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Till We Have Faces: From Idolatry to Revelation

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Abstract

Examines the “face” image and theme in Lewis’s novel and relates it to the use of the same image in a much broader literary context, from Augustine to Oscar Wilde.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S. Till We Have Faces:—Themes

Till We Have Faces: From Idolatry to Revelation

Dominic Manganiello

THE confrontation between a woman and her reflection in a mirror has been a pervasive literary motif at least since Milton's Eve, who, in imitation of Narcissus, bent over the still water and, for the first time, beheld "herself" (*Paradise Lost* 4.456-76). Modern authors, such as Margaret Atwood, Margaret Drabble, and Sylvia Plath, among others, have dealt extensively with the subject (cf. Jenijoy La Belle). Recent criticism of their writings has in turn relied on the theories of Freud, Lacan, or Foucault in an attempt to relate the "gaze" to questions of sexuality, identity, power, and cultural constructions of gender. Feminist critiques of *Till We Have Faces* have followed suit (cf. Bartlett). While often helpful and incisive, such treatments tend to overlook the ethical and theological dimensions of the "gaze." However counter-intuitive it might seem to apply Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig to an analysis of C. S. Lewis as I propose to do, in fact they provide a striking illumination of the central trope of the face in his fiction.

In *Till We Have Faces*, C. S. Lewis captures the whole life of an angry young woman in a paradigmatic mirror scene. Orual, the protagonist, sees herself in everyone and in everything: all belongs to her. This avaricious self-love breeds contempt for others, especially the gods. No sooner has her rage reached its peak, however, when a shocking moment of recognition shatters her self-image. She is granted a vision of her father commanding her to dig and descend deeper and deeper through a hole into a pillar room beneath the earth. There, in that infernal setting, she stands before a mirror and re-enacts the same *mise-en-scene* of her childhood, but this time with a telling difference. As a young girl she experienced no *méconnaissances*, no distortions of the self, because the "great mirror" on the wall was one in which "you could see your perfect image." Even though the specular image reflected her facial ugliness, Orual merely acknowledged the fact without weeping or turning her eyes away (69-70). The second "epiphany of the face," on the other hand, produces what Emmanuel Levinas calls a "traumatism of astonishment" (*Totality and Infinity* 73). Orual discovers that *she* is Ungit, the goddess she loathes the most: "The vision . . .

allowed no denial. Without question it was true. It was I who was Ungit. That ruinous face was mine. I was that Batta-thing, that all-devouring, womb-like, yet barren thing" (287).

Medusa-like, the face of the other petrifies the onlooker and fills her with despair; moreover, it traumatizes the ego by rupturing its narcissistic unity. Mesmerized by this eidetic image, Orual feels compelled to examine her past life with a view to probing the causes of her self-disintegration.

Orual begins her confessional narrative on a defiant note. She wields a vitriolic pen, accusing the gods of being cruel, vindictive, and—worse still—mendacious (105). Not only have they placed intolerable burdens on Psyche, she claims, but they also spread the vile lie that Orual hates her sister. Their malice knows no bounds. The injustice of it all drives Orual to set the record straight for posterity and leaves her wondering why the gods alter the past in such a merciless manner (182).

Orual's charges, however, recoil on her. Two episodes force a total reevaluation of her actions. The first occurs in a painful interview with Ansit, Bardia's widow, who tells her, "Your queenship drank up his [her husband's] blood year by year and ate out his life. . . You're full fed. Gorged with other men's lives; women's too. Bardia's; mine; the Fox's; your sister's; both your sisters" (274-75). What seemed like love for her counsellor on the surface, Orual now realizes, was actually hatred underneath (277). She treated all her loved ones with the same selfishness and cruelty; her dealings with Psyche proved to be no exception. The disturbing revelation comes to Orual while reading her own words of protest against the bloodthirstiness of the gods: "Jealous of Psyche? Not while she was mine. We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no one else had any right to her . . . You stole her to make her happy . . . She was mine. *Mine* . . . You're blood-drinkers and man-eaters" (302-3).

