

12-2-2010 Note: I completed this project on March 20, 2000, for my AP English Literature class at Bethel High School in Spanaway, Washington. I was 18 years old and finishing up my senior year of high school. No modifications have been made from the original manuscript so that even errors and imperfections in spelling and word choice have been retained.

I have included the instructions for the project so that the purpose of each essay is clear. Obviously the instructions were not written by me.

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Symposium Project

[Instructions]

The Senior Advanced Placement Symposium is an attempt to make you an expert on one author and one of his or her works. It is not an attempt to give you another term paper. We are looking for expertise.

Symposium requirements:

1. A bibliography of at least fifteen entries. These must be written in proper MLA format and be used in writing your paper.
2. A two-page biography of your author with some information on his work in general and how this particular work fits into his life's work and the canon of his country's literature specifically.
3. A six-page paper on one aspect of the novel on which you have concentrated. For example, you might concentrate on the supernatural in Hamlet, or the Oedipal complex in Hamlet or the stepfather-son relationship in Hamlet or soliloquies in Hamlet, or color imagery in Hamlet. See?
4. An in-depth reading of a significant passage from your novel on which you spend about an hour writing and then time editing. Present this part with a xerox of the passage.

Till We Have Lewis

To most people, Christians in particular, the name “C.S. Lewis” needs no explanation. Known for his practical, down-to-earth explanations of Christian philosophy and fictional apologetics, Clive Staples Lewis is quite possibly the greatest defender of the Christian faith for the twentieth century. Noted among his most famous works are *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Space Trilogy*; but there was more to the man than the apologetics he wrote. Lewis’ life story is an apologetic in itself.

Lewis was born on November 29, 1898 near Belfast, Northern Ireland (Sibley 21). Hating his name, Lewis cast it off at the age of four and declared himself “Jacksie,” to be known as Jack by family and friends for the rest of his life (Sibley 21). Though Jack’s parents were Christians and raised Jack so, at the age of ten, Flora Lewis, his mother, was diagnosed with cancer. Jack approached God, praying for and believing that a miracle would happen. When that miracle didn’t come and his mother died (Sibley 25-26), Jack began the descent into agnosticism. Over the years Jack’s disbelief in God made him a staunch atheist.

The story of Jack’s return to Christianity is one of the most remarkable features of his life. By 1928, he had served in World War I, attended Oxford University, and was elected a Fellow at Magdalene College, Oxford (<http://www.cslewis.org/about/>). Throughout this time Lewis embraced atheism and wrote numerous letters to friends and family mocking Christianity and discussing his philosophies. In 1929, after much inner conflict and debate, Jack wrote that he finally “gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed, perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. . . .” (Sibley 50). However, Jack’s conversion was only to theism. His conversion to Christianity came two years later, with the help of his brother, Warnie, and some friends from Oxford (Sibley 50-52).

The rest of Lewis’ life was marked by a stellar career in Christian theology, philosophy, fiction, and apologetics. Some of his most memorable works are *The Screwtape Letters*, a humorous series of letters from a senior demon to a junior demon on how to win the battle for a man’s soul, *Mere Christianity*, a book built around the common grounds of all Christian denominations that was originally heard as a series of radio broadcast talks during World War I, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of children’s books.

However, an idea that Lewis had been toying with since he was an undergraduate at Oxford was a re-telling of the Cupid and Psyche myth (Hooper 246). In the classic Greek myth, the beautiful Psyche becomes the bride of the god Cupid, but he only comes to her at night and she is not allowed to see his face. During the day, her older sisters are allowed to come to her palace, and soon become jealous of her wealth and power. They convince her that the reason she is not allowed to see her husband is because he is a hideous serpent, and she must take a lantern into their chamber at night and reveal him. However, upon doing so, Psyche learns that he really was a god and she has invoked his wrath. She loses everything she had because of her sisters’ treachery, and must endure many trials and much torment to

win back the god's love (Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 311-313). Out of this myth was born *Till We Have Faces*.

