Being Psyche: The Jungian Soul in Glome

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Abstract
In C.S. Lewis’s *Till We Have Faces*, Orual undergoes a psychological transformation as a predecessor to her spiritual conversion. Understanding her psychic journey through the lens of a Jungian archetypal story assists the reader in understanding how she is eventually able to approach the gods bareface.

Additional Keywords
Lewis, C.S. *Till We Have Faces*; Davidman, Joy—Influence on C.S. Lewis; Jungian analysis of C.S. Lewis's works; Anima and anima figures in literature and folklore; Individuation in fantasy
Of Lewis was haunted by the myth of Eros and Psyche ever since his days as an undergraduate at Oxford University. In The Golden Ass by Apuleius, an old woman tells the story of Eros and Psyche to a weeping girl in an attempt to comfort her after the destruction of her marriage. The woman describes three sisters, all illustrious in beauty, but the youngest, Psyche, appears to be an incarnation of Venus herself. Psyche’s sisters plan to sabotage her marriage to the winged son of Venus out of envy. Lewis attempted to write his myth retold twice, once in couplets and once as a ballad, but with Psyche’s eldest sister, Orual, “in the right and the gods in the wrong” (Myers 2). Years later, he returned to his rendition of the tale, composing Till We Have Faces [TWHF] as his final novel, which he considered to be his finest literary achievement. However, in this version, Orual is not in the right and the gods in the wrong. On the contrary, Orual comes to learn that the gods were the answer she sought all along.

Her eventual surrender to the divine would not be possible without the psychological transformation she undergoes throughout the novel. Many readers identify the connections between TWHF and the analytical psychology of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung. Lewis was deeply familiar with Jung’s work (Myers 197) and Jungian concepts are so prominent in the novel that Lewis anticipated his readers would bring the theories to his text. In a letter to a reader named Patricia, he said that he expected “some Jungianisms do come in” (Letters to Children 107).1 Jung offers a set of tools that assist the reader in understanding Orual’s psychic process that culminates with her conversion. TWHF re-imagines the myth of Eros and Psyche with an emphasis on the deepest recesses of Orual’s psyche.

Jung and Lewis shared the belief that myth is a dwelling-place of deep truth. Jung posited that “myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul” (Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious [“Archetypes”] 6). Myths reveal the archetypes, the psychic structures that exist in the unconscious. While Jung analyzed myth in psychological terms, Lewis

1 Lewis assured Patricia that he intended the primary framework of his novel to be Christian, not Jungian. In the pre-Christian world of Glome, Orual speaks to the god she meets.
turned to myth for theological truth. He held that the Christian myth was just as valuable, if not more so, than any system of beliefs: “A man who disbelieved the Christian story as fact but continually fed on it as myth would, perhaps, be more spiritually alive than one who assented and did not think much about it” (“Myth Became Fact” 59). He believed that many myths, from Norse to Egyptian, pointed toward Christianity. Both Jung’s and Lewis’s views of myth contribute to a holistic understanding of TWHF as a source of psychological and spiritual truth. The myth of Eros and Psyche tells an archetypal story in which the soul (Psyche) is wed to love (Eros). In Lewis’s rendition, the eldest sister of Psyche must embark on an internal journey through her psyche (and the archetypes that exist within her own unconscious) to meet the God of Love. She “undergoes a ‘psychic journey’ into the dark realm inside her psyche, i.e., the unknown part of her selfhood” (Chou 341). Orual’s journey through her psyche is completed with her submission to divinity, symbolic of Christian conversion. Her psychological transformation allows her to discover the spiritual truth that Lewis found abundant in myth. The psychological and spiritual implications of the novel are best understood when examined together. To examine Orual’s psychological transformation alone misses the message Lewis intended to convey. On the other hand, Orual’s conversion would not be possible if not for her journey through the self.

