at their pleasures before: the gobbling snatching, belching, hiccuping, the greasiness of it all, the bones thrown on the floor, the dogs quarreling under our feet. Were all men such?" (197). Lewis certainly had seen men "at their pleasures" before, but it may be through Davidman's eyes that he saw their behavior in quite this light for the first time.

Another scene seems remarkable to me because it has such authentic emotional impact. Orual has gone out to the mountain to bury Psyche's bones and is amazed to find Psyche alive and brimming with health and well-being. Orual returns home, confused, distraught, alarmed, and tries to discuss her experience and feelings with her mentor, the Fox. They talk for a little, but then the Fox addresses her abruptly:

"Daughter," said the Fox suddenly (I think no woman, at least no woman who loved you, would have done it). "Sleep comes early to old men. I can hardly keep my eyes open. Let me go. Perhaps we shall see more clearly in the morning." What could I do but send him away? This is where men, even the trustiest, fail us. Their heart is never so wholly given to any matter but that some trifle of a meal, or a drink, or a sleep, or a joke, or a girl, may come in between them and it, and then (even if you are queen) you'll get no more good out of them till they've had their way. In those days I had not yet understood this. (132)

The need to make sense of her experience by talking it through, the need for a companion to stay with her through that process of discovery, the anger, the sense of abandonment, all these aspects and more seem to me to reflect a woman's point of view.

ACROSS THE RIVER

I would like to consider one more way in which Davidman may have influenced *Till We Have Faces*. The most dramatic moment of Joy Davidman's life is certainly her conversion, the evening when, abandoned by her husband, unguarded by defenses, she experienced a direct

perception of God and found herself on her knees, a most astonished atheist. The pivotal moment for Orual occurs in much the same way. Orual has gone to the mountain, has argued with Psyche, has insisted that there is no goblet, no honey cakes, no palace of stone. Orual and Bardia make camp and Bardia sleeps.

Orual cannot sleep. She paces, she worries, she frets. She is bombarded with "fast and swirling thoughts" (116). It is twilight. There is much mist in the valley, and Orual decides to go down to the river and get a drink:

[W]hen I lifted my head and looked once more into the mist across the water, I saw that which brought my heart into my throat. There stood the palace, grey—as all things were grey in that hour and place—but solid and motionless, wall within wall, pillar and arch and architrave, acres of it, a labyrinthine beauty. (117)

Orual adds, "all this time I was still kneeling. . . (117).

The parallels in these conversion stories are unmistakable. But Joy and Orual each respond to the vision in very different ways. Joy Davidman received it, believed it, and acted immediately upon it. Orual – though she is shaken with conviction of what she ought to do—rejects it. "Perhaps it was not real," she says and then, "I was staring simply into fog, and my eyes smarting with it" (118).

INFLUENCES

Earlier in this paper, I discussed several themes in *Smoke on the Mountain* that seem to prefigure aspects of *Till We Have Faces*. I have also discussed several way in which Joy Davidman's character, perspective, and life events may have had some impact on the story. While some of these parallels are undeniably strong and clear, I do believe that it is wise to exercise caution in assuming too much of these connections. Lewis has warned literary critics — repeatedly and at length — of the dangers in what he calls "the personal heresy," the tendency to look at an author's text and make assumptions about their life, or, on the other hand, to look at an author's life and make assumptions about their texts.

It is easy to overstate or to distort the connections between life events and texts. Furthermore, when one writer seems to be influenced by another, there is always the possibility of coincidence, or, more likely, the possibility that they are using a similar source. For example, when Joy Davidman uses the expression "God the Lion" in *Smoke on the Mountain*, she may simply be borrowing the image from the same place that Lewis borrows it, from the scriptures themselves.

The key issue is the way that we talk about influence.¹² Did Joy Davidman influence *Till We Have Faces*? There does seem to me to be evidence in the text that supports this view. The strongest evidence, however, is not in the text itself but in what we know about how the text was composed. There may be questions as to how greatly Joy Davidman's earlier writings prefigure themes in this

book, how much we dare identify Orual as a character with Joy Davidman as a person, how much Joy's perspective is reflected in Orual's point of view, how greatly Joy's life experience parallels the experiences Orual faces.