Jack's version of the story is told with several critical twists, but one of the most important factors that went into the writing of the book is that he was aided by his future wife, Joy Davidman, so much that he almost owes her recognition as co-author (Sayer 220). With Joy as his editor-collaborator, not only did *Till We Have Faces*, an idea which Jack had been kicking around for decades, come together in months (Sayer 220), but he went on to pronounce it one of his best novels. Some even argue that Orual, the elder sister and narrator of *Till We Have Faces*, is based on Joy's character (Sayer 236).

Unfortunately, though Lewis considered *Till We Have Faces* to represent his best along with *Perelandra* (Sayer 236), the book was almost an immediate flop (Hooper 243). The main charge of the critics was obscurity (Hooper 243). However, though it's taken decades, critics have finally come to understand the deeper messages contained in *Till We Have Faces*, and the novel is now regarded by many fans as Lewis' best, as well as one of the greatest English novels of the twentieth century (Hooper 243).

Christian M & M's in a Pagan Cookie

Throughout his fictional novels, Clive Staples Lewis displayed a knack for portraying Christianity in the most surprising, and delightful ways. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it was through a fantastic world of unicorns and satyrs with the lion Aslan representing Christ. In *The Space Trilogy*, the gospel is taken to the interplanetary level with the oyarsu serving as the Christian "gods". And in what some consider to be his greatest work, *Till We Have Faces*, Christianity was presented through an ancient Greek myth re-told. These novels all maintain a common characteristic aside from Christianity: paganism. While this theme is only vaguely present in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy*, *Till We Have Faces* is literally paganism "Christian-ized."

A paradox is at hand. Paganism is regarded by the Christian world as a form of devil worship and Satanism. The current neopagan movement prides itself in its separation from traditional Christianity, thus Christians rightly oppose it. Why, then, would the twentieth century's greatest Christian apologist cleave to paganism so much as to "Christian-ize" a pagan myth? Peculiar as it may seem, Lewis knew what he was doing when he wrote *Till We Have Faces*. By grafting Christian parallels into the pagan myth of Eros and Psyche, C.S. Lewis uses paganism as a door to Christianity and shows how a person's defeats and realization of personal flaws, regardless of his culture and religion, may bring him to his knees and the doorstep of the Truth.

The account is told only through the eyes of Orual, the princess and later the queen of Glome, as well as the older, hideous sister of the beautiful, goddess-like Psyche. The story is set in the kingdom of Glome a few centuries before Christ (Schultz 404). Declaring the now-classic Cupid-Psyche myth to be "a lying story" (Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* [TWHF] 249) sent out against her by the gods, she takes up the pen and scroll to "accuse the gods, especially the god who lives on the Grey Mountain" (Lewis, TWHF 3). Like the big, bad, wolf in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, she's been painted as the bad guy and now she just wants to tell her side of the story and set the record straight. *Till We Have Faces* is her "complaint against the gods" (Lewis, TWHF 287).

With the exceptions of *The Great Divorce* and *The Screwtape Letters*, all of Lewis' fictional novels were written using a reliable third-person narrator, like gospels. The third-person narration gave objectivity to the novels. However, *Till We Have Faces* is written using an unreliable, subjective, first-person narrator, thus the book reads like a testimony and the audience can emphasize more easily with Orual as she struggles through her pain, her envy, her obsessive love, and her victories (Schultz 404), as well as pity her while she makes mistakes and then tries to justify them by deluding herself. Yet we find that we have plenty in common with Orual, even in her times of folly; George Sayer wisely observed that there is a little bit of Orual in all of us (Sayer 236). Though couched in paganism, the result is the story of a woman whose struggles we share in.