Orual intends to make her complaint of the god as if “before a judge” (I.1.3), but after “the change which the writing wrought in [her]” (II.1.287), redirects her critique toward herself. Her writing is “a labour of sifting and sorting, separating motive from motive and both from pretext” (II.1.290) that challenges her previous assumptions about the gods. As a result of her labor, Orual’s memoir becomes no longer the complaint she intends to write, but a documentation of her psychological process Jung called “individuation.” In Bareface: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s Last Novel, Doris T. Myers states that individuation is “the basis of Orual’s whole story. […] The awareness that comes from writing her response to the story is the real beginning of her individuation” (201-202). As a result of her individuation process, Orual’s psyche becomes more balanced, and she is a distinctly more reliable narrator. Her spiritual and psychological transformation are a change wrought within her, but also result in a change in character noted by Arnom in his postscript when he describes Orual as “the most wise, just, valiant, fortunate, and merciful of all the princes known in our parts of the world” (II.4.352). She no longer blames the gods for

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2 In “Myth Became Fact,” Lewis noted that the myths of Balder and Osiris point to the story of Christ, the myth that became fact (59).

3 Citations are given in book.chapter.page format.
Key to Orual’s individuation is the recognition of her shadow. Jung identified integration of the shadow (the dark, unknown aspect of the self) as the first step of self-analysis. He also emphasized the immense difficulty of confronting and integrating the shadow, noting that it is often met with considerable resistance. Jung reminisced on an encounter with one particular patient who resisted his initial confrontation of his shadow. “A forty-five-year-old patient who had suffered from a compulsive neurosis since he was twenty and had become completely cut off from the world once said to me: ‘But I can never admit to myself that I’ve wasted the best twenty-five years of my life!’” (Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self [Aion] 10). Orual expresses a similar sentiment when she laments the incorrect premises of her complaint: “It would be better to rewrite it from the beginning, but I think there’s no time for that” (II.1.287). Through the process of writing her complaint to the gods, Orual comes to reflect on her falsehoods.

Orual is unable to gain sight of her shadow when her view is obstructed by the veil. She believes that her veil is one of her greatest strengths (259), but uses it to hide the ugliness of her soul as well as her face. There are two distinct instances in which the removal of the veil allows for Orual to progress in her journey through the soul: first in her vision of the Pillar Room, and later before the gods. In the Pillar Room, Orual sees herself in the mirror as Ungit. Her ugliness in both face and character are too painful to admit, and her recognition of herself nearly drives her to suicide. In her next vision, she is unveiled before the gods. She must read her complaint, baring her lies, selfishness, and ugliness to the judge and countless gazers. Without confronting the parts of herself that she would rather hide behind the veil, Orual would have been unable to approach the gods bareface.

When Orual begins writing, her soul is not unlike the faceless black stone that represents Ungit when “in the furthest recess of her house where she sits it is so dark that you cannot see her well” (I.1.2). The Priest claims that “holy places are dark places” (I.5.58); the holiest, darkest place depicted in the novel is not the house of Ungit, but Orual’s psyche. To answer Orual’s question to the Fox (I.13.161), perhaps there are such things as soul-houses. In addition to the house of Ungit, there are a number of rooms and houses in the novel that illustrate various aspects of Orual’s psyche. In his note following the novel, Lewis declared that when composing his rendition of the myth “[t]he central alteration in my own version consists in making Psyche’s palace invisible to normal mortal eyes” (356). Orual is unable to see Psyche’s palace on the Mountain, and believes she is playing a game. Before undergoing the psychic
process of individuation, Orual is blind to what brings Psyche such abundant joy.

Orual’s vision of digging through the layers of the Pillar Room is a physical representation of her digging through the depths of her soul to arrive at a conclusion that fills her with despair. Myers makes the connection between Orual in the Pillar Room with Jung’s representation of the human personality in “Mind and Earth.” Jung also paints a picture of the soul as a house, with an upper-story built in the nineteenth century and a ground floor from the sixteenth century (though modeled on an eleventh century tower). Under the ground floor is a Roman cellar, and under that a “choked up cave” with stone tools lying on the floor. The Pillar Room evokes imagery similar to Jung’s cave. Orual uses the tools to dig until she sees the part of her that she detests the most. Of what lies beneath the surface of the cave, Jung said “we remain totally unconscious” (Civilization in Transition 31). Orual digs to find a layer of the soul-house so deep and dark that she cannot dig any deeper. In her next vision, she finds herself in the warm sunlight under blue skies. Perhaps this is what Psyche means when she says “[D]eath opens a door out of a little, dark room (that’s all the life we have known before it) into a great, real place where the true sun shines and we shall meet—” (I.7.83-84).

