

## REFLECTING CHRIST IN LIFE AND ART: THE DIVINE DANCE OF SELF-GIVING IN C. S. LEWIS'S *TILL WE HAVE FACES*

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ABSTRACT. This essay examines how C. S. Lewis, in *Till We Have Faces*, illustrates the Christian's journey of sanctification through the pre-Christian story of his main character, Orual. She must gain two 'faces' in this process that correspond to the two books she writes. First, she must gain the face of self-knowledge through humility. The key components to this face are her memory and the act of writing of her first book, which together create a mirror to reflect her sin back to her. Second, Orual must gain the face of transformation through divine agape love. The humility she learned from her first face now allows her to enter what Lewis describes as the dance of self-giving, which is a crucial element to the second face of transformation in its mortification of Orual's sin and selfishness. In the second face, Orual gains access to an 'actual language' that transcends merely verbal words and involves worshipping the god with her whole being, as do we in being transformed to reflect Christ more clearly. Orual's writing is a form of this 'actual language', and her second book that shares her personal encounter with the god of the mountain reflects to others the beauty of the divine. Similarly, Christians should reflect Jesus with their lives and their art, which are inextricably intertwined because a life lived for Him is the highest form of artwork they can create.

KEYWORDS: *Till We Have Faces*, memory, language, sanctification, agape love

Daylight, I must wait for the sunrise/  
I must think of a new life/  
And I mustn't give in/  
When the dawn comes tonight will be a memory too/  
And a new day will begin.

—'Memory', Andrew Lloyd Webber

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In his novel *Till We Have Faces*, C. S. Lewis presents a Christian story of sanctification by retelling the myth of Cupid and Psyche through the eyes of the oldest princess, Orual, of Glome, a fictional pagan kingdom (Lewis 1956: 312-13). To achieve salvation and sanctification, Orual undergoes a two-step process that requires her to mature spiritually, or in the novel's terminology, to receive two 'faces': first, the face of self-knowledge through humility, and second, the face of transformation through divine agape love. Orual possessively loves her younger half-sister, Psyche, who is beautiful in both form and spirit and therefore deemed a sacrifice to Glome's god of the mountain. But when a devastated Orual later travels to the mountain to bury Psyche's remains, she makes a surprising discovery: Psyche is alive and well and claims to be the god's wife. Instead of rejoicing in Psyche's newfound happiness, however, Orual's violent jealousy overtakes her better judgment. She blackmails Psyche into breaking a promise to the god, who drives Psyche into exile and makes Orual a mysterious promise: that she will 'know her work' and 'also be Psyche' (Lewis 1956: 174). Wracked by guilt, Orual returns home, succeeds to their father's throne, and spends her reign hating the gods, believing in her own righteousness, and refusing true interaction with the gods by veiling her morally ugly 'face'. Toward the end of her life, she challenges the gods to answer her charges against them, which begins her journey toward self-knowledge. Her memory and the act of writing are crucial in this process. In them, Orual sees a reflection of her morally ugly self, and they induce her spiritual awakening to her character flaws and need to be cured of them—a transformation only the god can offer. Once she achieves her first face of self-knowledge through humility by admitting her shortcomings, the god bestows upon her the second face of transformation through agape love. She thereby attains the status of a 'person' before the divine and enters into a wordless relationship with the god by accessing an 'actual' language that transcends verbal words. In learning this language, she enters the dance of self-giving, through which she gains her true personality and becomes a mirror reflecting the beauty of the divine.

### **The Role of Memory in Spiritual Formation**

To understand the journey Orual undertakes to reach her first face, we must first understand the importance of memory in spiritual formation for Lewis. In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Lewis's character remarks upon the proper, perfect role that memory plays after a member of his race courts his wife and has children:

[T]hen he remembers all this, and boils it inside him and makes it into poems and wisdom... A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered. You are speaking, *Hman*, as if the pleasure were one thing and the memory another. It is all one thing... What you call remembering is the last part of the pleasure, as the *crah* is

the last part of a poem. When you and I met, the meeting was over very shortly, it was nothing. Now it is growing something as we remember it. But still we know very little about it. What it will be when I remember it as I lie down to die, what it makes in me all my days till then—that is the real meeting (Lewis 1938: 74).

