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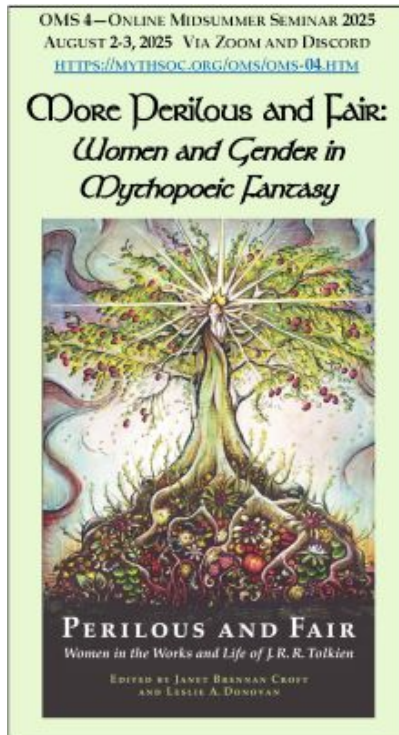
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Abstract

Lewis's firm assertion that *Till We Have Faces* is not the least bit allegorical is challenged through its parallels in plot and theme with the highly allegorical Middle English *Pearl*. The deep allegorical structures in both revolve around seeing truly and falsely, and blindness both intentional and ignorant.

Additional Keywords

Allegory in C.S. Lewis; Allegory in *Pearl*; Lewis, C.S.—Use of allegory; Lewis, C.S. "Poem for Psychoanalysts and/or Theologians"; Lewis, C.S. *Till We Have Faces*; *Pearl* (poem)—As allegory

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he PEARL MAIDEN'S PSYCHE: THE MIDDLE ENGLISH *PEARL* AND THE ALLEGORICAL-VISIONARY IMPULSE IN *TILL WE HAVE FACES*

T.S. MILLER

"Don't give that book another thought. It isn't an allegory. I was trying to tell a story."

—C.S. Lewis, Letter to Father Peter Milward, SJ, 24 Sept. 1959
 (*Collected Letters* III 1090)

Much like his friend and colleague J.R.R. Tolkien, who famously claimed to avoid allegory in his fiction in favor of the even vaguer concept of "applicability,"¹ C.S. Lewis habitually denied the allegorical character of his many fantastic fictions, including both his overtly Christian science fiction trilogy and the Narnia series. The obvious exceptions to Lewis's antipathy towards allegory include his self-consciously Bunyanesque first novel, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933)—which bears the unambiguous subtitle "An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism"—and also *The Great Divorce* (1945), a somewhat more novelistic work that nevertheless belongs to the ancient genre of the dream vision, itself the major locus of allegorical narrative in the Middle Ages (Boethius's *Consolatio*, Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose*, Dante's *Commedia*, *Piers Plowman*). According to Lewis, however, his other novels operate more on a principle of "supposition" than pure allegory (see *Companion* 423-9), and the majority of critics have been more than willing to accept this distinction, perhaps out of a desire to defend Lewis against accusations of clumsy didacticism or formal conservatism, or perhaps simply out of deference to Lewis's own expertise on literary allegory; after all, Lewis literally wrote the book on the subject in *The Allegory of Love* (1936). Yet I would suggest that we revisit the question of Lewis's seemingly self-denied debt to allegory not in spite of his own magisterial familiarity with its history, but because of it: several features of *medieval* allegory may lurk in Lewis's fiction where critics

¹ For the term and a brief discussion of its "application" to *The Lord of the Rings*, see Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition." Additionally, for a recent analysis of both Tolkien and Lewis's views on these matters, see the sixth chapter—"Allegory and Applicability"—of Sammons, *War of the Fantasy Worlds*.

eager to brush aside the problem of allegory have overlooked them (we should remember that Lewis himself, in maintaining that Narnia was not an allegorical landscape, would invariably use the post-medieval Bunyan as his baseline for allegory). In particular, Lewis's last novel, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), betrays what we might describe as an allegorical impulse, especially when we read it alongside a text Lewis knew intimately, the Middle English dream vision *Pearl*. By "allegorical impulse" I mean a desire to overload a seemingly straightforward narrative with multiple levels of meaning that can coexist within it, not some tendency to regress towards a simple system of correspondence-figuration, in which an element like a pearl might "stand for" or indeed stand in for something else and only that something. I will not, of course, attempt to apply the four levels of medieval allegoresis to produce an allegorical reading of *Faces*; with sufficient ingenuity, one could perform such an exercise with any text, medieval or modern. Instead, I will argue that Lewis's novel resembles medieval allegorical writing in that both deliberately incorporate multiple dimensions of figuration set in specific relation to one another: Lewis's novel does not rely on a concept of transcendent Romantic "symbolism" privileged over clunky allegory, but on the co-presence and complex co-interaction of several different figurative senses, some even analogous to the categories that medieval exegetes would term, for instance, the "typological" and the "anagogical," figuring Christ and the life to come, respectively.

This essay does not, of course, aim to reopen the tired debate about whether or not we should classify *Till We Have Faces* as an allegory,² but rather to

² It is a commonplace in the voluminous criticism on *Till We Have Faces*—which, rightly or wrongly, so often extols the novel as the creative and philosophical-theological *telos* of all Lewis's work—that it transcends the allegorical trappings of the author's earlier efforts. James Como, for instance, remarks that "this work is not only a novel but a distinctly *modern* novel—Lewis's only one, as opposed to romance, allegory, parable, satire, or fairy tale" (3). Andrew Howard's similar analysis particularly stresses the novel's uniqueness: "C.S. Lewis never wrote anything else like *Till We Have Face Faces*. Lewis' literary output includes children's books, space fantasies, allegorical fantasies, Christian-apologetic essays, and works of medieval scholarship, but *Faces* falls distinctly outside of all of these categories" (30). Finally, cf. Albert F. Reddy on the same point: "In *Faces* Lewis deliberately abandoned the literary forms which he had previously employed—allegory, theological fantasy, science fiction, the fairy tale—and attempted something new" (153). Perhaps Steve J. Van der Weele is nearest to the mark when he classifies the novel as "a romance-myth-allegory-autobiography-confession" (182). I should also mention that *Pearl* itself has had a vexed reception as an example of allegory, no doubt in part because of the same belief that to declare it allegorical would be to diminish it; see, notably, the anti-allegory position staked by Tolkien's sometime collaborator E.V. Gordon in the introduction to his posthumously published edition of the poem (xi ff.). In contrast to Gordon's early 20th-century view, much recent scholarship in medieval studies has attempted to revise this

tease out the traces of the allegorical dream poem that persist in this most thoroughly novelized, historicized vision. My central contention is that the resistance to the category of “allegory” conceived as a limiting concept or a text that operates on a principle of simple one-to-one correspondence—present in both Lewis’s own writings and the later criticism of his work—has obscured the debt of novels like *Till We Have Faces* to medieval allegorical narrative, one way or another, and often several ways. Indeed, in a novel so concerned with both vision and epistemology, an affinity with allegory should not surprise us—allegory, in the most fundamental sense, being that “saying other” or seeing other, the generation of meaning on several levels *including the literal*, not the coded system of one-to-one correspondences with which it is now so often associated. Conscientious awareness of allegorical figural strategies will help elucidate what vision and revelation come to mean for both Lewis and the *Pearl*-poet; precisely by literalizing the allegorical vision as a more or less realist historical novel, Lewis in fact continually plays with the concept of “the veil of fable” that traditionally conceals truth and must therefore be discarded during proper allegorical reading. The enduring modern fascination with *Pearl* surely results in part from the poem’s emphasis on the human in spite of its allegorical gestures towards the transcendent, and, similarly, throughout *Till We Have Faces* the literal level of the text refuses to yield entirely to the figurative just as tenaciously as the narrator Orual refuses to see.

That Lewis knew *Pearl* well is not in doubt. Of the two prominent medievalist Inklings, however, Tolkien has received far more attention than Lewis as a follower of the *Pearl*-poet, and for good reason, since medieval literature from the West Midlands region numbered among his greatest personal and philological joys.³ The question of Lewis’s own relationship with *Pearl*,

older modern perception of how medieval allegory severely limited interpretation, and to recuperate the real complexity of medieval reading practices. Roughly three decades ago, Maureen Quilligan’s groundbreaking reconsideration of the genre in *The Language of Allegory* opened the floodgates for the further study of allegory as a far from simplistic device, and, within the smaller community of scholarship on *Pearl* itself, the once great “allegory versus elegy” debate to which Gordon alludes—and feels compelled to enter—has long since been left behind.