On looking inside her text as in a mirror, she finds reflected there a verbal icon of her all-consuming desire for mastery and possession of the other. By her own account, Orual reduces the person to the status of an object, subjugates it, and coerces it into carrying out her will. Her relationship with Psyche lacks reciprocity and follows instead the master/slave dialectic of Hegel's phenomenology. Orual needs "the gaze of the other," or the recognition of the slave, to affirm her selfhood. How could the gods behave so unjustly towards Psyche? In the very complaint lies the answer. The only injustice has been committed by Orual herself.

After gaining this unexpected yet crucial insight, Orual makes a gradual about-face. At first her self-confrontation takes a negative turn. So repugnant is the fact of being Ungit to her, for example, that Orual attempts suicide in the river, but the unknown god stops her: "Do not do it . . . You cannot escape Ungit by going to the deadlands, for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after" (291).

The oracle, though cryptic, offers a hopeful script that touches her soul and opens her mind: "To say that I was Ungit meant that I was as ugly in soul as she; greedy, blood-gorged. But if I practised true philosophy . . . I should change my ugly soul into a fair one. And this, the gods helping me, I would do. I would set about it at once" (292-93).

To transform her soul means, in Levinas's terms, to take up "the facing position," that is, to bring the masterly ego to judgment "before the face" of the other: "My orientation toward the Other . . . can lose the avidity proper to the gaze only by turning it into generosity" (*Totality and Infinity* 50). In response to this moral summons Orual renounces her selfish attachment to Psyche: "Oh Psyche, oh, goddess . . . Never again will I call you mine, but all there is of me shall be yours. Alas, you know now what it's worth. I never wished you well, never had one selfless thought of you. I was a craver" (316-17).

Cupidity rendered her soul ugly; a renewed and purified love for Psyche will make it beautiful.¹ This reconciliation scene sets the stage for their final encounter in the palace gardens where they find themselves side by side at the very edge of a pool. When Orual casts down her eyes, she notices two figures, two reflections: "Yes, both Psyches, both beautiful (if that mattered now) beyond all imagining, yet not exactly the same" (319). The god now divulges the full meaning of his utterance, "you also shall be Psyche" (182). Narcissus drowned because of his need to see and possess only himself. Orual must "die" to that false, idolatrous image of the self in order to see and possess the Other. Only by transcending herself can she become fully human and start a New Life.

Lewis reverses the tragic implications of the Narcissus myth. Like Dante's Beatrice, Psyche functions as the true mirror of the good by reflecting God's image without God actually becoming visible. Orual's new name corresponds to her new being reshaped by grace. The restoration of the "psyche" or soul rests, as Charles Hampden-Turner translates Martin Buber's idea, on "the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of the other person, for in this uniqueness we glimpse God in man" (124). Orual's newly-found relationship

to the internal "Other" as well as to other human beings dramatizes the catoptric possibilities in human relations that Lewis described in another context as follows: "The duty and happiness of every . . . being is placed in being derivative, in reflecting like a mirror . . . Our whole destiny seems to lie . . . in being as little as possible ourselves, . . . in being clean mirrors with the image of a face not ours" ("Christianity and Literature" 21-22).

Orual embraces this poignant truth in her mutual exchange of self with Psyche by the pool: "I was being unmade. I was no one . . . Psyche herself was, in a manner, no one." Her sister counts, not for her sake but for another's (318). In the end Orual revokes her infernal declaration of independence, "I am my own,"² and rejoices instead in the splendour of her being made in the image and likeness of her Maker.

The biblically-inspired notion of the derived self, as articulated by Lewis, runs counter to most modern depictions of individuality. Ever since the "cogito" of Descartes the primacy of self-consciousness has constituted "a modern article of faith" (Ellmann and Feidelson 685). A first corollary of self-reference is to display evidence of personal uniqueness like Rousseau does at the beginning of his *Confessions*: he may be no better than other human beings, but at least he is different.