This practice is reminiscent of Mary, who, after the Wise Men visited the baby Jesus, ‘treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19, ESV). For Lewis, experience and memory are intimately related because the pleasure, or the experience, reaches its fruition once its enriching effects can be later comprehended in the broader context that memory provides. The character who expresses these thoughts, however, belongs to an unfallen race, and therefore his life’s pleasures are coterminous with his experiences. In a fallen world, not every experience will be pleasurable and immediately capable of becoming fully formed through memory, and therefore such is unachievable for us until our salvation in Christ.

For our memory to reach the epitome Lewis envisions, it must submit to the heavenly purification he describes in *The Great Divorce* that reconciles our experiences with our memory through sanctification:

[B]oth good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective. Not only this valley but all their earthly past will have been Heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on Earth too, will then be seen by the damned to have been Hell. That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, ‘No future bliss can make up for it’, not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory. And of some sinful pleasure they say ‘Let me have but this and I’ll take the consequences’: little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin... The good man’s past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of Heaven: the bad man’s past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness (Lewis 1946b: 69).

The dark lies of hell twist our memories so that we falsely recall our lives as nothing but despair, whereas the light from heaven illuminates what we first thought were deserts and reveals them as oases. To gain this true sight of our past, however, we must participate in what Lewis calls in *The Problem of Pain* the ‘dance’ of ‘self-giving’ where ‘the great Master Himself leads the revelry, giving Himself eternally to His creatures in the generation, and back to Himself in the sacrifice, of the Word’ (Lewis 1940: 157-58). Participating with Christ in this dance aligns our will with His; tellingly, Lewis terms such union with God ‘an unveiling, a surrender, of [our souls]’ (Lewis 1940: 156). To combine Lewis’s ideas, this unveiling or surrender is the gateway to heaven, which does not so much alter the events of the past as it gives us true eyes to see God’s work in our lives more clearly.

To ‘unveil’ in this manner, we must first undergo the four stages of any interest or relationship Lewis identifies in his essay ‘Talking About Bicycles’. In the Unenchanted Age, we know nothing about the interest or the beloved; but once we do, the Enchanted Age promises more than it can fulfill:

In that sense the second age was a mirage. But a mirage of something... Whether there is, or whether there is not, in this world or in any other, the kind of happiness which one’s first experiences of cycling seemed to promise, still, on any view, it is something to have had the idea of it. The value of the thing promised remains even if that particular promise was false—even if all possible promises of it are false (Lewis 1986: 84).

Next comes the age of Disenchantment, which Lewis’s interlocutor in the essay entered after he had been married for some time. Finally, though, we reach the mature Re-enchanted Age and appreciate the promise the Enchanted Age initially offered:

I don’t think I could explain to a bachelor how there comes a time when you look back on that first mirage, perfectly well aware that it was a mirage, and yet, seeing all the things that have come out of it, things the boy and girl could never have dreamed of, and feeling also that *to remember it is, in a sense, to bring it back to reality*, so that under all the other experiences *it is still there like a shell lying at the bottom of a clear, deep pool*—and that nothing would have happened at all without it—so that even where it was least true it was telling you important truths in the only form you would then understand (Lewis 1986: 86; emphasis added).