³ Although first published almost a century ago, Tolkien’s critical edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* remains highly respected; Christopher Tolkien has also posthumously published his father’s verse translations of both *Gawain* and *Pearl*. For a few of the most recent examples of studies that read Tolkien’s fiction alongside the poems of British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x., see Ekman, “Echoes of *Pearl*”; Wolfe, “Gollum vs. the *Pearl* Jeweler,” and even Shippey, “Tolkien and the *Gawain*-poet.” See also Krieg, “Levels,” an earlier article that glosses *Pearl* as sharing the theme Tolkien himself offered for *The Lord of the Rings*, namely, “Death and the desire for deathlessness” (qtd. in Krieg 21). Finally, not one but two articles in a recent issue of *Mythlore* discuss *Pearl* and its possible influence on

conversely, has gone almost entirely unexplored but for the commendable work of Stephen Yandell, who has traced the thematic basis of *Till We Have Faces* to *Pearl*: "Lewis's final novel *Till We Have Faces* takes its central theme from one of the greatest medieval poems of the fourteenth-century, *Pearl*" ("Lewis as Medievalist" 135). Up until the appearance of Yandell's work, in Lewis scholarship *Pearl* had perhaps been overshadowed by Dante's *Commedia*, in many respects a very similar text that has naturally attracted much more attention due to its greater familiarity and Lewis's more direct allusions to it. *Pearl*, a much shorter but nevertheless exemplary medieval dream vision, opens with the narrator's description of himself as a jeweler mourning a precious lost pearl; he shortly falls asleep in a beautiful garden, only to awaken into an even more beautiful environment, where a river divides him from a woman he soon recognizes as his lost "pearl," a figure generally understood to represent the Dreamer's deceased infant daughter, transfigured. To his surprise, the Dreamer learns that she is now a queen of heaven, and he must be educated on certain points of Christian doctrine during a long dialogue. Yandell, in his first brief discussion of the relationship between *Pearl* and *Faces*, rightly points out the similarity of the relationships driving their narratives:

The difficult task for these two family members [in *Pearl*] is to work through the tension of jealousy and misunderstanding when one has been granted a divine perspective and the other has not. On two sides of death, the two characters maintain radically different relationships to God. This is also the thematic core of *Till We Have Faces*. ("Lewis as Medievalist" 136)

Although Yandell expanded on his cursory identification of the relationship between *Pearl* and *Till We Have Faces* in an essay published the following year,⁴ I would like to press the connection between the two works even

Tolkien: Sarah Downey finds an analogue for Galadriel in the "celestial lady" of medieval allegory, with reference primarily to Dante and the *Pearl*-poet, while Noah Koubenec sees *Pearl* as having "exert[ed] a powerful influence on the nature of the One Ring and the ring-bearers" (119). Koubenec's argument occasionally strains the evidence and makes several dubious claims—e.g., that *Pearl* "represents the most probable philological and creative impetus for Tolkien's use of 'precious'" (125)—but his basic thesis, that the Dreamer's desire for an extension of the mortal relationship he enjoyed with his daughter during her lifetime dovetails with Tolkien's great theme, is inarguable.

⁴ See Yandell, "Medieval Models," esp. 264-71. This chapter also explores the profound influence of Dante (and, much less convincingly, of Margery Kempe) on the novel, and emphasizes the shared theme of loss among all four works:

The binding of the Church to Christ in holy union represents a split for an individual from the world, and Psyche's marriage to her husband, taking her away from her initial family, represents a similar loss on three levels: a physical loss

farther, and move in somewhat different directions. The thematic overlap is undeniable, but I am also interested in the ways in which both works convey such themes: the medieval allegorical dream vision provides a deep formal structure for the novel, as well as bearing on its content and moral vision. To be sure, the points of divergence from *Pearl* in *Faces* are even more telling than the two works' similarities, but we must first recognize those similarities in order to put the divergences in the proper context. Thus, I am forced to take a position opposite that of Doris T. Myers—"The originality of Lewis's approach is to ignore allegory" (*Bareface* 5)—for Lewis in fact works very closely with medieval allegory, even when he works *against* it. Far from participating simplistically in some universal genre of Christian allegory, Lewis's transformations of medieval allegorical methods of reading and writing speak to his own specific concerns in the mid-20th century, looking back retrospectively on the medieval in the age of the agnostic, or rather in an age that, unlike the implied audience of the *Pearl*-poet, no longer ascribes to certain fundamental tenets about the nature of the divine and its relationship to humanity.⁵ Thus, although asserting the allegorical character of the author's later fiction has long been taboo in much Lewis scholarship and criticism, this essay hopes to expand our definition of "allegory" in relation to Lewis's creative work, primarily in order to improve our understanding of Lewis's at times quite complex relationship with the medieval texts he spent his life studying.

Lewis's special affection for the Middle Ages can tell us much about his work; speaking chiefly of *The Discarded Image*, medievalist Kathryn Kerby-Fulton has written of Lewis,

He wrote in an age of 'world-picture' scholarship, but Lewis's reconstruction of the medieval universe has [...] a special significance. His great model can be turned back upon his own work to provide an

(Psyche dies while being offered up as a sacrifice), an emotional loss (Orual's emotional dependence on Psyche is shattered), and a spiritual loss (Psyche's perfection is taken away from Orual). (259)

⁵ Let me be clear early on that when I use the word "allegorical" in reference to a medieval text I am speaking of any narrative at least in part influenced by, modeled on, or designed for the system of tiered allegoresis adapted from scriptural exegesis but increasingly applied to vernacular texts in the later Middle Ages: medieval allegory was certainly not limited to strict personification allegory like *Piers Plowman*. The work of Alastair Minnis provides a fine entry point for scholars working in English literary studies and interested in a more nuanced view of scholastic reading practices and their legacy; see, for example, his widely-cited *Medieval Theory of Authorship*.

imaginative map of Lewis himself: the man, the critic and the cultural 'dinosaur' he so prided himself upon being. (260)⁶

If this statement is true of his critical oeuvre, it also holds in somewhat different ways for his fiction. Indeed, it is quite tempting to borrow the irresistibly memetic title of one of Lewis's most famous essays—and, further, its central claim—in order to suggest that what Lewis "really did" to Apuleius's original tale of Cupid and Psyche in *Till We Have Faces* was to "medievalize" rather than modernize it.⁷ Although the novel often receives praise for its psychological complexity, in overlaying a matrix of allegorical signification onto what was arguably—in the second-century collection of frequently bawdy "Milesian tales," the *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*—a glorified folktale, Lewis also offers what Charles Perrault famously found lacking in Apuleius: sense, applicability, *a moral*.⁸ Ultimately, however, Lewis's novel, rather than a genuine "medieval" text, is distinctively medievalizing, revealing, in a way characteristic for Lewis's entire career, a struggle to balance what the author found appealing in the Middle Ages with the peculiar challenges of modernity. Before I begin my closer analysis of *Pearl* and *Faces*, I should also note that I am not overly concerned with Lewis's intentions one way or the other to recall the allegorical figurescape of *Pearl* to his audience; had Lewis intended more overt allusion to the poem, he could have troubled himself, for instance, to include the word "pearl" somewhere in the text. But the reader will, like the hapless Jeweler himself, search in vain for the pearl in *Faces*, although, as we will see, a few references to gems and jewels may be worth pursuing. If, in the end, we cannot say with total

⁶ One of Lewis's references to himself as critical dinosaur may be found in his lecture/essay "De Descriptione Temporum," which also includes the famous passage, "I read as native texts you must read as foreigners" (24).

⁷ The essay in question is of course "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*," which contends that in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer, contrary to expectations, made Boccaccio's original story more medieval and "courtly" rather than more modern and humanistic. Few Lewisians since—or medievalists, for that matter—have been able to resist the allure of the formula "What X Really Did to Y."

⁸ In contrast to Robert Graves's confident gloss on the story—"taking hints from passages in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Republic* [Apuleius] turned it into a neat philosophical allegory of the rational soul towards intellectual love" (xix)—Perrault expressed considerable perplexity in the preface to his *Contes*:

I know that Psyche means the soul; but I fail to understand what is meant by having Love fall in love with Psyche—that is, the soul—and I understand even less the additional fact that Psyche was supposed to be happy just as long as she was ignorant of who her lover was (he was Love), but would be very unhappy just as soon as she found out: this is a puzzle I simply cannot solve. All that can be said is that this story and most of the others extant from ancient times were invented merely for pleasure with no regard to propriety. (5)

certainty that Lewis “had *Pearl* in mind” while writing the novel, we can still reason that the presence of the poem in its composition must have been at least unconscious, and the presence of the whole tradition of the medieval allegorical dream vision, surely conscious.⁹ The medieval was never distant from the mind of this particular dinosaur.

We will begin at the river. This endlessly rich universal signifier—and genuine literal course for running water—provides the most obvious connection between Lewis’s pseudo-historical novel and the world of the medieval dream vision, and the psycho-geography of *Pearl* in particular. To briefly summarize the plot of *Till We Have Faces* up to the central encounter at the river, the beautiful Psyche is the half-sister of the narrator Orual, both daughters of the king of Glome, itself a proud city-state on the fringes of the ancient Hellenic world. As in Apuleius’s version of Cupid and Psyche, Psyche’s ethereal beauty brings down the wrath of the goddess of love (here a much more chthonic incarnation of Aphrodite called Ungit), and she is left to die at the hands of a terrible monster, who turns out to be the god of love himself, and who marries her instead of devouring her. Later, Orual climbs the holy mountain and descends to the valley beyond in search of Psyche’s bones, only to discover her alive and well—and standing on the opposite bank of a river, precisely where the Dreamer of *Pearl* spots his lost “pearl.” Of course, the image of a river that divides the living from the dead has deep mythic origins across many cultures, and a stream of some kind appears in almost every medieval dream vision as an essential part of the *locus amoenus* or “pleasant place” trope. Indeed, some time ago, Robert Boenig demonstrated the influence on *The Great Divorce* of certain passages from the dream vision tradition, curiously omitting any discussion of *Pearl*, but noting insightfully that “the differences between *The Great Divorce* and medieval Dream Visions [...] are reactions to the genre” (32).¹⁰ In fact, meetings across rivers

⁹ See the appendix at the end of this article for other scattered examples of Lewis’s creative response to *Pearl*, the most significant of which, I argue, simultaneously engages with the Psyche myth. We could also perform the usual exercise of tracking all of the references to *Pearl* in Lewis’s scholarship, but none that I have located are especially illuminating in this context. In *The Allegory of Love* Lewis mentions the poem twice, but only as a point of comparison for other works; a moment in Hawes, for example, is “much after the style of *Perl*” (286, and see similarly 252). Lewis also refers to *Pearl* in passing in two of the essays published posthumously by Walter Hooper in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (7, 18). One might conclude, however, simply based on the ease with which Lewis deploys quotations from *Pearl* in illustrations of unrelated arguments, how deeply present the text always was for him; in other words, we perhaps find Lewis paying *Pearl* that greatest compliment of taking it for granted.