In her final vision, Orual must read her complaint out loud. She writes of the vision four days later after being found lying in the grass. “We may still wonder where exactly is the channel for the mortal Orual to undergo these transcendent(al and surreal experiences” (Chou 352). It is not clarified exactly where or how her encounter with the god took place, though she describes it as “certainly vision and no dream” (TWHF II.5.325). Christine Hsiu-Chin Chou offers her answer: “the psyche is the sacred locality wherein each human being can discover the truth of selfhood, meet with the numinous face to face, and even recover or restore the sanctity of his or her personhood” (Chou 352). In the vision, the Fox tells Psyche that “all, even Psyche, are born in the house of Ungit. And all must get free from her” (TWHF II.4.343). Orual learns that holy places are dark places because she finds her complaints against the gods—and the answer—by delving into the dark, unconscious corners of her own psyche.

Orual refers to her writing as the first step in preparing her for “the gods’ surgery” (TWHF II.1.287). The probing of her wound is metaphorical, but elicits the imagery of penetrating the surface identities (i.e. the shadow) to probe the inner psyche. While the writing process and confrontation of the shadow are crucial to Orual’s recognition of her flawed beliefs, neither one is her internal work in its entirety. Jung emphasized that integration of the shadow “marks the first stage in the analytic process, and that without it a recognition of anima and animus is impossible” (Aion 22). The god’s surgery delves into the innermost part of Orual’s soul: her anima.
During his career, Jung began to evaluate the nature and value of his psychoanalytic work. One topic he pondered was whether his research was science or art. He heard a female “voice” in his mind respond: “It is art” (Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections 156). He maintained a dialogue with the internalized female voice. The voice grew into a fuller personality, which Jung referred to as an “anima” (the female counterpart to a man) or “animus” (male counterpart to a woman). “While Anima is Greek for soul, Animus is Greek for mind or spirit,” Jungian scholar Robin Robertson explains, “because the course of development has already forced a man to integrate his mind, a woman her soul” (122). The goal of man is to develop his soul, and the goal of woman to develop her mind. Despite being a woman, Orual’s key task is to develop her soul (anima) rather than her mind (animus). If developing the soul, not the mind, is necessary for Orual’s move toward psychic balance, then Lewis’s novel is incompatible with the gender dynamic of a woman developing her masculine anima.

Orual believes that she has failed at womanhood, and it would have been better for her to have been born a man. Orual falsely identifies being born as a woman as the root of her misery, even going so far as to claim that “the one sin the gods never forgive us is that of being born women” (I.20.265). She spends much of her life wallowing in self-pity, blaming her gender and her physical appearance. She believes “nature’s hand slipped when she made me anyway. If I’m to be hard-featured as a man, why shouldn’t I fight like a man too?” (I.17.224). Her father, King Trom, did not want daughters because he found sons more valuable. Even Bardia says “It’s a thousand pities, Lady, that you weren’t a man. […] You’ve a man’s reach and a quick eye” (I.6.73). She excels in her masculine roles, and must develop her anima by finding harmony with her feminine soul.

In her essay “Recovering Femininity in C.S. Lewis’s Till We Have Faces,” Monika Hilder identifies two types of heroes at play in the text: the classical masculine hero and the spiritual female hero. Hilder argues that Orual succeeds as the classical hero by defeating Argan: “As the ‘ugly’ but intelligent woman in a patriarchal world that colonizes females, seeing them as either beautiful objects or undesirable chattel, Orual succeeds in becoming a classic ‘masculine’ hero” (100). After killing Argan, her legs begin to shake, and she feels as if

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4 Jung’s descriptions of femininity and masculinity are often considered outdated and sexist by modern standards. Verena Kast believed that Jung used “the established gender stereotypes of his time to define what is female and what is male” (Kast 113). Jung’s wife, Emma Jung, contributed her perspective on the contrasexual nature of the anima, stating that men “have to accept what is regarded as less valuable, what is weak, passive, subjective, illogical, bound to nature—in a word, femininity” (Animus and Anima 41).
something has been taken from her. Orual wonders “if women feel like that when they lose their virginity” (I.19.250). As a woman, Orual should have been beautiful enough to marry a man, consummate the marriage, and live as a wife and mother. Instead, her victory consummates her journey toward becoming the classical masculine hero. Orual becomes not only a woman performing the socio-political role of a man, but outperforms the men in leadership and swordsmanship. Being a female with a feminine anima breaks Jung’s conception of gender and the psyche, but breaking gender rules is nothing new for her.