In the Re-enchanted Age, we gain the maturity to see truly the joy foreshadowed by the mirage of the Enchanted Age: ‘But again and again the mere fact of riding [the bicycle] brings back a delicious whiff of memory. I recover the feelings of the second age’ (Lewis 1986: 84). Once we mature past believing the mirage to be a ‘recipe for happiness as [we] then thought’, our memory helps us understand that the mirage, as such, raised an emotion the thing itself could not fulfill (Lewis 1986: 84). The interlocutor illustrates this idea with a donkey for whom the sniff of a carrot raises an emotion that no ‘actual eating could satisfy’, which is ‘the real mark of a human’ (Lewis 1986: 84-85). The mark of humanity accords with his description from *Mere Christianity* of our longing for heaven: ‘If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world’ (Lewis 1952: 136-37). For Lewis, this yearning, which he dubs ‘Joy’ or Sehnsucht, is not an end in itself, but rather a signpost pointing us toward God (Lewis 1955: 238). Only in the Re-enchanted Age do we understand the ‘mirage’ of the Enchanted Age as a cardinal direction urging us onward and upward to God’s deeper and greater reality pervading our world. To reach the Re-enchanted Age, however, we must participate in God’s

moral law of self-giving through taking our places in the divine dance and thereby align our wills to His. Through Orual, Lewis demonstrates that the path toward salvation lies in our memory and its role in bringing us to self-realization of our sin.

### **Orual's Two Memories**

In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis remarks upon the depth of human capacity for self-deception: 'I do not think it is our fault that we cannot tell the real truth about ourselves; the persistent, life-long, inner murmur of spite, jealousy, prurience, greed and self-complacency, simply will not go into words' (Lewis 1940: 53). This comment also describes Orual's initial inability to confess the 'real truth' about herself, the 'speech which has lain at the center of [her] soul for years' that the gods eventually 'd[i]g out' of her, as a result of her sinfulness deforming her memory (Lewis 1956: 294). Consequently, her memory does not bring to fruition prior pleasures as in *Out of the Silent Planet*, nor to illuminate her long-ago agonies by the light of heaven as in *The Great Divorce*. Instead, her memory has the dimming, blurring effect of hell, which is apparent when she tries to recall the details of her argument with Psyche and her subsequent fleeting vision of the god's palace: 'By remembering it too often I have blurred the memory itself' (Lewis 1956: 117). Her selfishness distorts her memory into a selective narrative that bolsters only her goodness, as when she insists her blackmail of Psyche stemmed from true love, denies her jealousy of Psyche, and accuses the gods of giving her 'no clear sign' about the true identity of Psyche's husband when in fact they gave her a glimpse of his palace (Lewis 1956: 152, 245, 249). Like the grieving mother in *The Great Divorce* who refuses to accept her son's death, Orual wishes to freeze time in an attempt to possess Psyche and her beauty for herself while denying her culpability for her moral flaws and Psyche's exile. Orual's hellish memory reinforces her self-deception and deliberate entrapment of herself in the Enchanted Age, which she unwittingly admits when she says of her time with Psyche, '[I]n my memory it seems to have been all springs and summers' (Lewis 1956: 22).

Orual, like all of us, is incapable of escaping her misshapen memory and telling the truth about herself because she does not understand and therefore cannot communicate her fallen nature without divine assistance. The gods begin their intervention by purifying her memory through a story that acts as a mirror to the ugliness of her sin. When she visits the temple of a new goddess, revealed to be Psyche, the priest tells Orual a tale about Psyche's jealous older sister. Although some of the facts are not completely accurate, the priest's story exposes Orual's twisted love to her, just as Nathan's story in the Old Testament awakened David to his sin. As Os Guinness observes, this

approach ‘hoist[s] [the listener] by his own petard’ by compelling him to see the truth for himself (Guinness 2015: 23).

