

Orual's universal
struggle: conflict and
development in till we
have faces



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As some may know, *Till We Have Faces* is far from being C. S. Lewis' most beloved work nor is it the most accessible. However with the central story of the broken protagonist, Orual, we get a glimpse into Lewis's interpretation of how souls are often damned by their own excessive desires. For Orual, her main conflict seems to be her long journey towards reconciliation with the divine. Orual's path to redemption parallels Lewis' in real life in that they both sought out to gain a fuller understanding of the divine to reconcile for their wrongdoings. Lewis plays out the conflicts he dealt with during his life onto the character of Orual by making her deal with the pressure of rational vs. romantic and the moral flaw of too much self-love. Looking closely at *Till We Have Faces*, we see the way the character of Orual is portrayed and in turn she must learn that in order to understand the gods we must have true sincerity in our souls.

In *Till We Have Faces*, we learn of Orual's romantic longing for her sister Psyche which is central to the novel. Ever since they were children, Psyche wished to live upon the mountain that overlooked Glome to encounter a world that was so different from her own. I believe this is where fault originates for Orual. Her fault comes about when she states, " She made beauty all round her" (Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 22) meaning that Psyche had no flaws and everything she graced would instantly turn beautiful. Her perception proceeded to be clouded because her romantic longing for Psyche would inhibit her from living her own life. With the introduction of the Fox into the novel, Orual is accompanied by a significant rational influence that aids her thoughts as well. The Fox simply states, " We must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings" (Lewis, 14) and what I get from this

quote is that the Fox is trying to pass off his noble ways to Orual to gain her admiration.

Looking back on the conflicts Orual encountered, it seemed as if she resolved the problem between rational v. romantic with the guidance of the Fox and the Priest. The extended dialogue between the two sisters when Psyche is sentenced to be consumed by Brute reveals an uplifting resolution. After shockingly meeting up with Orual, Psyche speaks about the rational thinking of the Fox and the dark beliefs of the Priest. She states “ the only thing that did me good,” had something to do with the Fox’s philosophy of the divine nature “ but mixed up with things the Priest said, too, about the blood and the earth and how sacrifice makes the crops grow”(Lewis, 109-110). I believe the sisters come to the realization that the virtue of the Fox gives them a sense of existence, wisdom and truth they have never received before. Orual suggests that the gods are exactly as the Priest describes and they are “ viler than the vilest men” (Lewis, 71). Psyche offers a more positive view but in my eyes they both agree that the Priest and Fox are not sufficient enough on their own beliefs. Altogether, they both exclaim, “ We don’t understand. There must be so much that neither the Priest nor the Fox knows” (Lewis, 72). It seems clear to me that in the final pages of Chapter 7 in *Till We Have Faces*, we are given a present answer to address the romantic and rational conflicts that Orual has to encounter.

The second conflict Orual experiences in her path towards divine reconciliation just happens to be her possessive love for Psyche and all the results that come from it. Orual has fractured her relationship with the gods because of her corruption of love and she must overcome this spiritual

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conflict. I find an interesting comparison between Orual and the Mother in *The Great Divorce*, in that they deeply care for their family members and desire their undivided time and attention. It seems revealing that as the novel goes on and Orual continues to become separated from Psyche, her internal conflict swells. Orual is so disgruntled in that she states, “ But think, Psyche. Nothing that’s beautiful hides its face. Nothing that’s honest hides its name” (Lewis, 160). She’s clearly showing her disbelief in that a “ good” god would separate her from someone she loved so deeply. It’s evident that there’s a clear difference between Orual and Psyche’s view on divine love and earthly love. Orual only sees what she wants to see in the front of her mind while Psyche understands the divine beings and how they impact their lives. This quote reiterates the point stated earlier, “ He is a god. He has good grounds for what he does, be sure. How should I know of them? I am only his simple Psyche” (Lewis, 163).

Unfortunately, it’s her possessive love that causes her to have so much conflict and make the terrible choices she has made thus far. It can be said that she is directly the cause for Psyche going against the gods and the death of Bardia, her closest advisor. I think the Fox explains Orual and her flaws in the perfect way later in the novel. Her love was dishonorable, didn’t follow any sort of divine code and it could lead to many dangerous outcomes (Lewis, 304). It quite possibly could have led to the death of everyone of everyone around her if she got out of hand. The latter half of *Till We Have Faces* focuses on this aspect of how powerful human love may be and how it drove Orual further away from her reconciliation with the gods. In order for Orual to overcome her selfish love and resolve her problem with the gods,

she must simply give in to the divine. If she wants the gods to partly forgive her deceit, she must accept the full power and knowledge of the divine. These are the only two decisions she has to make that would lead to her peace and her accepting that “ holy places are dark places” (Lewis, 50).

Till We Have Faces is, altogether, one of C. S. Lewis' more interesting and compelling pieces of fiction. Until the final moments of the book, Orual stays adamant on her stance of accusing the gods for giving her the short end of the stick. I enjoy when she finally realizes that the gods are far beyond her and her earthly requests have no backing to them. She is faced with a decision: realize her faults and admit to them or continue to be reckless and not be at the mercy of the gods. In my eyes, due to the overbearing power of the gods, Orual seemingly realizes her odd affection for Psyche almost separated them all from the gods. Another important point of the novel is when Orual moves beyond the rational thinking of the Fox and the dark romanticism of the Priest to come up with a central thought that they each only know part of the truth about the divine. By looking thru the lenses of Lewis, one can overcome any sort of conflicts that obscure the fullness of our reality and walk towards the path that ultimately leads home.