Orual's tale is actually the story "of every nice, affectionate agnostic whose dearest one suddenly 'gets religion'." (Hooper 249). Our first impression of Orual is that she dearly loves her beautiful little sister. She writes:

I wanted to be a wife so that I could have been her real mother. I wanted to be a boy so that she could be in love with me. I wanted her to be my full sister instead of my half sister. I wanted her to be a slave so that I could set her free and make her rich (Lewis, TWHF 23).

When it is decided that Psyche must be sacrificed to the god of the Grey Mountain as a ransom for the kingdom of Glome, it is Orual who sinks in to despair while Psyche bravely accepts her fate. Upon what is to be her final meeting with Psyche, Orual can do nothing but selfishly complain of how Psyche never truly loved her. She is even jealous that Psyche would share her affections with the Fox, the man who has been a mentor and father to them.

"Oh cruel, cruel!" I wailed. "Is it nothing to you that you leave me here alone? Psyche; did you ever love me at all?"

"Love you? Why, Maia, what have I ever had to love save you and our grandfather the Fox?" (But I did not want her to bring even the Fox in now.) ... (Lewis, TWHF 73)

"I only see that you have never loved me," said I. "It may well be you are going to the gods. You are becoming cruel like them." (Lewis, TWHF 76)

After a while, Orual journeys up into the forests of the grey mountain, where she expects to find Psyche dead. What she discovers is even more frightening to her: Psyche is alive, well, and in love with another.

Orual's first thoughts are that Psyche must be mad. Psyche gives her water in her hands and calls it wine (Lewis, TWHF 104). She serves her "cool, dark berries" and calls it "food fit for the gods" (Lewis, TWHF 104). She claims that the meadow they stand in is the hall of her palace (Lewis, TWHF 115-116), and the rags she is wearing are her royal robes.

"Well, feel it, feel it, if you can't see," she cried. "Touch it. Slap it. Beat your head against it. Here--" she made to grab my hands. I wrenched them free.

"Stop it, stop it, I tell you! There's no such thing. You're pretending. You're trying to make yourself believe it." But I was lying. How did I know whether she really saw invisible things or spoke in madness? Either way, something hateful and strange had begun (Lewis, TWHF 118).

Orual tries to deny that Psyche is telling the truth, yet she knows in her heart that Psyche would not lie to her, and there is no other way Psyche could have stayed alive so long on the mountain by herself. She is the agnostic who has come to the horrible realization that her

beloved Psyche has “gotten religion.” C.S. Lewis wrote,

[In] my version of Cupid and Psyche Apuleius got it all wrong. The elder sister (I reduce her to one) couldn't see Psyche's palace when she visited her. She saw only rock and heather. When P. said she was giving her noble wine, the poor sister saw and tasted only spring water. Hence her dreadful problem: 'Is P. mad or am I blind?' (Hooper 249)

Meanwhile, just as Orual is the agnostic who becomes outraged at God's claim on the life of a dear one, Psyche is the Christian who is swept off her feet by God's love for her. While Orual attempts to follow their mentor, the Fox, and reject the gods, Psyche has a “natural, intuitive response to the divine” (Schultz 404). C.S. Lewis wrote:

Psyche is an instance of the *anima naturaliter Christiana* making the best of the Pagan religion she is brought up in and thus being guided (but always 'under the cloud', always in terms of her own imagination or that of her people) towards the true God. She is in some ways like Christ not because she is a symbol of Him but because every good man or woman is like Christ. What else could they be like? (Hooper 251)

Left bound to a tree to die, Psyche is “saved” by the god of the grey mountain and given everything she will ever need to be fulfilled. In return, however, she is asked to exercise faith in him: as the ancient myth has it, he only comes to her at night and she is not allowed to bring light into the chamber to see his face. Like the Christian who must trust that all the good things in his life come from the one true God, Psyche is asked to trust that all the good things in her life have truly come from a god.