On the other hand, I believe there is compelling evidence not in the text itself but in the way in which the text was composed. It is clear that Davidman participated in every stage of the production of this text. She also participated in almost every aspect of it, from generating ideas to correcting proofs. And while there is no evidence that she actually composed any lines herself, the fact that she and Lewis thoroughly discussed the chapters before they were written convinces me that she is in part responsible for their creation.

In a recent on-line discussion, Douglas Gresham was asked whether his mother had had any input into Lewis's novel *Till We Have Faces*. This is how Gresham replied: "Jack always said that Mother's input was so much and so important that the book was really a collaboration between them" (Mere Lewis Listserv, 8 Feb 1997).¹³ Lewis called her a collaborator on the book. We would not be out of line, then, if we were to do the same.

TWO WEDDINGS

Till We Have Faces was written in the spring of 1955; that August, Joy, David, and Douglas moved from London to Headington, about a mile from The Kilns. Douglas Gresham writes,

As time went by, the relationship between Mother and Jack was surely and swiftly changing in its nature. I don't believe it took Jack long to develop love rather than friendship for Mother, but it may have taken considerably longer for him to come to a conscious identification of his feelings, and then even longer to a conscious admission of them even to himself. As early as 1955, I, a mere child, could see how he brightened in her presence, and how she positively revelled in his proximity. (65)

Joy and the boys thrived in their new home, Joy busy with writing projects, the boys at boarding school. But then Joy had trouble renewing her visa, probably due to her earlier involvement with the Communist Party. Lewis offered to extend his British citizenship to her, and on 23 April 1956 they were married in a civil ceremony. Joy kept her name and her Headington home. In October, 1956, things suddenly changed. Joy was experiencing severe pain in her left hip. She fell, and was taken to the hospital by ambulance. It was cancer. The prognosis was grim. Warren noted in his diary, "Sentence of death has been passed on Joy, and the end is only a matter of time. . . . though to feel pity for anyone so magnificently brave as Joy is almost an insult" (246-7).

Lewis wanted to take her home to The Kilns to die, but first he sought to be married by the church. The Bishop of Oxford, Harry Carpenter, refused to permit it since Joy was divorced. Lewis approached a former pupil of his, and on 21 March 1957 the Reverend Peter Bide presided at the bedside ceremony.

Bide also prayed for her healing. Much to the astonishment of her doctors, Joy regained her strength. In April, 1957, she moved to The Kilns, and in June, 1958, the cancer was in complete remission. The extent of Joy's recovery was truly miraculous. In an unpublished letter dated 2 July 1958, she writes,

I'm very well myself; my last x-rays showed that my bones are now solid as rocks, and I am able to scramble about in the woods almost as well as I used to. My only complaint lately has been a strained back—which I got by rushing after a wood-pigeon too recklessly with a shotgun! Missed him too, drat it. They're very good eating—and I'm getting to be quite a good shot.¹⁴

Douglas Gresham remembers, "As Mother became more and more a healthy, active woman, she also became more and more a wife. Now The Kilns became a happy home, filled with the riches of life" (87).

MORE BOOKS

The crisis past, the Lewises (Warren, Jack and Joy) returned to writing projects. The Kilns was a household of writers; in fact, Joy observed, "We're all hard at work here; the house is practically a book factory" (unpublished letter, 23 March 1955).¹⁵

During this time, Jack wrote and published *Reflections on the Psalms*, a book which has a great deal in common with Joy's *Smoke on the Mountain*: both are treatments of Old Testament texts, both are quite colloquial in style, and both attempt to answer questions about troublesome passages by putting them in their historical and cultural context.¹⁶

Next Jack turned his hand to medieval poetry and philosophy and wrote *The Discarded Image*. Joy called it "a fearsome work of scholarship" and observed, "he goes about muttering bits of Latin & Anglo-Saxon, except when the cat trips him up, when what he says is much more vernacular" (unpublished letter, 4 Feb 1958).¹⁷

Jack also completed his book *The Four Loves*. Throughout the book, particularly in the sections on married love, he refers to his own experiences and describes aspects of his life and marriage. In one telling passage, he observes that there are relatively few professions where men and women can work side by side, but that writing is one such profession, and he is glad for it since deep friendship can arise from such mutual labor.