¹⁰ Salwa Khoddam has also begun to trace the *locus amoenus* trope across Lewis’s fiction: Jewels and glass pertain to the heavenly Jerusalem as has been discussed with respect to *Dawn Treader*. And as readers have been expecting all along, there, on top

themselves are not uncommon in the wider visionary tradition either, and Myers reads the river in *Faces* as "a subtle allusion to Dante's meeting with Matilda in *The Divine Comedy*, which occurs in the Garden of Eden" (*Bareface* 56), also observing helpfully that Ransom first addresses the Eve of Venus across water in *Perelandra*. In short, the similarity of setting observable in the two encounters of the bereaved may suggest a source for *Till We Have Faces* in *Pearl*—or possibly even a common source for Lewis and the *Pearl*-poet in Dante¹¹—but we cannot end there at the river.

Fortunately, if the presence of the river dividing the "deceased" from the living relative seems insufficient to establish a direct connection between the two texts, it actually matters very little to my argument. Whether Lewis is making an allusion to *Pearl* seems far less significant here than how he engages that common trope of the allegorical vision's *locus amoenus*. Orual first encounters an earthly paradise during her approach to the valley—complete with great romantic vistas and a singing lark—a place where "[h]eavy dew made the grass jewel-bright" (95). On the descent, Orual gives us a longer description of the pleasant place, "a small valley bright as a gem," which culminates in the appearance of Psyche: "There, not six feet away, on the far side of the river, stood Psyche" (101). Although Apuleius twice mentions a *fons* (spring, fountain) when his Psyche first arrives at the foot of the mountain, he makes no later reference to it (V.1),¹² and, while the original also features a mountainous setting, the vision

of 'a smooth green hill' (*Battle* 219) lies the garden, complete with a green wall enclosing trees with leaves like silver and fruits like gold. These motifs harken back to the Miltonic and classical gardens of *Magician's Nephew* and Revelation 21:18-22. The medieval poem *Pearl* describes a similar vision of paradise. (7)

In keeping with her own emphasis on garden imagery, Khoddam then quotes lines 77-80 of *Pearl*, which describe leaves like burnished silver.

¹¹ Jean Marie Chard has even called *Till We Have Faces* "a modern *Divine Comedy*" (18), although most analyses of Lewis's debt(s) to Dante focus on his other works, especially *The Pilgrim's Regress* and *The Great Divorce*. One might be able to construct an argument that traces more closely the mutual influence of Dante on Lewis and the *Pearl*-poet; for a recent reading of *Pearl* alongside the *Commedia*, see Newman, "Artifice of Eternity," an article which further points the reader to other such discussions (19 n.5).

¹² I choose to emphasize the similarities between *Till We Have Faces* and medieval dream visions like *Pearl* not to deny the importance of Apuleius or indeed the numerous classical authors that work their way into the narrative; Myers has even argued, perhaps without too much hyperbole, that "[r]eading *Till We Have Faces* without the [Greek] classics is like taking a cloze test, in which every fifth word is blanked out" ("Browsing" 73). Lewis's uses of—and challenges to—the classics have, however, already received extensive treatment (for example, see also Storey, "Classical Allusion"), and I have referred to Lewis's modifications to Apuleius only when they shed light on my more specific claims. For a recent and exhaustive point-by-point analysis of Lewis's narrative alongside Apuleius, see the appendix in Hood, "Heroic Orual."

in *Pearl* paints the cliffs crystalline—"crystal klyffez so cler of kynde [crystal cliffs of so bright a nature]" (74)—and further paves the ground with gemstones: "Þe grauayl þat on grounde con grynde / Wern precious perlez of oryente [The gravel that ground underfoot / Was all precious oriental pearls]" (81-2).¹³ Other precious stones line the sides and bottom of the river (109-20), just as Orual describes herself as treading on gemlike grass down into a shining gemlike valley. Again, however, much more telling than these parallels are the explicit contrasts between *Pearl* and *Faces*, as the beauty of the *locus amoenus* puts Orual in a "fool-happy mood" that she feels she must struggle against (96), in order to reassert her hatred for the "god-haunted, plague-breeding, decaying, tyrannous world" (97). In other words, the Dreamer of *Pearl* experiences precisely what Orual resists, to be lulled by this natural beauty and allow the sadness of loss to dissolve:

The dubbement dere of doun and dalez,
 Of wod and water and wlonk playnez,
 Bylde in me blys, abated my balez,
 Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez.
 [The splendid adornment of downs and dales,
 Of woods and waters and fertile plains,
 Built up bliss in me, caused my sorrows to abate,
 Undid my distress, and destroyed my pains.] (121-4)

Moreover, even before the entrance of the Pearl Maiden, the Dreamer quickly ascertains that Paradise lies beyond the river, but he fears to attempt a crossing:

Byzonde þe broke, by slente oþer slade,
 I hoped þat mote merked wore.
 Bot þe water watz depe, I dorst not wade,
 And euer me longed ay more and more.
 [Beyond the brook, by slope or valley,
 I expected that the city was placed.
 But the water was deep, I dared not wade,
 and ever I longed always more and more.] (141-4)

¹³ All translations from the *Pearl*-poet are my own, and are intended to communicate clearest sense, rather than reproducing the poetic quality of the original or providing a plainly literal rendering. For a complete translation of *Pearl*, see either Tolkien's version or the useful prose translation by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, included with their latest edition on CD-ROM and also available in print. Tolkien's efforts to work within the demanding metrical constraints of the original often cause his translation to drift from the literal sense, but his version has the advantage of showcasing the intricacy of the poem's combination of rhyme, alliteration, and concatenating stanzaic links.

A wide reader of Lewis will recognize in the Dreamer's desire throughout *Pearl* something of the sense of *Sehnsucht* that so captivated Lewis, and perhaps even an echo of the repeating phrase "ay more and more" in the famous "Further up and further in!" of that most anagogical phase of the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Last Battle*, a novel in fact first published in the same year as *Faces* (201 ff.) We will return later to the apocalyptic dimensions of both *Pearl* and *Faces*, but much more remains to be said about how each author plays the recognition scene at the glistening riverbank.

The first point of divergence in *Faces* from the narrative of separation in *Pearl*, although quite obvious, rewards careful attention. One of the allegorical functions of the river in *Pearl* is to indicate a spiritual as well as physical barrier between the living and the dead, and the wise and the errant. Lewis does not use the physical barrier of the river in quite the same way, since he allows Orual to transgress it—but without, perhaps, crossing certain other barriers at which it still hints. For, in contrast to the Pearl Maiden's injunction to the Dreamer that he may not yet cross the river as he wishes—"to passe þys water fre: / Þat may no joyfol jueler [to pass this noble stream: / That may do no joyful jeweler]" (299-300)—Psyche immediately invites Orual to her side, and guides her across the stream literally every step of the way:

"Come, Orual, you must cross the stream. I'll show you where it's easiest."
[...] "A little further up, Orual," Psyche was saying. "Here's the best ford. Go straight ahead off that big stone. Gently! make your footing sure. No, not to your left. It's very deep in places. This way. Now, one step more. Reach out for my hand." (102-3)

Why should we find this relict of an allegorical threshold in Lewis's novel, if it is so easily crossed? While the stream will reappear in the novel at key moments, on the most basic level, the presence of the stream points to how Orual will later internalize the division between herself and Psyche, or rather between her way of viewing the world and Psyche's new perspective: "For the world had broken in pieces and Psyche and I were not in the same piece. Seas, mountains, madness, death itself, could not have removed her from me to such a hopeless distance as this" (120). We see that the narrative of *Faces* introduces the familiar allegorical river precisely to leave it behind; at the same time, even if we say that the stream in *Faces* merely "foreshadows," "symbolizes," or "echoes" some deeper mystery of human social relations, it also illustrates how the legacy of *Pearl* and its figural strategies persist in the novel, and remain points of reference even when Lewis deliberately deviates from such familiar allegorical strategies.