From the celebration of the unique self in isolation to Nietzsche's glorification of the "healthy selfishness . . . that issues from a mighty soul, . . . around which everything becomes a mirror" is but a small step (*Zarathustra* 208). The superman has no genealogy because he struggles "to gain a past *a posteriori* from which [he] might spring, as against that from which [he does] spring" (*Use and Abuse* 21), or to become his own origin. Along with the tendency to rewrite history came a new principle fashioned from the old adage of Protagoras: the "creative, willing, evaluating Ego . . . is the measure and value of things" (*Zarathustra* 60). The impulse of the Ego to set the standard of all experience³ culminated in the aesthetic individualism of Oscar Wilde, who formulated his creed in a letter of 1897 as follows: "The egoistic note is, of course, and always has been to me, the primal and ultimate note of modern art, but to *be an Egoist one must have an Ego*. It is not everyone who says 'I, I' who can enter the Kingdom of Art" (*Letters* 289).⁴ By the turn of the century the secular scripture of modernism could proclaim, in Irving Howe's lapidary phrase, "a salvation by, of, and for the self" (14).

The most incisive critique of the extravagant claims made in this third testament came from none other than Wilde himself. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stands as his parable of the impossibility of ever achieving beatitude on aesthetic terms. The eponymous hero makes a demonic pact in the manner of Faustus, exchanging his soul for eternal youth, but he sees himself as a modern Narcissus too. In the portrait Basil Hallward paints of him, Dorian perceives “the marvel of [his] own face” and the “magical mirror” of “his own soul” (114, 106). The birth of self-awareness witnessed here recapitulates Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage (91-100). The initial encounter of the subject as child with its idealized self-image in the mirror is essentially narcissistic since it wrongly identifies the specular “Other” as the object of desire. The Other is in fact the Same. The split psyche that results from pondering this illusory difference arises out of the subject’s inability to move out again into the real world and turn its gaze on the true Other. For Wilde the egocentric predicament of his young protagonist is as much spiritual as it is psychological: “What the worm was to the corpse, his sins would be to the painted image on the canvas. They would mar its beauty, and eat away its grace” (119). Sinning involves a turning to the self to the exclusion of the Other. Dorian adopts various guises in order to multiply his personality and thereby hide the true “face of [his] soul” (157). Later, on realizing that he is more than an object of pleasure and is indeed an ethical being with a conscience, he rebels against the “unjust mirror” that exposes his hypocritical transgressions committed while wearing the “masks” of goodness and beauty (220, 222). The painter Basil Hallward had seen in Dorian’s pristine good looks “perfection face to face,” a beatific vision of his friend’s personality “directly presented to [him] without mist or veil” (114). The “idolatry of the beautiful,” as Levinas says (*Otherwise than Being* 199 n.21), leads one to worship “a work of art [that] substitutes itself for God.” Basil repents of his “curious artistic idolatry,” while Dorian persists in his folly (11, 158). The tragedy of lost transcendence whose outcome is spiritual suicide leaves Dorian “withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage” (224). Wilde’s cautionary tale negates his own cherished maxim: the truths of metaphysics are *not* the truths of masks.⁵

Lewis grounds his divine comedy on the ethics rather than on the aesthetics of the face. Orual’s ostensible purpose in telling her story is to have the reader judge favorably her version of events on account of her Rousseauistic candor: “in this book I must hide none of my shame or follies” (189).⁶ Lewis, however,

attaches a great deal of irony to her statement. The moment she makes a point of not concealing anything, she decides to don a veil that covers the ugliness of her face and, by extension, her soul. On one level the veil, like Dorian's mask, emblemizes self-deceit. Despite her intense introspection, Orual, at this stage of her development, lacks genuine self-knowledge. Once the veil is lifted, the face revealed is just as hideous as Dorian's mirror image. The difference lies in Orual's willingness to mend her fragmented self, and to have it re-formed into a prelapsarian *imago Dei* before meeting her Maker face to face. She begins as a Rousseau, but ends as an Augustine.⁷

Levinas's philosophy of the face, supplemented by Merleau-Ponty's, helps to illuminate important aspects of Lewis's ethical poetics. As opposed to the egocentric impulse of Individualism, the ethos of Levinasian personalism is altruistic. It conceives of persons in relation who engage in "a primordial donation" (*Totality and Infinity* 174), that is, in making a gift of the self to the other. What triggers this self-giving? Levinas claims it is one person's sense of wonder upon seeing another person's face in its nudity and destitution.