Davidman's influence is evident in Lewis's *Reflections on the Psalms*, for the work has much in common with her own. Davidman's influence is evident in *The Four Loves*, for the work tells much of their life together. Following these two books, Davidman and Lewis began another collaboration, a novel which has much in common with *Till We Have Faces*. Douglas Gresham notes, "The working title [was] Menelaus Yellowhair, Menelaus being the rightful husband of Helen of Troy, and it was to be a book in the tradition of *Till We Have Faces*, a retelling of the ancient story of the fall of Troy."¹⁸

The story begins inside the Trojan horse — dark, cramped, and ripe with the smell of men who have been trapped inside for nearly a day. They exit the horse and Troy is captured easily enough. Menelaus also recaptures Helen. But ten years has taken its toll. Her face may have once launched a thousand ships, but now she is quite changed:

. . . he had never dreamed she would be like this; never dreamed that the flesh would have gathered under her chin, that the face could be so plump and yet so drawn, that there would be grey hair at her temples and wrinkles at the corner of her eyes. Even her height was less than he remembered. The smooth glory of her skin which once make her seem to cast a light from her arms and shoulders was all gone. (*Dark Tower* 142)

The story was never finished; we have only five chapters. Douglas Gresham reports that Joy was involved, as she had been before, with generating ideas and doing rewrites of the story. He also notes, "I can remember him reading us parts of it, and my mother's comments, which were, it was good stuff, it was very good."¹⁹ Roger Lance-lynn Green also heard parts of it read aloud in August of 1960 after Joy's death: ". . . after that year Lewis found that he could no longer make up stories, nor go on with this one" (155).

THE END

In October of 1959, Joy's cancer returned. Lewis wrote, "The tide has turned. Apparently the wonderful recovery Joy made in 1957 was only a reprieve, not a pardon" (*American Lady* 85). Despite her serious condition, they went to Greece, a vacation both had long desired. Lewis noted, "Joy knew she was dying. I knew she was dying. . . . But when we heard the shepherds playing their flutes in the hills it seemed to make no difference" (*They Stand* 553).

When they returned to Oxford, Joy's strength was spent. Lewis wrote,

Joy got away easier than many who die of cancer. There were a couple of hours of atrocious pain on her last morning, but the rest of the day mostly asleep, tho' rational whenever she was conscious. Two of her last remarks were "You have made me happy" and "I am at peace with God." (*They Stand* 553)

Joy Davidman Lewis died on 13 July 1960, and her ashes were scattered at the Oxford Crematorium. Joy and Jack had been married four years.

Lewis kept a diary after Joy died, which he later published under the title *A Grief Observed*. In it, Lewis described Joy as "my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier. My mistress, but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have had good ones) had ever been to me" (56). Friends who knew them testify to the unusually strong bond between them, and the obvious enjoyment each felt in the presence of the other. Lewis said simply, "We feasted on love, every mode of it—solemn and

merry, romantic and realistic, sometimes as dramatic as a thunderstorm, sometimes as comfortable and unemphatic as putting on your soft slippers" (6).

Lewis never really recovered from his loss of Joy. His health declined rapidly, and he died at home on 22 November 1963, the same day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

As Chad Walsh has noted, Lewis's literary accomplishments are considerable: "After Lewis's death, his literary executors brought out additional books from scattered articles and manuscripts, bringing the total to more than fifty. Many of his works are clearly destined for a long life. Certainly he has left us God's plenty" (150). Walsh continues with this speculation: "If he had been granted an additional ten years of good health, what might he have written? *Till We Have Faces*, *The Four Loves*, and *A Grief Observed* provide the clues." Walsh concludes his remarks with this important summary: "It was Joy who made them possible." ☘