If we further accept—or simply entertain the possibility for a moment—that Lewis did write in response to *Pearl*, the crossing of the river itself also serves to underline the power dynamic that *Faces* both recapitulates from *Pearl*

and then proceeds to modify, as Orual requires Psyche's help to succeed in passing the threshold: "[T]he coldness of that water shocked all the breath out of me; and the current was so strong that, but for Psyche's hand, I think it would have knocked me down and rolled me under" (103). This first act of guidance on Psyche's part anticipates the reversal of roles so often noted in discussions of *Pearl*, in that the Pearl Maiden, who appears to have died at the age of two (483), becomes the instructress of her father during their ensuing theological dialogue. Although most readers prefer to understand the Pearl Maiden as the narrator's daughter, a younger sister would also fit the only description of the relationship that he provides: "Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece [She was nearer to me than aunt or niece]" (233).¹⁴ Orual, of course, is both older sister and surrogate mother of Psyche—"What mother but me has she ever known?" (148)—and, in either capacity, she can claim a position of authority over her daughter-sister that Psyche only undermines on the other side of the river. Orual's patronizing, possessive sense of maternal "ownership" of Psyche becomes clearer during their later meeting, when Orual coerces Psyche to look on her husband's hidden face, the cause of her fall; during this conversation, Orual refers to Psyche as a child again and again: "Psyche, you are still little more than a child. You cannot go your own way. You will let me rule and guide you" (159). During this same exchange, Psyche reminds Orual that she cannot advise her about marriage because she remains a virgin, a rebuke obviously not to be found in *Pearl* (162);¹⁵ in fact, even though the Pearl Maiden consistently speaks of Christ as her

¹⁴ I doubt that the origin of Lewis's name "Glome" was in *Pearl*, but the rhyme on "nece," in its full context, will prove arresting to a reader of *Till We Have Faces*:

Pyȝt in perle, þat precios pyse
 On wyȝer half water com down þe schore.
No gladder gome heȝen into Grece
 Þen I quen ho on brymme wore;
 Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece
 [Dressed in pearls, that precious person
 On the opposite side of the water came down the shore.
 There was no gladder man from hence into Greece
 Than I, when she was on the riverbank;
 She was nearer to me than aunt or niece] (229-33; emphasis mine)

The proximity (in more ways than one) of Glome to Greece, in combination with the resemblance of these scenes in *Faces* and *Pearl*, causes this pairing to resemble an instance of linguistic bricolage, a movement from "*gladder gome [...] Grece*" to "Glome."

¹⁵ Indeed, somewhat contrary to expectations, Orual does remain virgin, not even cursed by the god of love into his service like so many others before her who dared defy Love; the trope is classical, but one of the more egregious examples comes from a dream poem in the medieval tradition, the *Isle of Ladies*, in which he invades a too-chaste island with a full-blown *armada*. In Apuleius, Psyche's two wicked sisters are given the lighter sentence of death.

"lemman" or lover, the poet emphasizes that she stands as a Bride of Christ among the company of those "coronde clene in vergynté [crowned pure in virginity]" (767). Naturally, Orual does not react well to this remark, nor to any of Psyche's attempts to wrest control of their relationship from her, yet, as in *Pearl*, we understand that the younger Psyche is the first to see clearly: even before her "death," she manages to glimpse the insufficiency of the dialectic between primitive faith and Greco-Roman rationality that Lewis establishes as inadequate: "There must be so much that neither the Priest nor the Fox [the sisters' Greek teacher] knows" (72). Many readers of the novel take this implicit ability of modern Christianity to unite faith and reason to be Lewis's central theme,¹⁶ and Orual is the one who must come to understand it, slowly and painfully.

On one level, then, Orual seems not so very different from the Dreamer who requires education over the course of the vision, even though she acknowledges the reversal of positions—and therefore authority—with shock and disgust: "You would have thought she was my mother, not I (almost) hers" (163). In particular, the Dreamer balks at a similar presumption in the Pearl Maiden, for all that he loves her: he first expresses bafflement at how she can call herself a queen of heaven, and, then, unsatisfied with her answer that all saved souls can live as royalty in the afterlife, he becomes indignant at her sudden and apparently unmerited elevation:

Dou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede;
Dau cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray,
Ne neuer nauþer Pater ne Crede—
And quen mad on the fyrst day!
[You lived not two years in our country;
You never knew how to please nor pray to God,
Nor ever knew the Paternoster nor the Creed—
And made queen on the first day!] (483-6)

When the Pearl Maiden responds by way of Matthew's parable of the workers in the vineyard, who receive the same promised pay for different amounts of work, the depth of the narrator's lack of understanding reveals itself in his incredible

¹⁶ Ronda Chervin provides one of the clearest explications of this theme: primitive pagan religion and pagan intellectual philosophy meet as thesis and antithesis, with Christianity implicitly emerging as synthesis (243 ff.); see also several passages in the novel in which Orual expresses a desire to overcome a similar false dichotomy, even if she cannot yet grasp Psyche's solution: "But I could not find out whether the doctrines of Glome or the wisdom of Greece were right. I was the child of Glome and the pupil of the Fox; I saw that for years my life had been lived in two halves, never fitted together" (151).

response to the Scriptural account—"Me þynk þy tale vnresounable [Your tale/account seems unreasonable to me]" (590)—and in his subsequent attempt to counter with an Old Testament quotation concerning the equity of divine justice. This reading of *Pearl* relies on the standard 20th-century view of the naive or "obtuse" Dreamer, a well-meaning but limited narrator who repeatedly fails to understand the doctrine that the Pearl Maiden dispenses until the end of the poem. Even if the *Pearl*-poet did not intend to plant such a narrator in his text,¹⁷ however, Lewis very clearly positions Orual as just such a fallible narrator; after all, the second part of the book consists of her hurried "retraction" of the great complaint against the gods that had comprised the first.¹⁸

Over the course of her first conversation with Psyche at the river, Orual's similarity to the Dreamer becomes plainly evident. Orual, it turns out, literally cannot see the wonderful palace that Psyche claims the god has given her to dwell in; when Psyche promises to find a way to show her and make her see, Orual believes herself to understand all too well: "'Ah!' said I, with a long breath. How well I understood" (114). In other words, as the Dreamer tends to believe he understands the words of the Pearl Maiden when he will require further correction, Orual also believes that she has solved the puzzle: Psyche simply must have gone insane living alone in the wilderness. The Pearl Maiden's first words to the Dreamer, however, establish a pattern of rebuke and correction that will continue throughout the poem: "Sir, 3e haf your tale mysetente [Sir, you have erred in your speech]" (257). Unlike Orual's often violent reactions to Psyche's words, the Dreamer first apologizes, but he too believes himself to have understood perfectly *this time*, next expressing his wish to cross the river and live with the Pearl Maiden:

To be excused I make requeste.
I trawed my perle don out of dawez;
Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste,
And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schawez,
And loue my Lorde and al His lawez
þat hatz me broȝt þys blys ner

¹⁷ For a defense of the Dreamer's own important role in the theological dialectics of the poem, see Rhodes, "The Dreamer Redeemed." Indeed, recent criticism has seen some backlash against the concept of the "obtuse narrator" in medieval literature generally; one of the more challenging critiques is A.C. Spearing's book *Textual Subjectivity*, which in one chapter targets *Pearl* specifically, on the grounds that, for medieval readers, "the distorting concept of 'the narrator' did not yet exist" (173).

¹⁸ Ian C. Storey has rightly recognized the basic structure of the final section as that of the palinode ("Classical Allusion" 14-15), a persistent tradition in both classical and medieval literature, of which Chaucer's *Retraction* is likely the most famous example.

[To be pardoned I make request.
I believed my pearl done away with;
Now that I have found it, I shall rejoice,
And dwell with it in shining wood-groves,
And praise my Lord and all His laws
That has brought me near this bliss] (281-6)

Whereas Orual insists on dragging Psyche back from the paradise she has discovered to her own bitter, misotheistic world, the jeweler is all too willing to bypass that messy business of living and dying in order to stay in the garden with his pearl: both desires are mistakes, mistakes that each text works to correct in a similar fashion. We see again that Lewis has—consciously or not—reversed an element of the specific allegory in *Pearl*, which may suggest more strongly a debt to the individual poem itself rather than simply its broader tradition. Of course, in *Faces*, the nature of the “dreamer’s” lack of understanding has changed in a way perfectly in keeping with its translation into a 20th-century issue: Orual is, in part, the picture of the agnostic or religious apathetic, categories alien to the *Pearl*-poet (instead, he means to instruct and increase the faith of one already assumed to be among the faithful).

While it would be reductive to translate Orual into atheism or agnosticism, or even to an individual atheist or agnostic who rejects Psyche’s faith,¹⁹ we need not impose any simplistic and restrictive correspondence in order to trace the reflexes of allegory and its figurational strategies here. For one, the allegorical workings of both poems become especially salient when they touch on the last things and the terminus of salvation history, although we must always keep in mind that the Dreamer eventually obtains an unclouded vision of the New Jerusalem that Orual does not, his own Revelation in miniature. The Pearl Maiden accedes to the Dreamer’s request for such a sight—

Bot of þe Lombe I haue the aquylde
For a syzt þerof þurȝ gret fauor
[But from the Lamb I have obtained permission for you
For a sight thereof through His great favor] (967-8)

—and he then perceives, standing atop a nearby hill, the city described by St. John in Revelation, “Þat schyrrer þen sunne with schaftez schon [That shone brighter than the sun with its rays]” (982). After leaving Psyche for the first time

¹⁹ We need not accord it the hefty interpretive weight often granted to such authorial self-commentary, but Lewis himself, in a letter to Katharine Farrer, does gloss the novel as “the story of every nice, affectionate agnostic whose dearest one suddenly ‘gets religion’, or even every luke-warm Christian whose dearest gets a Vocation” (qtd. in Hooper, *Companion* 249).

in anger and dejection, Orual instead sees a puff of palatial pareidolia in the fog, which evanesces in microseconds: "There was a tiny space of time in which I thought I could see how some swirlings of the mist had looked, for the moment, like towers and walls. But very soon, no likeness at all. I was staring simply into fog, and my eyes smarting with it" (133).²⁰ Through various allegorizations or quasi-allegorizations ("impulsive" allegorizations?), the problem of seeing in *Faces*, as indeed in *Pearl*, quickly becomes a larger set of problems revolving around the concept of revelation, or rather, problems of both sight and judgment.