The original sincerity of the face "resists possession," invades the subject's solitude, and disturbs his self-interestedness to the point of obliging him to respond to its need and frailty (197-99):

There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. There is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill. (*Ethics and Infinity* 86)

The "epiphany of the face" can be construed, then, as an ethical phenomenon (*Totality and Infinity* 199) since it moves each person to behave responsibly towards his neighbour. The face of the other also acts as an existential mirror, according to Merleau-Ponty's complementary metaphor, in which the subject's face first appears to itself and develops its identity.⁸ In that facial mirror, "we do not have two images side by side of someone and ourselves, but one sole image in which we are both involved . . . each the reverse of the other" (*The Visible and the Invisible* 83). Proximity makes neighbours interdependent, enantiomorphic reflections of the same Being. Coexistence precedes yet initiates the communal definition of persons.

For Lewis, too, the face reveals the person. Orual's identity crisis stems in part from her refusal to acknowledge the moral appeal the face makes not to commit murder when she drains the life-blood from Bardia and Psyche.⁹ Her decision to wear a veil manifests a deeper anxiety about who she is. Not surprisingly, her veiled face poses quite an enigma, fuelling much speculation among the citizens of Glome. Some say it is the face of a siren or an animal too terrible to be apprehended directly, while others maintain it radiates a dazzling beauty. The best story making the rounds is that Orual has no face at all. She is, paradoxically, a faceless woman with a thousand faces (237, 281). All these theories strike her as absurd, but they are closer to the truth than she imagines. Even going "bareface" represents a last ditch effort on her part to wear a "disguise" (289) and flaunt her anonymity.¹⁰ She is condemned to go without a face until she strips away the myriad "facades" of her ego, repents, and is ready to offer her primordial donation to Psyche in the self-effacing, "reversible" moment by the pool. The "brightface" of Psyche (166) emerges in a new perspective: it is no longer the goal of Orual's quest for happiness but the way that leads her there. Just as Glome's citizens want to glimpse the true face of their queen, so too Orual secretly pines to see the face of the god who gives her sister so much joy. Although her supernal desire mirrors Psyche's longing for her *patria* (83-84), Orual glosses over this fact when she lectures her sister: "'We must face it, child . . . What sort of god would he be who dares not show his face?' . . . 'Nothing that's beautiful hides its face. Nothing that's honest hides its name' . . . 'In your heart you must see the truth'" (168).

The scene is replete with irony. Orual is, of course, the one who is blind to the presence of the other and ignorant of her true identity. The veil she wove from morally imperfect dispositions clouds her view. But the god consoles her with these words: "You, woman, shall know yourself" (182). The potential for having a *personal* relationship with the god had always existed. Orual becomes a person by developing a face to meet the faces of other people and, ultimately, the gods, for "how can they meet us face to face till we have faces?" (305).

Lewis's re-presentation of the face-to-face relationship, while rooted in the ethical, transcends mere ethics. In this respect his philosophical orientation shows more affinity with the personalistic tradition of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig than with that of Levinas.¹¹ Although Levinas affirms "the dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face," transcendence for him takes place in this world alone and not in some beatific contemplation of the wholly

other (*Totality and Infinity* 78). The ethical relation between persons by itself already constitutes a vision of God.¹² Martin Buber, on the other hand, contends that one cannot face an Other without being “transfigured in God’s countenance” (82). The transfiguration of the human face leads inevitably to communion with the divine: “When a man loves a woman so that her life is present in his own, the You of her eyes allows him to gaze into a ray of the Eternal You” (154). Psyche mediates the dialogue between the human “I” and the divine “Thou” for Orual. As Lewis explains it, the soul’s vis-a-vis with God results in mutual self-revelation: “By unveiling . . . we assume the high rank of persons before Him. And He, descending, . . . reveals that in Him which is Person . . . The Person in Him . . . meets those who can welcome or at least face it. He speaks as ‘I’ when we truly call Him ‘Thou’” (*Letters to Malcolm* 33-34).

In this proximity whose alterity is absolute, the divine countenance “which glances at me and out of which I glance,” writes Rosenzweig, resembles the human countenance not because God is “my mirror, but God’s truth.” “To walk in the light of the divine countenance,” Rosenzweig concludes (423-24), one must heed “the words of the divine mouth” or the scriptural injunction (found in Micah 6.8) “to do justice and to love mercy.”