Glimpsing her sin in the mirror of the priest’s story spurs Orual to defend herself by writing her first book, which encapsulates her initial faulty memory. In so writing, Orual unearths what Sharon Jebb (Jebb 2011: 120) notes Lewis calls the ‘forgotten past that enslaves [her]’ (Lewis 1969: 12). In other words, in mirroring and laying bare her sin and inward focus by excavating events that contradict the self-reflexive narrative she tried to impose upon her life, such as the suppressed happy memories with her overlooked sister Redival, her writing expands her perception to realities beyond herself (Lewis 1956: 254). Through liberating Orual from her narrowly selfish memory, her writing reveals the truthful version of her past and assists her in recognizing the divine as the ground of being. Such an acknowledgement of God allows us to examine accurately both our own being and our own memory of being, as Orual illustrates. Only when she admits the gods’ preeminence can her memory be cleansed to act as a new mirror reflecting the god and his work in her life and thereby serve as a corrective lens to the vision of her cherrypicked, misremembered past.

The structure of *Till We Have Faces* itself reflects this central role Orual’s memory plays in her journey toward the first face. The first part of the novel comprises Orual’s first book: her charges against the gods, which she reads when summoned before a divine court. Upon realizing her flaws, she writes her second book, the second part of the novel, which captures the accurate, purified second memory she receives in meeting the god in her final vision. Being close to death, Orual does not have time to rewrite the first book; however, she refuses to leave it standing alone:

Since I cannot mend the book, I must add to it. To leave it as it was would be to die perjured; I know so much more than I did about the woman who wrote it. What began the change was the very writing itself. Let no one lightly set about such a work. Memory, once waked, will play the tyrant. I found I must set down (for I was speaking as before judges and must not lie) passions and thoughts of my own which I had clean forgotten. 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. The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the gods’ surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound (Lewis 1956: 253-54).

As she recognizes in observing ‘the change the writing wrought in me’, Orual’s act of writing in self-defense ironically initiates what she tried and failed to accomplish earlier in life out of guilt over her blackmail of Psyche: her own mortification. But to begin the process of truly dying before [she] die[s]’, as the god commands, and therefore receive her first face, Orual must

with divine aid stare herself and her depravity down in the mirror of her own writing (Lewis 1956: 279).

### **Veiled ‘Contemplation’ as Sub-Human**

To gain the first face of self-knowledge through humility, Orual must unmask her morally ugly face by confronting her flaws. Critical to understanding the journey she undergoes is first understanding Orual’s suppression of her flawed self through her veil and her status as Queen. Orual takes to wearing the veil after her blackmail of Psyche to break her promise to her god-husband: ‘It is a sort of treaty made with my ugliness. There had been a time in childhood when I did not yet know I was ugly. Then there was a time... when I believed, as girls do... that I could make it more tolerable by this or that done to my clothes or my hair. Now, I chose to be veiled’ (Lewis 1956: 180-81). Ostensibly, the veil conceals her physical unattractiveness, but given the timing of her choice to wear it, the veil’s true purpose is to hide her moral ugliness from both herself and from others. Immediately afterwards, she assumes the throne and attempts to lose herself in her new title: ‘I am the Queen; I’ll kill Orual too’ (Lewis 1956: 225). The non-persona of the Queen, however, compounds the suppression of her identity and does not truly put Orual and her selfishness to death; rather, they are simply in a limbo that inhibits any change while the Queen performs her royal duties (Lewis 1956: 225). Through her title and veil, Orual becomes both respected and feared, and she notes that speculation about her veil runs wild: ‘The best story was that I had no face at all’ (Lewis 1956: 228).

Indeed, Orual does not have a ‘face’, or moral and spiritual maturity, because she refuses to recognize her self-centeredness—in other words, her sin. This sinful, veiled ‘face’ is no face at all as far as the divine is concerned, for her veil keeps others at arms’ length in a distorted form of Lewis’s concept of Contemplation. In his semi-autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis explains that when we attend to an object or a person, we are ‘Enjoying’ the relationship, but as soon as we examine the feeling itself, we are removed from Enjoyment and are ‘Contemplating’ the thing or individual (Lewis 1955: 217-18). His essay ‘Meditation in a Toolshed’ elaborates on this idea. If we look ‘along the beam’ of light at the object it illuminates, we are in the throes of Enjoyment, whereas when we step back to observe the beam itself, we are then looking ‘at the beam’ and are in Contemplation (Lewis 1970: 212). Thus, ‘looking along’ the beam is akin to Enjoyment, and ‘looking at’ the beam is akin to Contemplation.