Before we examine at greater length how both texts confront their problems of "seeing," it would be helpful to turn to Lewis's own remarks on where and why he diverged from his immediate source, in which the Christian interpretations of revelation and judgment obviously play no role. In his concluding appendix to the novel, Lewis offers a brief redaction of Apuleius's version, and then explains, "The central alteration in my own version consists in making Psyche's palace invisible to normal, mortal eyes" (313). Even without Lewis's prompting, we would have to ask ourselves whether it matters, or rather *how* it matters that the palace remains invisible to Orual. I would suggest that reading *Till We Have Faces* through *Pearl* helps us appreciate immediately that, not only can Orual literally not see the palace, but seeing it would not be enough to solve her moral and theological problems. Even if her one fleeting and ambiguous vision of the palace through the mist had been clearer or longer lasting, or even if she had been able to hold the image in her field of vision and fix it there permanently, her jealousy over her god-stolen Psyche would have persisted. In fact, her failings may then have ended up resembling the petty envy of the two sisters in Apuleius, who lust after Psyche's unbelievable wealth and divine husband. Perhaps all of this is simply to say that Orual's difficulty

²⁰ Again a particular linguistic correspondence suggests a connection between these two most rare visions. Orual describes her fleeting glimpse as "the ferly, my glimpse of the palace" (142), "ferly" being the same archaic word for "marvel" or "vision" that the *Pearl*-poet uses to describe both the wonder of his vision and the wonder he feels in himself at it:

Anvnder mone so great merwayle
 No fleschly hert ne myȝt endeure
 As quen I blusched vpon þat baly,
 So *ferly* þerof watz þe fasure.
 I stod as styлле as dased quayle
 For *ferly* of þat frech figure
 [Under the moon so great a marvel
 No mortal heart could endure
 As when I looked upon that castle,
 So wonderful was its form.
 I stood as still as a dazed quail
 For the wonder of that noble form] (1081-6; emphasis mine)

obviously lies not in a *literal* failure of (eye)sight, in terms of neither its causes nor its resolutions. Sight, in other words, means much more than sight in the allegorical frameworks of both *Faces* and *Pearl*.

Regarding the interpretation of a novel titled *Till We Have Faces* that features "things invisible to see" as an essential plot point and thematic nexus, one might well ask whether we really need to invoke medieval allegory to suggest that what "seeing" means becomes a matter of some importance in the narrative. Of course we do not, but the four levels of medieval exegetical interpretation (and not infrequently composition) can illuminate certain features of the novel, especially in the context of the apocalyptic resonances that Orual's complaint and demand for "judgment" acquire. Dante famously outlines these four levels in both the *Convivio* and the (possibly non-authorial) *Epistle to Can Grande*, in which he suggests their application to his own *Commedia*: the *literal* or historical level,²¹ such as the historical fact of the Israelites' flight from Egypt; the *typological* or allegorical level, which most commonly matches events in the Old Testament with the life of Christ; the *moral* or tropological level, which reveals how one should behave; and the *anagogical* or mystical level, which is concerned with salvation and salvation history, including the afterlife and the Last Judgment. In what follows, I will explore how the application of only a few of these levels—or seeing where Lewis encodes or evokes them within his narrative—can augment our understanding of certain key moments in the novel.²²

A reading of *Pearl* exposes the anagogical-allegorical dimensions of *Till We Have Faces* particularly well; while the Dreamer experiences an ecstatic anagogical vision of the afterlife—indeed, his ecstasy causes him to renew his old mistake and attempt to pursue his Pearl across the river, terminating the vision—Orual's brief glimpse remains vexed and uncertain, literally seen through a fog. Yet the relevance of that anagogically rich passage in Corinthians 13:12 becomes

²¹ I have registered my disagreement with Myers's insistent rejection of allegory several times, but I should note in fairness to her that she demonstrates an awareness that "the four-fold method of medieval exegesis [...] always begin[s] with the plain-prose, literal meaning" (*Bareface* 137). She simply seems to draw an opposite conclusion from this fact, perhaps based on the unfortunate assumption that medieval allegory and allegorists did not much value that level. In fact, the usual term "level" is perhaps misleading in itself, because it suggests a tiered hierarchy of privilege that the Latin word "*sensus*," or "sense," did not necessarily imply.

²² For a far more comprehensive attempt to approach *Pearl* in the context of the fourfold system of allegoresis, see Chance, "Allegory and Structure"; it is perhaps no coincidence that, in addition to being a medievalist, Chance herself also remains quite active in Inklings studies. Cf. the application of the fourfold method to *Pearl* in Bond, *The Pearl Poem*, beginning in the third chapter.

an obvious guiding principle for both *Pearl* and *Faces*: the Pearl Maiden claims that souls in heaven no longer see as in a glass, darkly (*Pearl* 859), and the passage from which the novel's title is taken directs us to that final end, *until*: "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?" (294). Of course, we have Lewis's treasured gloss on the meaning of his title—"[a human being] must be speaking with 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, *Companion* 252; emphasis in original)—but we need not stop there. The phrase "till we have faces" also suggests that great ellipsis between the present moment and the final end of the Christian narrative, when, as Psyche promises Orual, "we shall meet here again with no cloud between us" (128). On the literal-historical level of the novel, Psyche means this quite literally, that, next time they meet, they will have a pleasant and mutually satisfactory conversation; she is wrong, of course, but only on the literal level. Regarding the dispersal of the cloud between them when Orual, too, becomes saved, she is perfectly correct. Orual has been seeing—and trying to see—the wrong things, whenever she has not looked to the final end, the only point at which one may truly see, just as the Pearl Maiden must correct the Dreamer's reliance on literal seeing in order to bring him to a higher sight.

From the harshness of the Pearl Maiden's responses to him, one might even accuse the Dreamer of blindness: the second rebuke dramatically increases in intensity from the first, as the Pearl Maiden suggests that her listener is both mad and witless (290-4). She identifies three errors in his original apologetic speech, the second and third involving his thought that he could cross the water to dwell with her there himself, and the first concerning his erroneous trust in his own sight:

Pou says þou trawez me in þis dene
Bycawse þou may with y3en me se
[You say that you believe me to be in this valley
Because you can see me with your eyes] (295-6)

I halde þat jueler lyttel to prayse
þat leuez wel þat he sez with y3e
[I hold that jeweler little to praise
That believes well that which he sees with his eyes] (301-2)

3e setten Hys wordez ful westernays
þat leuez noþynk bot 3e hit sy3e
[You set His words entirely awry,
You who believes nothing unless you have seen it first] (307-8)

In other words, it is only his literal vision of the pearl that has brought him faith and joy, rather than true faith and understanding; at the same time, the issue remains quite complex, since the Pearl Maiden scolds the Dreamer for trusting in his eyes, even as the *Pearl*-poet repeatedly phrases the rewards of salvation in terms of sight. In fact, *Cleanness* (or *Purity*), the second poem in the manuscript and generally held to have been written by the same author, consistently describes the reward for “cleanness” as the gift of seeing God in the sight of God:

And þere [God] fyndez al fayre a freke wythinne,
With hert honest and hol, þat haþel He honourez,
Sendez hym a sad sy3t: to se His auen face
[And there where God finds all fair within a man,
With heart honest and whole, that man he honors,
Sends him a dignified sight: to see His own face] (593-5; see also 27-9
and 551-2)

Indeed, in *Cleanness*, the poet asks a similar question to Orual's “How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?”:

Nov ar we sore and synful and sovly vhone;
How schulde we se, þen may we say, þat Syre vpon throne?
[Now are we diseased and sinful and unclean, each one of us;
How should we see—then we may well say—that Sire upon His
throne?] (1111-2)

The *Pearl*-poet's answer to “how may we see God” seems simple, especially in *Cleanness*:

And to be couþe in His courte þou coueytes þenne,
To se þat Semly in sete and His swete face,
Clerrer counseyl con I non, bot þat þou clene worþe
[And if you desire then to be known in his court,
To see that Seemly One enthroned and His sweet face,
Clearer counsel I do not know, but that you should make yourself
pure] (1053-5)

In short, be *clean*, and receive God's mercy; yet again "cleanness" in the poem takes on various meanings, surely not limited to the literal. Just so, both Orual and the Dreamer must attain to higher sight, and both texts use allegorical mechanisms—such as figurative landscapes, discrete levels of sense, moral and spiritual insights tied to a specifically Christian life and Christian version of salvation—to accrete various figurative meanings around this concept of *vision*.