Orual can not stand to see her sister's affections spent on another; she would rather see her dead and miserable than in love with someone else and happy (Lewis, TWHF 292). By manipulating Psyche's love for her and threatening suicide, Orual forces Psyche to take a lantern in to her chamber at night. A raging storm rocks the mountain, and in the midst of the storm Orual hears Psyche weeping, but cannot get to her. The idea of Psyche being cast from her perfect palace is an echo of Eve being cast from the Garden of Eden. Then the god appears to Orual, to pronounce a curse on both of them, and Orual is horrified to see that he is no monster, but a beautiful man with compassion in his eyes who truly cares for Psyche (Lewis, TWHF 172-173).

He rejected, denied, answered, and (worst of all) he knew, all I had thought, done, or been... He made it to be as if, from the beginning, I had known that Psyche's lover was a god, and as if all my doubtings, fears, guessings, debating, ... all the rummage and business of it, had been trumped-up foolery, dust blown in my own eyes by myself (Lewis, TWHF 173).

Orual had tried to deny that Psyche really was the property of a god by reasoning with the Fox, herself, and Bardia, the captain of the army and her dearest friend next to the Fox. Yet

one minute alone in the presence of this god was enough to give her a glimpse of her folly. On this subject C.S. Lewis also said:

What can you ever really know of other people's souls -- of their temptations, their opportunities, their struggles? One soul in the whole creation you do know: and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands. If there is a God, you are, in a sense, alone with Him. You cannot put Him off with speculations about your next door neighbors or memories of what you have read in books. What will all that chatter and hearsay count (will you even be able to remember it?) when the anaesthetic fog which we call "nature" or "the real world" fades away and the Presence in which you have always stood becomes palpable, immediate, and unavoidable? (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* 168; Jenson 46)

Upon her return to Glome, Orual begins a transformation in her identity that will consume her for the rest of her life. Over the next few months, she takes up regular fencing lessons with Bardia, becoming more and more masculine, and begins wearing a veil everywhere she goes to hide her hideous face. Her abusive father dies, leaving her the queen of a shattered kingdom on the verge of rebellion and war. She ends the war by winning a one-on-one sword fight with the king of an opposing country, thus kicking off her fame as the warrior Queen of Glome. Orual decides that she must kill off her old life. As she lays in bed the night after her first victory, she thinks: "The King's dead. He'll never pull my hair again. A straight thrust and then a cut in the leg. That would have killed him. I am the Queen; I'll kill Orual too" (Lewis, *TWHF* 225).

Orual's veil is an outward symbol of an inward reality: she has thrown up a wall between herself and the gods. Yet Orual, lost in her own self-delusions, praises the veil as one of her strengths as Queen: "... the wildest stories got about as to what that veil hid... The best story was that I had no face at all; if you stripped off my veil you'd find emptiness" (Lewis, *TWHF* 228). Orual does not realize just how true this story is.

Orual finds that she cannot hide from herself and the gods forever. As she makes her complaint against the gods, claiming that the reason they will not speak to her face to face is that they have "no answer" (Lewis, *TWHF* 250), she begins to experience a series of visions in which she shares in the sufferings of her exiled sister, and realizes how self-deceived she is and how she has devoured the lives of other people (Schultz 404).

In one of her visions, Orual is about to kill herself by jumping into a river, and the god appears to her and calls her to repentance. "Do not do it... Die before you die. There is no chance after" (Lewis, *TWHF* 279). The pagan god echoes Paul's Christian teaching in Colossians 3:3: "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (NIV). Through the book she has written and the visions she experiences, Orual finally realizes her folly and dies to herself, as the god says she must, thus obtaining salvation (Schultz 404).

What Lewis has done in *Till We Have Faces* is told the story of not just one woman, but

many people from all walks of life who find themselves rebelling against the divine nature's claim on their lives. Though a pagan story at heart, "the complaint against the gods" shimmers and shines with Christian truths. Through these Christian-pagan parallels Lewis opens a window to the true faith and brings out the Orual in all of us.