The quest for justice in *Till We Have Faces* contains intertextual echoes from the Bible. Lewis links Orual momentarily with Job, who uses a familiar trope to ask Yahweh an overwhelming question: “Why do you hide your face and look on me as your enemy?” (Job 13.24). He wonders why Yahweh refuses to speak to him, as he did in former times to Moses, “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Exod. 33.11). Orual’s array of questions are no less pointed than those of her biblical counterpart, her sense of enmity no less keen. But she cannot face the god or see “the place where all the beauty came from” (83), because from the outset she seeks revenge rather than friendship. Her monologic “babble” (305) pre-empts any kind of dialogue with the other. But “the face speaks,” Levinas points out; it is a voice that ushers in the very advent of meaning (*Totality and Infinity* 66, 206). The manifestation of the face elicits the primal word of exchange from Orual’s lips: “‘Lord, who are you?’ said I . . . ‘Lord, I am Ungir’” (291). “What is redemption,” Rosenzweig asks, “other than that the I learns to say Thou to the He?” (274). Orual’s receptiveness to the speech of the god allows him to correct her defective vision: “The voice of the god had not changed in all those years, but I had. There was no rebel in me now” (291). Through the medium of dreams the god shows Orual fulfilling

a series of burdensome tasks on Psyche's behalf. Orual's participation in her sister's sufferings not only foreshadows the great self-offering of Christ for humanity's sake, it also presages her hope for divine mercy which goes beyond what strict justice would demand. "Are the gods not just?" she asks her mentor, who replies, "Oh no, child. What would become of us if they were?" (308). Orual is truly just to Psyche when she loves her, and the reward of justice, according to the Psalmist (Ps. 17.15; cf. 26.8), consists in seeing the face of God.

Till We Have Faces, like *The Divine Comedy*, then, provides a present gloss on "another text," a "shadowy preface" of what is to be disclosed in a futurity that constitutes the ultimate meaning of the veil.¹³ Lewis follows Dante's practice of employing biblical tropes such as "face," "veil," and "mirror" to convey the successive stages of Orual's progress from spiritual darkness and unbelief to "pale enlightenment" and the full "unveiling" or *re-velation* of the Truth himself. The veil was literally a cover for the radiant face of Moses after he had been speaking to Yahweh and figuratively the relationship between the letter of the Old Testament and the spirit of the New, who is Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-16). The "conversion" of Scripture by means of a retrospective illumination is analogous to Orual's re-vision of her autobiographical scroll in the light of her own conversion: "It would be better to re-write it from the beginning . . . The past which I wrote down was not the past that I thought I had (all these years) been remembering. I did not, even when I had finished the book, see clearly many things that I see now" (263).

In her book of memory, as in Dante's (cf. Freccero 122-23), "vision" is a hermeneutic metaphor for the interpretive glance backward that restores the eyes of the soul. "The god is both the 'pagan' Cupid and somehow a participant in the Christian fabric of exchange and mercy," Colin Manlove observes (273), "working 'backwards' (if we may use such terms of acts in eternity) from Christ's life and death, in parallel with Orual's own 'working backwards'." Cupid prefigures the God of all ages who plays hide-and-seek through the features of men's faces. Orual sees him through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13.12; cf. 2 Cor. 3.18) or, as Nicholas of Cusa renders the idea, "in all faces is seen the Face of faces, veiled and in a riddle."¹⁴ The veil is removed and the enigma solved once Orual approaches the light that makes the "one Face above all worlds" visible (*Perelandra* 244): "And he was coming. The most dreadful, the most beautiful, the only dread and beauty there is, was coming" (*Till We Have Faces* 318-19).