United in their metaphorical-literal blindness, Orual and the Dreamer, it becomes clear, share several other errors, including certain misapprehensions about the concept of "judgment." On the first page of the novel, Orual establishes her desire to confront the gods with the case she has been building against them her entire life: "I will accuse the gods, especially the god who lives on the Grey Mountain. That is, I will tell all he has done to me from the very beginning, as if I were making my complaint of him before a judge. But there is no judge between gods and men" (3). As she later learns, there *is* a cosmic judge, a principle of divine justice and mercy that cannot exist in her pre-Christian understanding; her failure to pursue the higher (implicitly Christian) truths that Psyche can dimly glimpse causes her to make this complaint instead, much like the narrator of *Pearl* acknowledges, presumably retrospectively, that his own *complaint* on the death of his pearl had resulted from his failure to appreciate the consolations of Christ:

I *playned* my perle þat þer watz penned,
Wyth fyrcce skyllez þat faste faȝt.
Þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte
[I lamented my pearl that was imprisoned there
With fierce arguments that fought insistently.
Although the nature of Christ taught me comfort,
My wretched will suffered constantly in woe] (53-6; emphasis mine)

Similarly, Orual's understanding of justice and "judgment" does change over the course of the narrative, as the Dreamer must learn to revise his usage of the concatenating word "deme," or "judge." The best evidence that the Dreamer continually struggles to understand, like Orual, that judgment is God's prerogative and not his own, comes from his rather "obtuse" response to the Pearl Maiden's plain statement that "Al lys in Hym to dyȝt and deme [All lies in Him to ordain and deem]" (360): "Þenne demed I to þat damyselle [Then deemed I to that damsel]" (361; emphasis mine). Moreover, the Dreamer and Orual also make the same mistake of ignoring the divine and locating the foundation of their joy in a *mortal* temple; well into the dialogue, the Dreamer addresses his Pearl as "grounde of alle my blysse [the foundation of all my bliss]" (372), and Orual describes the birth of Psyche as "the beginning of all my

joys" (20). Fortunately for these two hapless "dreamers," the transformations of their loved ones after death will eventually lead to their own transformations in life, although their roads to this transformation differ.

In the last analysis, Lewis's Psyche differs in one all-important way from that of the Pearl Maiden: although the two women resemble one another in being "saved," in the novel, Psyche remains in (historical) human time, and thus cannot simply "represent" either a soul in heaven or Christ himself. To trace the implications of such differences, we must look more carefully at how *Faces* might be said to operate allegorically, and how it does not. Thus, I would now like to consider some of the tropological and typological operations of Lewis's text; as long as we do not reduce any given character or detail of the novel to a single meaning, doing so puts us in little hermeneutic danger. After all, in Lewis's most extensive explication of the novel, he offers no less and no more than four *levels* of meaning that one might find in the narrative, employing the same language and indeed the same number of levels used in medieval allegoresis.²³ The four levels that Lewis identifies are not, of course, the same four, but they make for an illuminating comparison; after he quotes Lewis's account of the first level of historical fiction—we might indeed say the "literal-historical"—Ian C. Storey condenses the remaining three levels well: "(2) Psyche as instance of the *anima naturaliter Christiana*, (3) Orual as an instance of human affection perverted, and (4) the reaction of a loved one to a 'beloved passing into a sphere where it cannot follow'" ("Between Myth and Reality" 154).²⁴ Following level (3), critics routinely extract something very like a *moral* meaning from Orual's perverted love of Psyche, in that one should not be so controlling and possessive, and so on. Analogical meanings, as we have seen, suggest themselves during the novel's scenes of judgment, but also here in Lewis's second level, which positions Psyche as an enlightened pagan: Lewis's rather liberal view of salvation history obviously permits what was once called "the salvation of the righteous heathen." It is the attempt to find *typological* meanings in *Faces* that is probably the most controversial move a critic can make, that is, the effort to map the life of Christ onto the text. But Christ is always present in the novel, often through pointed emphasis on his *absence*, as when Bardia, the captain of the guard figure,

²³ This is one of the points that Yandell makes in his comparison of the texts ("Medieval Models" 270); I hope that I have at least managed to situate it in a wider context.

²⁴ The complete letter to Clyde S. Kilby may be found in W.H. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 273-4. Throughout the letter, Lewis consistently downplays the concept of "allegory," preferring words like "parallel" and "instance." At the same time, he tells Kilby both that "Much that you take as allegory was intended solely as realistic detail" and that "An author doesn't necessarily understand the meaning of his own story better than anyone else." Cowed by the former statement, some critics of Lewis have been understandably but unfortunately reluctant to pursue the full implications of the latter.

offhandedly says, "I wonder do the gods know what it feels like to be a man" (66). Clearly, Christ is missing from this world, and his absence is keenly felt, even when not understood.

That Psyche herself steps in to play the role of Christ is a reading that both Lewis and many of his critics have militated against. Again, I would argue that deference to Lewis's own avowal of his conscious intention—"She is in some ways like Christ [...] because every good man or woman is like Christ" (*Letters* 274)—limits rather than enhances our appreciation of the novel's multiple figurational "levels" and how they work in conjunction with one another (rather than simply replacing one another). Psyche not only shares this distinctly typological role with her eventual husband, the God of the Grey Mountain, but also means only "Psyche" on the literal level, a human being living in an ancient kingdom called "Glome": her allegorical resonances on the medieval model do not eliminate the literal, which is, after all, the essential first level of allegoresis. For example, when the people of Glome sacrifice Psyche to the Brute in order to save the entire community—the victim "bound to the Tree and left" (48)—the echo of Christ's crucifixion as scapegoat is obvious: Psyche evokes Christ's life without "being" Christ. Likewise, immediately prior to her death, Psyche tells Orual that their sister Redival "also does what she doesn't know" (69), in an overt echo of Christ's beneficent words on the cross about his persecutors (Luke 23:34). We could point to several other Christ-like features of Psyche's life, but I will mention just one more, significant as an obvious addition to Apuleius's story: as in the *Metamorphoses*, people begin to venerate Psyche as a goddess, but in Lewis's version she becomes almost more Christ-like than Venusian. Just as the *Pearl*-poet tells us that parents did of Jesus—"To touch her chylder þay fayr Hym prayed [To touch their children they implored Him earnestly]" (714)—the citizens of Glome demand Psyche's healing touch during a plague (31-3). And we need not stop at Psyche-as-Christ: for that matter, how many quasi-typological readings of the novel have compared Orual to Job? My goal here is not to rehearse a complete four-level allegorical reading of every aspect of the novel, but to demonstrate that the text permits such readings, even encourages them, as long as Orual is not only Job, and Psyche is not only Christ—but the most programmatic medieval exegete would have known better than that! *Till We Have Faces* can be read productively on—and as engaging with—the four levels of medieval allegory, among others, just as surely as *Pearl* accommodates a powerful narrative of *human* loss as well as examining the desire for things beyond and asserting the need for a higher understanding of divinity.

When we refrain from rejecting allegory outright as a negative, the apparent differences between the "realism" of *Till We Have Faces* and the allegorical progression of *Pearl* may also begin to erode. Yes, Orual sets off looking for very literal bones rather than some allegorical pearl—

“O perle,” quoth I, “in perlez pyȝt,
Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,
Regretted by myn one on nyȝte?”
[“O pearl,” said I, “arrayed in pearls,
Are you my pearl that I have lamented,
That I grieved for alone by night?”] (241-3)

—but the woman that the Dreamer addresses as his pearl exists on multiple levels that shift over the course of the poem, much as Orual's understanding of certain concepts must evolve. For example, the gem that the Pearl Maiden bears and represents becomes revealed as the Biblical pearl of great price, the kingdom of heaven, a treasure also at stake in *Till We Have Faces*. *Pearl* makes the allegory obvious (721-44),²⁵ but even *Faces* may echo this emphasis on the one jewel worth all the rest when Psyche tells Orual, “If am I allowed to give my jewels as I please, you must keep all of the things that you and I have really loved. Let [Redival] have all that's big and costly and doesn't matter” (69). But the formal interactions of the literal and the figurative in each text are much more revealing: the physical beauty and perfection of the Dreamer's “perle withouten spot” will alter in meaning to signify spiritual perfection as well (12), just as the perfectly formed Psyche will follow a similar course in the narrative and become *spiritually* pure, with Orual's ugliness conversely mirroring her spiritual ugliness. We might be tempted to point to the differences between *Pearl* and *Faces*, emphasizing that, instead of a divinely-inspired chat in a dream, it takes Orual a lifetime to learn the error of her ways. Such a distinction would be in keeping with the argument that privileges the text's modern and/or historical-novelistic features over the allegorical, but this is simply not what occurs in the novel. Orual's lifetime teaches her nothing, even though it occupies a considerable fraction of the book; indeed, it can seem as if Lewis conspires with Orual to let her disappear into her role as queen, just as she wishes: “If Orual could vanish altogether into the Queen, the gods would almost be cheated” (201). In the dull reality of life after Psyche, the most “realistic” part of the novel by far, Orual, as temporal queen, only nurtures her self-destructive “charge against the gods” (247), later learning her error(s) retrospectively, and through what but a series of dream visions?

To claim that Lewis has totally abandoned medieval forms in *Till We Have Faces* should now seem increasingly absurd. Yet Lewis in fact causes Orual to challenge the dream vision tradition until the very end of the novel; unlike the Dreamer in *Pearl*, who acknowledges his vision as a divine gift, Orual consistently counts dreams among the torments of the gods:

²⁵ For a summary of the various allegorical resonances attached to the *Pearl* by scholars using the exegetical method, see Robertson, “The Pearl as a Symbol,” 155 ff.