In Orual’s case, the wearing of the veil combined with her assumption of the throne encourages others to Contemplate the deeds of the Queen as a figurehead while simultaneously preventing them from Enjoying Orual as a person and seeing her moral failings. The mask of the Queen, therefore, is a

non-persona that indicates her attempt to make herself less of a person. But to obtain the understanding she claims she craves and gain her first true face before the gods, she must unmask her pre-existing, morally ugly face and identify her specific sins through divine grace. This is the same process non-believers must undergo before they can accept Christ: they must admit they cannot attain goodness on their own to understand their need for Jesus as their Savior.

### **Orual's Despair, Pride, and Disordered Loves**

Orual's primary sin lies in her self-centeredness, which spins a web of other interconnected sins, including her despair and pride. As Peter Kreeft explains, these vices are 'twin brothers' because '[t]here is a secret pride in despair—a tragic grandeur, an overweening claim unfulfilled—and there is a secret despair at being human in pride's demand to play God' (Kreeft 1992: 103). Orual embodies these sins in her dealings with those closest to her. She displays her despair after she wins a swordfight against the prince of another kingdom and anticipates celebrating her victory with the captain of her guards, Bardia, who leaves unexpectedly upon receiving word his wife is in labor. A sulking Orual drinks too much at the following feast: 'For the way [the alcohol] worked on me was—not at all that it blotted out these sorrows—but that it made them seem glorious and noble, like sad music, and I somehow great and reverend for feeling them. I was a great, sad queen in a song. I did not check the big tears that rose in my eyes. I enjoyed them' (Lewis 1956: 224). In another self-indulgent scene, Orual fantasizes about her supposed magnanimity in stabbing herself as part of Psyche's blackmail. She imagines the sorrow of the Fox, Bardia, and Psyche mourning over her dead body, particularly Psyche 'weeping and repenting all her cruelties', and melodramatically concludes, '[E]veryone loved me once I was dead' (Lewis 1956: 170). The Fox, her tutor, identifies her pride when he rebukes Orual for suggesting Psyche's murder if Psyche refuses to abandon her god-husband: 'You are transported beyond all reason and nature... There's one part love in your heart, and five parts anger, and seven parts pride' (Lewis 1956: 148). As the Fox observes, Orual's pride in her 'demand to play God' outweighs her love for Psyche.

Orual's narcissism thus leads to her selfish treatment not only of Psyche, but all her loved ones, because it deforms her love for them. Although Orual frees the Fox from the slavery imposed by her father, she begs him not to return home to Greece and instead remain in Glome with her, and he relents. But despite his devotion to Orual, as he grows older and she busier, she dismisses him: 'The Fox was growing old now and needed rest; we had him less and less in my Pillar Room... But I was too busy to be with him much' (Lewis



1956: 235). Psyche, of course, Orual has cruelly blackmailed, and Orual's jealous possessiveness of her is obvious:

I wanted to be a wife so that I could have been her real mother. I wanted to be a boy so that she could be in love with me. I wanted her to be my full sister instead of my half sister. I wanted her to be a slave so that I could set her free and make her rich (Lewis 1956: 23).

Finally, she overworks Bardia, whom she secretly loves, in an effort to spend time with him during his work.

To be cured of her self-absorption and order her loves rightly, Orual must first see a purer form of love in action. She finds an embodiment of such love in Bardia's wife, Ansit, who after his death tells Orual of his exhaustion and accuses her of working him to death. When Orual, astonished, asks why Ansit did not try to stop her, the following exchange occurs:

'Tell you? And so take away from him his work, which was his life...and all his glory and his great deeds? Make a child and a dotard of him? Keep him to myself at that cost? Make him so mine that he was no longer his?'