The Complaint Against the Gods

pages 289-294

“Uncover her,” said the judge.

Hands came from behind me and tore off my veil--after it, every rag I had on. The old crone with her Ungit face stood naked before those countless gazers. No thread to cover me, no bowl in my hand to hold the water of death; only my book.

“Read your complaint,” said the judge.

I looked at the roll in my hand and saw at once that it was not the book I had written. It couldn't be; it was far too small. And too old--a little, shabby, crumpled thing, nothing like my great book that I had worked on all day, day after day, while Bardia was dying. I thought I would fling it down and trample on it. I'd tell them someone had stolen my complaint and slipped this thing into my hand instead. Yet I found myself unrolling it. It was written all over inside, but the hand was not like mine. It was all a vile scribble--each stroke mean and yet savage, like the snarl in my father's voice, like the ruinous faces one could make out in the Ungit stone. A great terror and loathing came over me. I said to myself, “Whatever they do to me, I will never read out this stuff. Give me back my Book.” But already I heard myself reading it. And what I read out was like this:

“I know what you'll say. 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 know it. Hypocrites! I do know it. As if that would heal my wounds! I could have endured it if you were things like Ungit and the Shadowbrute. You know well that I never really began to hate you until Psyche began talking of her palace and her lover and her husband. Why did you lie to me? You said a brute would devour her. Well, why didn't it? I'd have wept for her and buried what was left and built her a tomb and . . . and . . . But to steal her love from me! Can it be that you really don't understand? Do you think we mortals will find you gods easier to bear if you're beautiful? I tell you that if that's true we'll find you a thousand times worse. For then (I know what beauty does) you'll lure and entice. You'll leave us nothing; nothing that's worth our keeping or your taking. Those we love best--whoever's most worth loving--those are the very ones you'll pick out. Oh, I can see it happening, age after age, and growing worse and worse the more you reveal your beauty: the son turning his back on the mother and the bride on her groom, stolen away by this everlasting calling, calling, calling of the gods. Taken where we can't follow. It would be far better for us if you were foul and ravening. We'd rather you drank their blood than stole their hearts. We'd rather they were ours and dead than yours and made immortal. But to steal her love from me, to make her see things I couldn't see . . . oh, you'll say (you've been whispering it to me these forty years) that I'd signs enough her palace was real, could have known the truth if I'd wanted. But how could I want to know it? Tell me that. The girl was mine. What right had you to steal her away into your dreadful heights? You'll say I was jealous. Jealous of Psyche? Not while she was mine. If you'd gone

the other way to work--if it was my eyes you had opened--you'd soon have seen how I would have shown her and told her and taught her and led her up to my level. But to hear a chit of a girl who had (or ought to have had) no thought in her head that I'd not put there, setting up for a seer and a prophetess and next thing to a goddess . . . how could anyone endure it? That's why I say it makes no difference whether you're fair or foul. That there should be gods at all, there's our misery and bitter wrong. There's no room for you and us in the same world. You're a tree in whose shadow we can't thrive. We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no one else had any right to her. Oh, you'll say you took her away into bliss and joy such as I could never have given her, and I ought to have been glad of it for her sake. Why? What should I care for some horrible, new happiness which I hadn't given her and which separated her from me? Do you think I wanted her to be happy, that way? It would have been better if I'd seen the Brute tear her in pieces before my eyes. You stole her to make her happy, did you? Why, every wheedling, smiling, catfoot rogue who lures away another man's wife or slave or dog might say the same. Dog, now. That's very much to the purpose. I'll thank you to let me feed my own; it needed no titbits from your table. Did you ever remember whose the girl was? She was mine. *Mine*. Do you not know what the word means? Mine! You're thieves, seducers. That's my wrong. I'll not complain (not now) that you're blood-drinkers and man-eaters. I'm past that. . . ."

"Enough," said the judge.