Hilder provides essential insights of Orual’s union with Psyche, but Chou notes that her analysis focuses on theological feminism without “the psychic process that changes Orual from a personality of ugliness and disobedience to a protagonist of ‘femininity,’ i.e. a new creature embodying what Hilder suggests is ‘the Christian ethos of obedience to the divine’” (Chou 343). Hilder’s interpretation of gender in TWHF is a crucial addition to the study of the novel that can be further developed by examining the psychic process that leads to Orual following Psyche’s lead in feminine heroism. Orual’s psychic process demonstrates that the Christian ethos Hilder refers to, obedience to the divine, is the ultimate work of the soul. The psychological and spiritual transformation are inseparable; as Orual grows in character, she turns to Psyche and, eventually, to the gods.

Psyche plays a literal and symbolic role in Orual’s transformation. On a literal level, Psyche is the Accursed, left for the god on the mountain, and must complete Ungit’s tasks. However, Psyche takes on another role for Orual as a spiritual guide, just as the anima serves the role of “guide to the unconscious” (Hopcke 108). She personifies the spiritual heroism necessary for Orual to become conscious of her feminine anima—to develop her soul. Unlike the shadow, which can become fully known and integrated, the anima is autonomous as a separate aspect of the self. “Though the effects of anima and animus can be made conscious, they themselves are factors transcending consciousness and beyond the reach of perception and volition. Hence they remain autonomous despite the integration of their contents” (Aion 20). Psyche’s character comes to represent the autonomous aspect of Orual’s soul. As a result, Orual’s sanctification is contingent on her ability to integrate the spiritual attributes of Psyche with her own self.

Jung described the loss of one’s anima as catastrophic, characterized by “a diminution of vitality, of flexibility, and of human kindness” (Archetypes 71). Orual exhibits possessiveness over Psyche, telling the gods “She was mine. Mine. Do you not know what the word means? Mine! You’re thieves, seducers” (II.3.333). She believes that she has a right to Psyche that could not be nullified by any amount of happiness the gods could give her. She is blinded by her own
egoism and jealousy. In addition to believing that Psyche is her own, Orual believes that she is her own, and submission or devotion to god is futile.

In order to be once again united with Psyche, she must cultivate the wisdom leading to the developed stage of the anima. The developed anima serves as a spiritual guide and a mediator between the consciousness and unconsciousness. When Orual meets Psyche on the mountain, “Psyche’s depiction as the emblem of the feminine soul is complete. Psyche, ‘brightface,’ laughing, and, although in tattered clothing, not showing any hint of poverty or suffering […], illustrates the ideal feminine soul who has found fulfillment in union with the masculine divine” (Hilder 128). In an act of selfishness, Orual convinces Psyche to disobey the gods. She wants to keep Psyche for herself. The ugliness that made her unworthy of being the Great Offering is largely characterized by her deluded belief that she is more worthy of Psyche than the gods. When Orual asks King Trom to sacrifice her to the Shadowbrute, he leads her to a mirror and reminds her that Ungit demands the best in the land. Orual believes her physical ugliness is what makes her unworthy as an offering, but it is spiritual ugliness she must overcome. Psyche, who is illustrious in physical and spiritual beauty, is left on the Grey Mountain for the Shadowbrute. In order to be Psyche, Orual must also be an offering. She does not need to be beautiful (in a physical sense) to achieve feminine heroism. Rather, she must emulate Psyche’s spiritual beauty in order to achieve union with divinity. “It takes Orual her entire life’s journey to overcome her anathema to ‘feminine’ obedience to the ‘masculine’ divine. Her journey may be read as the archetypal human journey: an arduous path out of spiritual ugliness into well-being” (Hilder 130). Her ruinous face becomes representative of a ruinous soul that must find beauty in spiritual redemption.