'And yet—he would have been yours.'

'But I would be his. I was his wife, not his doxy. He was my husband, not a house-dog. He was to live the life he thought best and fittest for a great man—not that which would most pleasure me' (Lewis 1956: 264).

This shadow of divine love, agape, and its proper charitable treatment of the beloved awakens Orual to the warped nature of her love for Bardia, which has developed into an idol:

For it was all true—truer than Ansit could know... Did I hate him, then? Indeed, I believe so. A love like that can grow to be nine-tenths hatred and still call itself love... My love for Bardia (not Bardia himself) had become to me a sickening thing... It stank; a gnawing greed for one to whom I could give nothing, of whom I craved all (Lewis 1956: 266-67).

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis describes this phenomenon: 'For natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves. They are still called so, but can become in fact complicated forms of hatred' (Lewis 1960: 8). Orual has given her natural love the 'unconditional allegiance' Lewis says we owe only to God, for left to its own devices, without the pruning of 'decency and common sense' and temperance by God's grace, it has become overgrown and self-destructive, to use Lewis's gardening metaphor (Lewis 1960: 8, 117-18). In Ansit's unselfish example, by contrast, we hear echoes of Lewis's thought that,

[O]nly by being in some respect like Him, only by being a manifestation of His beauty, lovingkindness, wisdom or goodness, has any earthly Beloved excited our love... It is not that we shall be asked to turn from them, so dearly familiar, to a Stranger. When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been a party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love (Lewis 1960: 139).

Thus, in *Ansit*, Orual begins to see part of the divine ‘face’ of the god of the mountain: the charitable agape love that God bestows upon us.

The next pivotal point in Orual’s journey toward the first face is recognition of her twisted love for Psyche, the last piece of vanity to which she clings, claiming she was in the right. Orual’s selfishness distorts the memory of her love for Psyche, which in turn prevents her from seeing ‘the value of the thing promised even if that particular promise was false’, as Lewis’s interlocutor says in ‘Talking About Bicycles’ (Lewis 1986: 84). That is, Orual does not understand her love for Psyche as akin to ‘the shell’ described by Lewis’s interlocutor: a lovely mirage that acts as a signpost pointing Orual upward to the agape love from the gods, to whom Orual owes her worship and allegiance, not Psyche. As with her love for Bardia, Orual’s overgrown love for Psyche has set itself up as a god and needs pruning, but such a natural love cannot tame itself. In Lewis’s terminology, Orual’s love for Psyche is a ‘Gift-love’, which is particularly challenging to tame because it

needs to be needed. But the proper aim of giving is to put the recipient in a state where he no longer needs our gift... Thus a heavy task is laid upon this Gift-love. It must work towards its own abdication... But the instinct, simply in its own nature, has no power to fulfill this law... A much higher love—a love which desires the good of the object as such, from whatever source that good comes—must step in and help or tame the instinct before it can make the abdication (Lewis 1960: 50-51).

To receive the first face, Orual must understand through the god’s grace she cannot tame her possessive love of Psyche by her own efforts, for natural loves ‘prove that they are unworthy to take the place of God by the fact that they cannot even remain themselves and do what they promise to do without God’s help’ (Lewis 1960: 118). The key to Orual’s apprehension of this principle is the self-reflective mirror she created in writing her first book. A divine court summons Orual and commands her to read it, which she discovers is not the grand tome she believed it to be; instead, it is a wretched scroll filled with her darkest thoughts that exposes her own vile sinfulness as the thing she ‘really mean[s]’ (Lewis 1956: 294). Tellingly, before she begins her diatribe, the gods have stripped Orual of the veil she wears to hide her flaws:

We want to be our own. I was my own and Psyche was mine and no one else had any right to her... What should I care for some horrible, new happiness which I hadn't given her and which separated her from me? Do you think I wanted her to be happy, that way?... She was mine. *Mine* (Lewis 1956: 291-92; emphasis in original).