Here, as in Dante's "marvellous vision" in the *Vita Nuova*, a Lord of terrifying aspect, "frightening to behold, yet apparently marvellously filled with joy" (5), is set to appear and overwhelm the beloved.¹⁵ This Love, for whose sake "the earth and stars and sun . . . existed" (318),¹⁶ satisfies Orual's deepest desire: "Lord, You are yourself the answer. Before your face all questions die away" (319). As the battle of words ceases, her narrative is suspended abruptly in joyful anticipation of the One—the Author himself—who will come to read it, unveil its meaning, and reveal Orual fully to herself. The epiphany of the Face binds her to silence in an endless ending, for the soul finds peace only in looking at her Lord.¹⁷

Endnotes

¹ The commentary of St. Augustine on 1 John 4:19 provides an appropriate gloss on Orual's transformation:

How could we have loved him [God] if he had not first loved us? By loving him, we became his friends; but he loved us when we were his enemies, in order to make us his friends. He loved us first and gave us the boon of loving him. What is a misshapen and deformed man doing, loving a beautiful woman? . . . Can he, by loving, change and become beautiful? . . . Our soul . . . is ugly due to iniquity; loving God makes it beautiful".(193-94)

For Emmanuel Levinas, spiritual life is not the "interiority of the beautiful soul," as Susan Handelman (294) points out, but "exteriority", that is, "the opening to the other." Lewis, however, has Orual implicitly follow the Christian tradition of trying to achieve a harmony between interiority and exteriority. He once described her as having a "naturally Christian spirit" ("*anima naturaliter Christiana*"). See *Letters* 274.

² Lewis uses George MacDonald's statement, "The one principle of hell is—I am my own," as epigraph to the fourteenth chapter of *Surprised by Joy* (212). Orual's declaration recalls that of Lilith, the eponymous heroine of MacDonald's novel that was first published in 1895, about her daughter: "I am not another's; I am my own and my daughter is mine" (*Lilith* 199). The *metanoia*, or change of heart, both heroines experience reflects the Pauline affirmation, "What? know ye not that . . . ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 19-20).

³ Apropos of Nietzsche's famous proposition, "If God existed, how could I bear not to be God?," Franz Rosenzweig remarked, "The first real human being among the philosophers was also the first who beheld God face to face—even if it was only in order to deny him" (18). Even before Nietzsche, however, the libertarian Max Stirner, sometimes dubbed the German Protogoras, had pushed the claims of the ego to set the standard of all experience still farther. Drawing on Fichte's declaration, "the ego is all," Stirner stressed the uniqueness of the finite as opposed to the absolute ego: "To be a man is not to realize the ideal of *Man*, but to present *oneself*, the individual . . . I am my species, am without norm, without model and the like" (182). *The Egoist*, the individualist review named in honour of Stirner, published some major

work of the early modernists, including Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* and chapters of *Ulysses*, as well as the poetry of Pound, H. D., and the criticism of T.S. Eliot. See Michael Levenson (70).

⁴ Wilde alters the following words of Christ: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 7.21).

⁵ In several essays Wilde extolled art for rejecting truths and faces in favour of lies and masks. In "The Critic as Artist," for example, one of his characters states, "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth" (1045). And in "The Truth of Masks," he affirmed, "in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true . . . The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks" (1078). For the affinities between Wilde and Nietzsche on this subject see Thomas Mann's article.

⁶ Orual's statement recalls the one Rousseau makes at the beginning of his *Confessions*: "So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions. Let them groan at my depravities, and blush for my misdeeds" (17).

⁷ In *Tales of Love*, Julia Kristeva provides an extended commentary on the trope of the mirror in literary theory as well as in cultural history. Relevant to my discussion here is her reference to Augustine in describing the "mirrorlike" relationship of the soul to God:

Consider this mirrorlike motion: my desire will be fulfilled through Him, for He has fulfilled his own by creating me in his image . . . Let me recall a hardly orthodox but highly significant expression of jubilatory identification of the lover with his God, in a prayer that has been attributed to Augustine: "O lord, if I were God and you Augustine, I would rather that you be God and I Augustine." (160)

Augustine's supposedly heterodox notion needs to be located. It would seem that Kristeva alludes to the following passage from St. Francis de Sales on the soul's benevolence towards God:

Ah, how dearly do I love the impossibility of being able to desire any good for you, O my God, since this comes from the incomprehensible immensity of your abundance . . . We are told that the great St. Augustine often made such acts and poured forth in an excess of love these words: "Ah, Lord, I am Augustine and you are God, but still if there were that which neither is nor can be, namely, that I were God and you were Augustine, then I would wish to change my condition with you and to become Augustine, so that you might be God!" (*On the Love of God* 250).