Now mark yet again the cruelty of the gods. There is no escape from them into sleep or madness, for they can pursue you into them with dreams. Indeed you are then most at their mercy. The nearest thing we have to a defence against them (but there is no real defence) is to be very wide awake and sober and hard at work, to hear no music, never to look at earth or sky, and (above all) to love no one. (80-1)

After Psyche's death, a fever bearing strange empty dreams grips Orual: at first no vision comes to her. During Part II, however, she begins to perform Psyche's mythical tasks in her dreams, conflating dream and reality until the final "dream," which has the ambiguous character of many medieval visions: "What followed was certainly vision and no dream. For it came upon me before I had sat down or unrolled the book. I walked into the vision with my bodily eyes wide open" (285). The eagle that in Apuleius represents Jove's assistance of Psyche during her last task here becomes the apocalyptic eagle familiar from Dante and Chaucer, who brings Orual to the faceless parliament that will hear her complaint; as she recognizes plainly, (re)reading her complaint constitutes its own answer and its own key: "The complaint was the answer" (294). But Orual's refusal to describe this scene of judgment as a dream in fact signals the ultimate realization of Lewis's desire to transcend the dream vision tradition across the entire novel.

If we revisit the scene of Orual's reunion with Psyche, we will see in Psyche's words at their first parting on the riverbank a similar impulse to exceed the achievement of a dream vision like *Pearl*: "Orual, don't look so sad. All will be well; all will be *better than you can dream of*. Come again soon. Farewell for a little" (128-9; emphasis mine). Although her presence waiting for Orual across the stream echoes *Pearl*, Psyche insists that Orual must transcend the consolations offered by such dreams in order to truly see, yet she interestingly does so by way of the medieval religious *visionary* Julian of Norwich, the source of Eliot's famous "All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well." In effect, the particular exigencies of modernity both prevent the medieval balm of the revelatory dream vision from solving all problems at once, but they also deeply require such a balm; Orual's complaint, after all, echoes Lewis's own rage at the divine in the early 20th century.²⁶ Perhaps this, then, is Lewis's fourth level,

²⁶ In the same letter to Christian Hardie, Lewis explains that his earlier attempts at retelling the story of Cupid and Psyche, made during his pre-Christian days, had instead put Orual "in the right and the gods in the wrong" (qtd. in Hooper, *Companion* 251). The full-length account of Lewis's conversion is of course his 1955 *Surprised by Joy*, published just one year before *Till We Have Faces*; in it he records a pessimism very similar to Orual's: "I was [...] very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world" (111).

the "modernological," the attempt to adapt and apply the other levels of allegory to the particularities of a new century of the faith. As always with Lewis, his approach to the modern remains firmly rooted in the medieval: the trope of "awakening to truth" appears even within medieval dream frames. Compare, for example, how Pysche also explains that her sacrifice had seemed a dream from which she had awakened—"And in a sense it was, wasn't it? And you are nearly awake now. What? still so grave? I must wake you more" (106)—with Chaucer's eagle in the *House of Fame* squawking to the dreamer, "Awak!" (556). And like the *House of Fame*, the novel ends as a fragment, Orual's text breaking off in that very Chaucerian sentence fragment, "I might—" (308); we still receive no clear glimpse of that "man of gret auctorite" (HF 2158). Life goes on, the fragment of the vision ends, and another hand closes off the narrative with a final flourish of the literal-historical; as in *Pearl*, life continues, the Dreamer awakens—as he must—and the reader closes the book, as we must. There is no "pure allegory," only the historical level of human life, the transcendent sphere of the divine, and the intersection between them that is the subject of both *Pearl* and *Till We Have Faces*, and accessed via complex allegorical fictions in both.

We are perhaps now as prepared as we will ever be to address the question of why the word "allegory" has been such a taboo one for most critics of Lewis. Joseph Pearce notes helpfully that both "Lewis and Tolkien tended to use the word 'allegory' in its formal sense" (119), by which he means in the sense of pure personification allegory on the model of Bunyan; the distinction between "formal or crude allegory (Reason) and informal or subtle allegory (Reepicheep)" that Lewis and Pearce maintain reflects the perhaps infelicitous identification of allegory with personification narrative only (118).²⁷ Although postmodernism has, against all probability, led to a resurgence of interest in allegory, we might also conclude that allegory was particularly aesthetically unfashionable during the period in which Lewis published most of his novels, and indeed for a time afterwards;²⁸ we might compare here another dismissal of allegory written just a

²⁷ For Lewis's definition of allegory as such, see *Allegory of Love*, 44 ff. On such a position and its counter-positions, see the useful summary in Paxson, *Poetics of Personification*, 30 ff., especially the reference to Kenneth R. Haworth's book *Deified Virtues*: "[N]o necessary connection [exists] between the rhetorical figure *personification* and allegory" (51, qtd. in Paxson 38). Mentioning Paxson here forces me to confess that I have otherwise had to bracket the quite expansive poststructuralist revisitation of the concept of allegory; the most important writers on the subject would of course include Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, along with a host of scholars influenced by Walter Benjamin.

²⁸ Note also that the later 1950s and early 1960s probably represented the high point of the new form of exegetical criticism in medieval studies (especially in America), a form of literary criticism Lewis resisted; compare the wildly divergent interests evident in his 1961 *An Experiment in Criticism*.

few years prior to the publication of *Till We Have Faces*, and indeed by a famous admirer of Lewis's, Jorge Luis Borges: "For all of us, allegory is an aesthetic mistake" (337).²⁹ Lewis himself defines allegory in many novel ways in *The Allegory of Love*—e.g., "Allegory, besides being many other things, is the subjectivism of an objective age" (30)—but he reminds us often that his subject is "secular and creative allegory" rather than "religious and exegetical allegory" (48 n.2); accordingly, he seems to have felt that this emphasis freed him from much discussion of the fourfold method of allegoresis, which often plays a larger role in the *writing* of the latter sort. *Pearl*, however, seems to straddle these two categories of allegory, particularly if we read it in conjunction with *Gawain*—or with *Till We Have Faces*, another "combination" allegory. If we apply nothing else from *The Allegory of Love* to this discussion, we might do worse than to suggest that, as Lewis says of Chaucer's achievement in the *Troilus*, we might likewise say of Lewis, "Allegory has taught him to dispense with allegory" (178)—but also that he does not let it go easily. Nor should we.

Finally, we must consider that Lewis—and his critics—may have feared that his overtly Christian writings would be especially vulnerable to attack on the grounds that they peddled simplistic, possibly even propagandistic religious allegory instead of "true" literature. A writer can of course use a Classical myth like Cupid and Psyche without inviting such complaints, as those infinitely malleable stories also proved ripe for appropriation by some of the early 20th century's most prominent writers: Joyce, Yeats, Eliot. But has Lewis, in contrast to these other mythographers of modernity, pulled an *Apuleius moralisé*, after the absurdly allegorized tales from Ovid—the "other" *Metamorphoses*—so popular in the Middle Ages? In overwriting the heavenly marriage of Cupid and Psyche

²⁹ On the author's early interest in Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* and its effect on his own writing, see Rodríguez Monegal, *Literary Biography*, 323-38. Borges further distinguishes the allegory from the modern novel with reference to the medieval:

The passage from allegory to novel, from species to individual, from realism to nominalism, required several centuries, but I shall have the temerity to suggest an ideal date: the day in 1382 when Geoffrey Chaucer, who may not have believed himself to be a nominalist, set out to translate into English a line by Boccaccio—'*E con gli occulti ferri i Tradimenti*' (And Betrayal with hidden weapons)—and repeated it as 'The smyler with the knyf under the cloke.' The original is in the seventh book of the *Teseide*; the English version, in 'The Knightes Tale.' (340)

Notwithstanding the fact that a modern medievalist may have trouble swallowing almost any given *phrase* in this quotation, Borges's position on allegory is somewhat more complex than it may appear, as we again see that he seems, like Lewis, most dismissive of "pure" allegory—"Allegory is a fable of abstractions, as the novel is a fable of individuals" (339)—while admitting that "there is an element of allegory in novels" (340). Cf. some of Lewis's own remarks in *The Allegory of Love* to the effect that "every metaphor is an allegory in little," etc. (60-1).

with the “bride of Christ” allegory, Lewis has produced a text that does indeed grasp at a specifically Christian theological truth, as surely as does *Pearl*. Yet the result is not Apuleius moralized, reduced to a monologic “meaning” or “moral,” but Apuleius endlessly complicated, complicated simply in the general direction of Lewis’s own faith and theology. Moreover, Psyche’s religious peace, while recognizable to a reader familiar with Christian teachings, remains far more vague, ever difficult for her or later Orual to put into words: Orual’s personal and moral rather than theological failings remain much easier to diagnose. One thinks of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* here, another attempt—beloved by Lewis—to reach a kind of Christian theodicy without direct recourse or even much reference to received Christian doctrine. Interestingly, in *The Discarded Image*, Lewis goes to some lengths to explain why it was not so strange at all, as some readers suppose, for Boethius to have written both his theological works and the strictly *philosophical* and not explicitly religious consolation (76 ff.). Still, we must ask, if Lewis resolved to write the Christian narrative onto a classical substrate, why, unlike Milton, did he not make the Christian “message” more explicit in the text, or at least as explicit as the quasi-allegorical “supposals” of Narnia? The answer, I think, must be more complex than that he was simply “trying to tell a story” rather than produce a tract or convert the heathen. It is true that the subtleties of the novel’s Christian resonances will be much clearer to a reader with extensive knowledge of Lewis, his faith, his apologetics, and his belief in the transformative power of fantastic or “mythic” literature; perhaps, then, we would do better to turn to one of his famous apologies for fantasy rather than Christianity *per se*, in which he argues that the fantastic “stirs and troubles [the reader] (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach, far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth” (“On Three Ways of Writing for Children” 30).³⁰ Brian Attebery, glossing this passage, rightly points out that, “[f]or Tolkien and Lewis [...], longing for the nonexistent could be a preliminary to personal experience of the divine” (23). That, as Attebery then contends, “Lewis’s formulation can be translated into purely materialistic terms and still remain valid” must remain an open question for his readers (23), whether we mean that formulation strictly in its theoretical form, or also in its practice in a novel like *Till We Have Faces*. We can only say that, for Lewis, the story, the vision experience itself, *will* lead to that higher sight, the acquisition of which it dramatizes.