The antithesis of Ansit's love for Bardia, Orual's prideful speech echoes George MacDonald's characterization of hell: 'The one principle of Hell is—*«I am my own!»*' (Lewis 1946a: 103). Speaking her abominable thoughts aloud forces Orual to acknowledge her soul's decay: she has projected her own moral depravity onto the gods and denied their beauty over jealousy for Psyche's love for her husband and for the goodness she herself does not possess. She therefore finds that 'the complaint was the answer' in the discovery of her willful blindness to her reprehensible character (Lewis 1956: 294).

Jebb, drawing upon a point made by Rowan Williams, notes that this lack of self-awareness is closely connected to her warped love for Psyche, which is hardly surprising given that the lack of self-knowledge is, in Williams's words, 'a failure in moral and spiritual habit, a deficiency in skills of living according to nature' (Jebb 2011: 116). For Lewis, 'living according to nature' means participating in the divine dance of self-giving, and Orual's selfishness and near-worship of Psyche fundamentally conflict with the steps of that dance. The tension Orual experiences from living in conflict with this moral law is captured in her horror when she believes she is looking at Psyche's palace but cannot see it: '[A] sickening discord, a rasping together of two worlds, like two bits of a broken bone' (Lewis 1956: 120). Only the dance of self-giving reconciles these two worlds, and it requires that she put to death herself and her natural loves. Lewis notes that '[e]ven for their own sakes the loves must submit to be second things if they are to remain the things they want to be', and to order her loves rightly, Orual must place the god first in an act of self-mortification, just as when we look for Christ first, we 'find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in' (Lewis 1960: 119; Lewis 1952: 227). After accepting her need for the divine, Orual demonstrates this principle in her recognition that Psyche 'still matters' but only in relation to the god, for whose sake all things exist (Lewis 1956: 307). As Lewis writes in his poem 'Five Sonnets', Orual has finally learned to '[p]itch [her] demand heaven-high' by '[a]sk[ing] for the Morning Star'; only then can she 'take (thrown in)/[Her] earthly love' (Lewis 1964: 126-27).

Thus, the process started by Orual's act of writing reaches its completion. The mirror created by Orual's writing as incarnated in her first book forces her to leave behind the Enchanted Age and to undergo the death of the Disenchanted Age by mortifying her warped loves. She then enters the Re-enchanted Age, where she comprehends that the true purpose of the promise of the Enchanted Age is to function as a signpost for a greater divine reality;

thus, only in heaven do we find our desires truly fulfilled. Once this maturation has purified Orual's memory, the light of heaven illuminates her past: the Fox explains that although Psyche underwent many trials in exile, 'Another bore nearly all the anguish', and the gods' animated murals reveal to Orual that she endured Psyche's pain while Psyche accomplished the tasks to end her exile (Lewis 1956: 300-301). Orual rejoices and blesses the gods as they transform her memory so that she sees her past and their mercy with the perfect vision of heaven (Lewis 1956: 301).

At long last, Orual relinquishes her pride and selfish love and gains her first face: that of self-knowledge through the virtue of humility, which Kreeft explains is the 'foundational virtue' and therefore the opposite of pride and despair (Kreeft 1992: 103). Ironically, recognizing her morally ugly self leads to moral beauty, for it allows Orual to see herself and her disordered loves truly, as the god sees them. In the same manner, when we accept Christ, He clarifies the vision of our memory so that we perceive His action in both our lives and our fallen nature more clearly. As Orual discovers, however, the first face is not the final destination of her journey, because to enter the divine dance of self-giving fully, she needs a second face: that of divine transformation, which fulfills the god's mandate that she also 'be Psyche'.