There was utter silence all round me. And now for the first time I knew what I had been doing. While I was reading, it had, once and again, seemed strange to me that the reading took so long; for the book was a small one. Now I knew that I had been reading it over and over--perhaps a dozen times. I would have read it forever, quick as I could, starting the first word again almost before the last was out of my mouth, if the judge had not stopped me. And the voice I read it in was strange to my ears. There was given to me a certainty that this, at last, was my real voice.

There was silence in the dark assembly long enough for me to have read my book out yet again. At last the judge spoke.

"Are you answered?" he said.

"Yes," said I.

The complaint was the answer. To have heard myself making it was to be answered. Lightly men talk of saying what they mean. Often when he was teaching me to write in Greek the Fox would say, "Child, to say the very thing you really mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that's the whole art and joy of words." A glib saying. When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech

which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you'll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?

This passage is the climax of C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*. Throughout the book Orual has been working on a "complaint against the gods", to be read as if she were making it before a judge (Lewis, TWHF 3). In this scene, Orual finally gets her chance. She is taken before a judge in a room filled with billions of people (possibly all of humanity that has died prior to that point in time), handed her complaint, and told to read it before the judge.

There is much symbolism in the judge's order to "uncover her." Ever since she lost Psyche, Orual has worn a veil to cover her face. Everything about Orual is false, like the veil: her identity as the masculine Queen as well as the eloquent style her "complaint against the gods" is written in. Just as the veil is an attempt to cover up the ugliness that is her face, "the Queen" is an attempt to cover up the ugliness that is her life and her "complaint against the gods" is an attempt to cover up the ugliness that is her argument against the divine. To be blunt, the veil was nonsense. For forty years Orual has complained that the gods can offer her no answer and will not speak to her face to face; now, she has her chance, and she will not be allowed to have any nonsense covering her. No veil, no Queen, no eloquent books; just the Truth, ugly as it may be.

The book that is handed to her that seems so unlike her "great book" is what her book is really like, stripped down from the eloquence and melodrama she has caked the book in. The voice she reads the book in is not the voice she used as Queen to frighten ambassadors and send them running like frightened children; it is her real voice. For the first time ever, Orual is seeing things as they are and not as she so desperately wishes them to be, and the truth scares her.

No sooner does she begin to read her complaint than the flaws in it become as apparent as her hideous face. She accuses the gods of things they never really did, forgetting Psyche's wise observation from so long ago: "... they are real gods but don't really do these things" (Lewis, TWHF 71). It was the dark, holier-than-thou priest of Ungit who said Psyche would be devoured by the Shadowbrute, not the gods.

Orual's most fatal flaw is a profound misunderstanding of what love is. Love is choosing the highest good for the other person. The gods, out of their love for Psyche, took her away from her abusive father and possessive sister, saved her from being a human sacrifice and gave her a husband, a palace, a hope and a future. They chose what was best for Psyche. Orual, on the other hand, cared not whether Psyche was happy or safe, as long as they were together. "She was mine. *Mine!*" Orual cries again and again, never realizing just how petty and selfish it is to try and usurp unquestioned authority over the life of another

human being. If she truly loved Psyche, she would want what was best for her, and she would realize that the best thing for her was not for them to be together.

Another error Orual demonstrates in her foolish argument is one which Lewis often wrote about: that of putting the Self over the Divine. "We want to be our own," she complained. Lewis felt that following after the Self was what led a person to hell, even created the hell. Of the hell-bound man Lewis wrote, "He has his wish -- to live wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is Hell" (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* 123; Jenson 88). Satanism itself is a philosophy of self-indulgence, and Orual has fallen victim to it and her own mind.

When the judge stops her, though she would have repeated the nonsense forever, Orual finally wakes up to the folly of her claims. She has finally said what she really means, not the dressed-up baloney her "great book" was, and she sees clearly that she is the only one to blame, not the gods. Her own complaint is her answer, or rather, the stupidity of her argument against the gods is her answer, and she needs no other.

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