I have attempted to demonstrate that, in this particular novel, Lewis pursues that sense of something beyond reach by engaging closely with the allegorical-visionary framework of *Pearl*, which I understand as both undergirding and providing an essential point of contrast and reference for the

³⁰ Cf. similar points made in Lewis’s essay “On Stories,” collected in the same book.

structure—narrative and interpretive—of Lewis’s piece of mythopoesis. I would hope that, if nothing else, this essay encourages further examination of Lewis’s medievalism in Lewis’s fiction: in the case of *Till We Have Faces*, the novel’s obvious affiliations with and indeed ultimate origins in classical literature have perhaps obscured some of its other intertextual relations.³¹ More certain is that the trend in Lewis criticism that unquestioningly privileges other modes of fictional discourse over allegory—often through an appeal to the presumably less didactic and far richer literary vehicle of “myth,” and often with support from the author’s own correspondence—has occluded its unambiguous affinities with the formal conventions and figural strategies of traditional allegory. Myers, then, can only be partially correct when she argues that reading the novel as an allegory impoverishes it: “It cannot be overemphasized, then, that *Till We Have Faces* is not allegory, but a realistic modern novel [...]. To attempt to use the reading skills appropriate to a neomedieval allegory just multiplies difficulties” (*Bareface* 4). As we have seen, to praise overly the newness of Lewis’s achievement in *Till We Have Faces* in fact diminishes its sophistication as an engagement *with* allegory, as well as diminishing our understanding and appreciation of such dimensions of the novel. One hopes that, at a time when Lewis’s reputation as a major 20th-century writer seems well assured, we can now confidently bring an ever-increasing variety of critical models and methods to bear on his last great vision.

APPENDIX: OTHER PEARLS

While the association of Psyche with the Pearl Maiden in *Till We Have Faces* seems clear, one can also detect fainter traces of *Pearl* and its tradition in some of Lewis’s other works, which must finally constitute strictly circumstantial evidence for Lewis’s deliberate or conscious manipulation of *Pearl* in the novel. For one, *The Great Divorce* also features a river “so clear that [the narrator] could count the pebbles at the bottom” (30); I have previously mentioned the detail in *Pearl* of the pellucid stream with the gem-studded bottom: “In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe” (113). Clover Holly Gatling finds this river reminiscent of Dante’s Lethe purging sins (2), but resonances with both texts can exist simultaneously. A more familiar river still appears in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, with the Landlord’s castle somewhere unseen on the great mountain beyond the

³¹ I am pleased to see some recent reviving interest in Lewis’s medievalism in the context of allegory; in an independent discussion of the Narnian unicorn, Chad Wriglesworth suggests similarly that, “[a]lthough Lewis is by no means offering a full replication of these earlier paradigms, his work remains heavily dependent upon images and structural patterns found in medieval allegory” (29).

brook that divides the living from God and the dead; the final chapter, titled "The Brook," features the delirious crossing of this boundary after a long journey towards wisdom and faith. Earlier in the narrative, a figure called Mr. Halfways also sings the narrator a song that induces a divine vision of someone very like the Pearl Maiden wearing her crown at the riverside (205): "Now came the vision of the Island again: but this time it was changed, for John scarcely noticed the Island because of a lady with a crown on her head who stood waiting for him on the shore. She was fair, divinely fair" (46). Don W. King has also published a previously undiscovered poem of Lewis's that alludes to *Pearl*, "To Mrs. Dyson, Angrie," an occasional piece that King speculates served as "a playful apology for an unintended slight or missed appointment such as a dinner engagement" (172): "No! with unkindly charm / The mortal *Pearl* such mischief hath us done, / Choosing to 'arme / Those looks, the heav'n of mildnesse with Disdain'" (King 290-1). In a footnote, King cites an e-mail from Joe R. Christopher observing that the reference to *Pearl* can be "explained" by realizing that Mrs. Dyson's given name, Margaret, means "pearl" (345 n.24), but I find it particularly interesting that the quoted lines describing the Pearl derive from *Paradise Lost* IX.533-4, some of Satan's flattering words to Eve.

The fortuitous connection of Pearl with Eve in "To Mrs. Dyson, Angrie" may gain new significance when we move on to consider the most important of Lewis's other works to invoke *Pearl*, a poem titled "The World Is Round" that in fact appears to conflate the Pearl Maiden and Psyche much more plainly than I argue of *Till We Have Faces*—only with the further complication that it effects this identification by means of a triangulation with, yes, Milton's Eve. While the poem was first published in 1940, it has probably received the widest readership in its unrevised state, as a posthumously published work with the tongue-in-cheek title "Poem for Psychoanalysts and/or Theologians" (being a simple literary critic, I am neither, but I can surely still squeeze some arcane meaning out of it).³² Indeed, we quickly understand the motivation behind Lewis's original whimsical title, as the poem's every line brims with imagery possessing simultaneous sexual and Christian resonances. Witness, for example, the phallic original sin in the "fangless serpent," and the vaginal, molluscan kingdom of heaven: "I was the pearl / Mother-of-pearl my bower":

³² Hooper—whom John Clute has termed, a bit unfairly, Lewis's "Kinbote" (58)—published in his *Poems* what is apparently an unrevised version of "The World Is Round"; somewhat vexingly, one must refer to Hooper's separate bibliography of Lewis's works for this information (*Bibliography* 266). I have, however, chosen to quote from Hooper's version here rather than the text published (anonymously) in the multi-author collection *Fear No More*, since it is now much more readily available, and because the revisions, while numerous, affect the substance of the poem very little.

Naked apples, woolly-coated peaches
Swelled on the garden's wall. Unbounded
Odour of windless, spice-bearing trees
Surrounded my lying in sacred turf,
Made dense the guarded air—the forest of trees
Buoyed up therein like weeds in ocean
Lived without motion. I was the pearl,
Mother-of-pearl my bower. Milk-white the cirrus
Streaked the blue egg-shell of the distant sky,
Early and distant, over the spicy forest;
Wise was the fangless serpent, drowsy. (*Poems* 113)

These images soon give way to a brief narrative of exile—a fate, of course, that Eve and Psyche share—and the poem concludes by gesturing towards some kind of eternal return:

I remember the remembering, when first waking
I heard the golden gates behind me
Fall to, shut fast. On the flinty road,
Black-frosty, blown on with an eastern wind,
I found my feet. Forth on journey,
Gathering thin garment over aching bones,
I went. I wander still. But the world is round. (*Poems* 113)

Of course, a well-read Lewis critic will probably detect more *Paradise Lost* than *Pearl* in these final lines; in his own scholarly endeavors, Lewis crossed the divide between the medieval and the Renaissance long before it was fashionable, as evidenced by his pioneering work on Spenser and his still influential *Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942). We should remember, though, that the setting of this poem, while clearly Edenic, also echoes the Edenic-once-removed *locus amoenus* of the medieval dream vision, as well as the divine dwelling of Psyche in both Lewis and Apuleius. As we see, the speaker identifies herself as a pearl like the Pearl Maiden, but also, of course, becomes the wandering Psyche, turned out from the house of the god, ever searching for the way back in. In fact, Adam seems significantly absent from the poem, the spouse or consummation devoutly to be wished perhaps becoming part of what the wanderer must seek; in this respect, Lewis's account of the wandering woman strikingly does *not* resonate with that famous image from the final lines of *Paradise Lost*, where Adam and Eve walk hand in hand.³³ Finally, we should note that, when Lewis did sit down to write

³³ The final four lines of *Paradise Lost* read:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:

the novel of Psyche's story,³⁴ it was no longer Eve, whose wandering would appear to invite more extensive comparison with Psyche's own, but the Pearl Maiden whom he found the more useful as a point of reference: after all, in *Faces* Lewis concerns himself not so much with Psyche's own wandering after her elevation, but with the living, the redemption of the one on the other side of the river.



They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way. (XII.646-9)

I should note that King, in a short paragraph-length treatment of the poem, instead assumes the speaker in Lewis's poem is Adam rather than Eve (193), but to me the feminine voice seems far more likely, based on the opening reference to the apple, associated much more prominently with Eve as the first to Fall; the description of the speaker as supine on the ground that recalls Eve's depiction of herself "repos'd" on the earth immediately after her creation in *Paradise Lost* (VI.459 ff.); and the pearl/oyster imagery much more appropriate to a woman than a man.

³⁴ Lewis often explained that he had wanted to retell the story for most of his adult life; see, for example, the often-quoted letter to Christian Hardie in which he claimed to have "been at work on Orual for 35 years," although *Till We Have Faces* itself was written fairly quickly (qtd. in Hooper, *Companion* 251).

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