St. Francis considered this spiritual practice of imagining impossibilities to express the soul's insatiable desire for God as profitable. St. Augustine's prayer, moreover, must be placed in the context of what he says in the *Confessions* (22): "I should be null and void and could not exist at all, if you, my God, were not in me. Or is it rather that I should not exist, unless I existed in you? For *all things find in you their origin, their impulse, the centre of their being* (Rom. 11.36)." Augustine makes a related statement later in his narrative: "When we learn to know God, we become new men in the image of our Creator" (332). By having Orual acknowledge her true origin, Lewis models the last part of her narrative on Augustine's *Confessions* rather than on Rousseau's.

⁸ For connections between the philosophy of the face in Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas see the article by John Patrick Burke.

⁹ For Levinas the commandment “thou shalt not kill” does not mean simply “that you are not to go around firing a gun all the time. It refers, rather, to the fact that, in the course of your life, in different ways you kill someone. For example, when we sit down at the table in the morning and drink coffee, we kill an Ethiopian [sic] who doesn’t have any coffee. It is in this sense the commandment must be understood” (Tamra Wright, “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas” 173).

¹⁰ One of the sources for Lewis’s use of the trope of the face is a striking passage from George MacDonald’s *Lilith*:

Did they [the apparitions] know how they appeared to others—a death with living eyes? Had they used their faces, not for communication, not to utter thought and feeling, not to share existence with their neighbours, but to appear what they wished to appear, and conceal what they were? And, having made their faces masks, were they therefore deprived of these masks, and condemned to go without faces until they repented? (86)

¹¹ For the connections between Levinas and Buber see the article by James Ponet. For Levinas and Rosenzweig see the article by Richard A. Cohen.

¹² Levinas states, “the transcendence of the face is not enacted outside of the world, not a beatific contemplation of the other... Transcendence is not a vision of the other, but a primordial donation” (*Totality and Infinity* 172, 174). Susan Handelman quotes the following passage from Levinas to corroborate this point: “Ethics is not the corollary of the vision of God, but that vision itself” (302). In a section titled “Divine Comedy” in his essay on “God and Philosophy,” Levinas comments that the word “transcendence” has to be “put back into the significance of the whole plot of the ethical or back into the divine comedy without which it could not have arisen. That comedy is enacted equivocally between temple and theatre, but in it the laughter sticks to one’s throat when the neighbour approaches—that is, when his face, or his forsakenness, draws near” (179). John Patrick Burke elaborates on the point by saying that the dimension of the divine for Levinas is ultimately the dimension of “justice which is there primarily in the proximity to me of my neighbour in need and not through a direct manifestation of the personal God” (205 n.11). For Lewis, however, acting justly entails loving God and loving one’s neighbour for God’s sake.

¹³ See *Inf.* XV.88-90; *Par.* XXX.78-81; *Inf.* XXXIII.27.

¹⁴ Cf. the description of Yahweh in the book of Proverbs as a master craftsman “at play everywhere in his world, delighting to be with the sons of men” (8.31). The following verses from “As kingfishers catch fire,” a poem by Hopkins, are also relevant:

For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces. (90)

Nicholas of Cusa, in his mystical treatise of 1453, explains his idea as follows: “Lord, I comprehend Thy face to precede every face that may be formed, and to be the pattern and true type

of all faces, and all faces to be images of Thy face . . . Each face, then, that can look upon Thy face beholdeth naught other or differing from itself, because it beholdeth its own true type" (24).

¹⁵ Lewis refers to the *Vita Nuova* in *The Problem of Pain* to make his point that "love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness . . . even the love between the sexes is, as in Dante, 'a lord of terrible aspect'" (27-29). Orual progresses from seeing the "ruinous face" of Ungit to seeing "the most dreadful, the most beautiful" face of the god of Love.

¹⁶ The powerful closing scene in which Orual anticipates meeting the god of Love, for whose sake "the earth and stars and sun . . . existed," refers unmistakably to the climax of Dante's journey in *Paradiso* (XXXIII.145) when he contemplates the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

¹⁷Cf. Dante, *Par.* XXX.100-102. The *Vita Nuova* ends on a similar note: the prospect of seeing the miraculous vision of the Trinity inspires Dante to remain silent.

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