Her visions reveal that Eros’s claim “You also shall be Psyche” (I.15.197) is a predictive statement that comes to fruition when Orual takes on the tasks assigned to Psyche by Ungit. It is Orual who “bore the anguish. But [Psyche] achieved the tasks” (II.4.343). Orual took on the concrete labor of sifting and sorting the seeds along with Psyche in her vision while also completing the abstract work of sifting and sorting through her soul. While Orual bore the anguish of the internal sifting, she could not have achieved the task without her psyche, the feminine counterpart. Upon Psyche’s return from the land of the dead, Orual declares to Psyche “Never again will I call you mine; but all there is of me shall be yours” (II.4.348). She no longer envies the gods for taking Psyche from her, but becomes an offering herself alongside Psyche. Orual’s ugliness

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5 A prominent literary example of a developed anima is Beatrice in Dante’s Inferno. Dante’s fictitious journey through the afterlife is in part to find his lost Beatrice, who serves as a catalyst for his spiritual transformation. Psyche and Beatrice serve similar purposes in their respective stories as the romanticized female and spiritual guide.
vanishes into the second beautiful Psyche, her true redeemed self” (Hilder 146). Divine beauty could only be achieved through the obedience and devotion modeled by Psyche.

Abigail Santamaria writes in Joy: Poet, Seeker, and the Woman Who Captivated C.S. Lewis that Lewis and his wife, Joy Davidman, conceived the novel’s premise over a bottle of whiskey and discussion of myth. When Lewis initially read the myth in his atheist days, he claimed that Apuleius got it wrong; rather, he “imagined a version in which Venus was a fable, Psyche’s sacrifice a consequence of cultural superstition, and the palace merely her delusion. The sisters, then, were mercifully bringing Psyche into reality” (288). After his conversion, his view of the myth, specifically the actions of Psyche’s two sisters, shifted. He began to write from the perspective of the eldest sister and named her Orual. Orual’s epiphany in Book II mirrors both Lewis and Davidman’s conversion to Christianity. “[Lewis] could have been speaking for both himself and Joy when he wrote of the story, ‘[I] could be said to have worked on it most of [my] life’” (289). Myers also notes the autobiographical qualities of Till We Have Faces: “In Orual we see much of the real Jack Lewis—his loss of his mother, his disrespect for his father, his desire for closeness, his struggle with disbelief” (Myers 2). Davidman and Lewis “infused their parallel spiritual journeys into the narrative” (Santamaria 289). Similarly, Orual’s memoir is the work of her life, documenting every moment that contributed to her psychological development and spiritual conversion. The understanding of Psyche as inseparable from Orual’s psyche is not limited to the Jungian conversation of the anima; Psyche is within us all.

Psyche’s longing for the Grey Mountain is reflective of a spiritual longing expressed by Davidman’s lifelong quest for Fairyland. She imagined Fairyland as a place of perfect love with no suffering. In Fairyland, there is “love without crying, / honey without cloying, / death without dying!” (Davidman 222). Fairyland took its final form in her imagination as heaven (Santamaria 3). The ache in her heart for heaven existed long before her conversion to Christianity. She would visit Fairyland in her dreams (Santamaria 3) and wrote “we always woke, / we never got there” (Davidman 222). When speaking of the Grey Mountain, Psyche describes a similar type of longing that is both wistful and joyous. “It was when I was happiest that I longed most. […] [B]ecause it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, ‘Psyche come!’” (I.7.85). Lewis echoes the sentiments of Davidman and Psyche in his essay “Weight of Glory”:

In speaking of this desire for our own far off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of
you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence. (“Weight of Glory” 29-30)

Orual does not understand the longing Psyche, Davidman, and Lewis describe, and cannot even see the palace when Psyche leads her to the stairs of the gate. Her blindness to the palace is not because she is incapable of the inconsolable longing, but because of the work that must first be done within her soul. The writing, the sorting and sifting, the digging—all of it leads to her arrival in the pasturage of the gods. The walls are painted with images of Psyche completing the tasks from Orual’s visions. The work is done; Orual and Psyche are reunited.

Eros’s claim “you shall also be Psyche” is not merely a predictive statement to Orual, but an invitation to the reader to begin the inward journey toward their own dark and holy self. Readers of Lewis’s novel can use “[Orual’s] pen to probe [their] wound” (II.1.287). Through doing so, Orual and the reader gain a clearer vision of “the Soul’s union with Love” (Myers 137). The transformative themes of Lewis’s novel are not new concepts, but an ancient myth told anew through his own (and Joy’s) spirituality. Orual narrates from within a pre-Christian society, but she speaks to the God she meets: “I know now Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer” (II.4.351). Her book begins as a complaint against the gods, but by means of the writing process, is transformed into a prayer. With Orual’s journey as a prompt, the reader can also delve into the darkest recesses of their psyche, and thus find the soul’s first movement toward the holy. We are all Orual. We are all born in the house of Ungit. And we, too, shall be Psyche.

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