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Endnotes

1. The movie makers have omitted the second stanza of the poem, which reads, "How tenderly to crown/The brutal year/The clouds send something down/That one need not fear" (40).
2. Unpublished letter, 26 June 1954, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham. This and all previously unpublished excerpts from letters are taken from the Joy Davidman archive at the Wade Center, Wheaton College, and are used by gracious permission of the Wade Center and Douglas Gresham.
3. It is remarkable how similar Jack's comments are about Joy in his book *A Grief Observed*: "Her mind was lithe and quick and muscular as a leopard. Passion, tenderness and pain were all equally unable to disarm it. It scented the first whiff of cant or slush; then sprang, and knocked you over before you knew what was happening. How many bubbles of mine she pricked! I soon learned not to talk rot to her unless I did it for the sheer pleasure—there's another red-hot jab—of being exposed and laughed at" (3).
4. Unpublished letter, 9 July 1953, Joy Davidman to Renee Pierce Gresham.
5. Unpublished letter, 11 Sept 1973, Chad Walsh to Teresa Strasser. Walsh is using the term "secretary" in a general sense, but after she moved to England, Joy did in fact handle Lewis's correspondence. For example, we have several wonderful letters to Dorothy Sayers that she wrote in his stead. And in the book *Letters to an American Lady*, there is a letter that Joy wrote to Mary Shelbourne (6 June 1958) on Lewis's behalf.
6. Joy was the first person to read a number of Lewis's books in manuscript. For example, she read *Surprised by Joy* before it was published: "Incidentally I've been reading Jack's autobiography in manuscript and I shan't send them to his old school, Malvern. Wow! He's as violent a satirist as Swift when he wants to be." (unpublished letter, 6 July 1954, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham). Joy also did the actual typing of a number of manuscripts for Lewis, who had never learned to type.
7. Unpublished letter, 19 May 1954, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham.
8. Davidman read and edited several books for Warren Lewis, who was an accomplished writer and historian. In the acknowledgment page of *Sunset of the Splendid Century*, Warren Lewis thanks "my friend Joy Davidman for her kindness in correcting the proofs." His next book was *Assault on Olympus*, and here he thanks Joy Davidman, "for her patient kindness in pruning the first draft and recommending certain excisions." And a third book, *The Scandalous Regent*, contains this dedication: "to my sister in law JOY DAVIDMAN," and the following note on the acknowledgments page: "in conclusion I have to acknowledge gratefully my indebtedness to my sister in law Joy Davidman for her kindness in reading my manuscript and for making many valuable suggestions."
9. Unpublished letter, 16 March 1955, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham.
10. Joy never ceased to be amazed at the speed with which Lewis wrote: "Jack is halfway through *another* book. That makes his third this year, in addition to newspaper articles, shorts, etc.— and to lecturing and examining. There's no slowing him down. The man really *likes* to write! Warnie is in good shape and starting research on a new one, too" (unpublished letter, 2 July 1958, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham).

- p.4. For the propriety of the presence of Father Christmas in Narnia, see my essay, "'Always Winter and Never Christmas', Symbols of Time in Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia," *Mythlore* 67 (Autumn 1991), Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 10-14.
4. For the symbolism of "The Merry Party," see "Artist's Statement about the Cover," *The Lamp-Post* (Winter 1995-96) Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 4-6.
5. I have discussed this stream in my essay "'Halfe Like a Serpent'; The Green Witch in *The Silver Chair*," (Patterson 1984: 46)
6. In point of fact, the word "fruit" first appears in *Genesis* 1:11—"and God said, Let the earth bring forth ... the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind." The *Tanakh* renders this as "fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it."
7. See my essay, "The Holy House of Ungit," *Mythlore* 82 (Winter 1997) Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 4-15.

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11. Interview conducted by Lyle Dorsett in Wheaton, Illinois, July 23-25, 1982. Notes of this interview are in the Joy Davidman Archive, Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, and are used by permission.
12. For a brilliant discussion of the nature of influence and the limitations of influence studies I recommend Goran Hermeren's *Influence in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975..
13. The MereLewis List archive may be accessed on-line at <http://members.aol.com/dwalheim/merelewis.html>. In this same post, Gresham goes on to express his opinion that "collaboration" is, in his opinion, too strong a word. He readily affirms that his mother was very involved in all stages of the project.
14. Unpublished letter, 2 July 1958, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham.
15. Unpublished letter, 23 March 1955, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham.
16. Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper (*C. S. Lewis: A Biography*) are among those scholars who believe that working with Joy Davidman on *Smoke on the Mountain* served an impetus for Lewis's work on the Psalms.
17. Unpublished letter, 4 Feb 1958, Joy Davidman to William Lindsay Gresham.
18. Unpublished interview conducted by Lyle Dorsett, July 23-25, 1982. Gresham refers to the book as *Menelaus Yellowhair*; in the published text, which appears in *The Dark Tower and Other Stories* edited by Walter Hooper, he is called *Menelaus Yellowhead*.
19. Unpublished interview conducted by Lyle Dorsett, July 23-25, 1982.