### **Becoming a Person through Humility**

To receive this second face, Orual must first present herself willingly to the god. Lewis notes that we are 'always completely, and therefore equally, known to God... [T]hough this knowledge never varies, the quality of our being known can' (Lewis 1963: 20). He further explains,

When we (a) become aware of the fact—the present fact, not the generalization—and (b) assent with all our will to be so known, then we treat ourselves, in relation to God, not as things but as persons. We have unveiled. Not that any veil could have baffled this sight. The change is in us. The passive changes to the active. Instead of merely being known, we show, we tell, we offer ourselves to view... By unveiling, by confessing our sins and 'making known' our requests, we assume the high rank of persons before Him. And He, descending, becomes a Person to us (Lewis 1963: 20-21).

Although God can never stop Enjoying us in our 'veiled' state, in offering ourselves to Him, we treat ourselves as persons and engage with Him as such. Lewis points out in 'The Weight of Glory' that God promises not that Christians should know Him, but that we should be known by Him (Lewis 1949: 41). Combining these thoughts, although God can *see* us in our veiled state, as the god saw Orual, He respects our refusal to be *known* as persons until we 'unveil' and offer ourselves for His Enjoyment. The moral and spiritual maturity Orual gained from her first face of self-knowledge through humility

prepares her to ‘unveil’ in this manner when she finally dares to ‘look up’ to the god (Lewis 1956: 308). This conscious decision to seek to know the god as a person results in his bestowal of the second face of transformation upon Orual when he declares she is also Psyche (Lewis 1956: 308). Whereas before she could only Contemplate the god through her ceaseless interrogation of him and her accompanying self-defense, she now Enjoys him and can receive him as a person, for as Lewis writes, as long as we treat ourselves only as objects of Contemplation and not Enjoyment, God will not truly know us: ‘He speaks as ‹I› when we truly call Him ‹Thou›’ (Lewis 1963: 21). To do so, we must, through a saving faith, reach a place of complete honesty with God, which can be achieved only by first realizing how ugly our faces are and then offering them to Christ for transformation by His divine face, as Orual does.

### **Actual Language and Agape Love**

After receiving this second face, Orual’s questions about the divine are answered: ‘I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?’ (Lewis 1956: 308). As Dominic Manganiello explains, from the outset, Orual sought ‘revenge rather than friendship’ with the god, and her ‘monologic ‹babble› pre-empts any kind of dialogue with the other’ (Manganiello 2000: 38). But although the god never directly responds to Orual, his initial answer is Orual’s self-knowledge through the first face, which involves the assertion of her charges against the gods. The making of that complaint changes her attitude toward the god and the very questions she poses: ‘The voice of the god had not changed in all those years, but I had. There was no rebel in me now’ (Lewis 1956: 280). Writing as N.W. Clerk, Lewis underwent a similar change in his grief after his wife’s death, when he interrogated God and received a ‘special sort of ‹No answer›’ like a ‘silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze’ that indicated he was asking nonsensical questions, such as whether yellow was square or round (Lewis 1961b: 69). Similarly, once Orual receives her face of transformation, she finds that before the god’s face, questions die away, for eternity reveals some of this lifetime’s questions, posed defiantly and in ignorance of heavenly knowledge, as illogical.

The god’s primary answer, however, lies in a new form of contact with Orual: that of direct communication. Orual says she understands why the god *utters* no answer, which implies he responds, but not in merely human, verbal words. We should not therefore conclude that Lewis suggests God finds words and language useless; indeed, God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, and Jesus spoke to Paul on the Damascus road. Rather, as Eliane Tixier explains, Orual’s and Job’s experiences parallel insofar as before his encounter with God, Job ‘needed to listen to God’s speech, which was not an ‹answer›, but rather the story of God’s commitment to His Creation’, and

likewise, before Orual can confront the god, she must receive ‘divine communication in the form of her visions and of the scenes depicted on the walls’ (Tixier 2016: 312). The god’s lack of utterance in response to Orual’s questions about his nature is similar to the purpose of God’s speech to Job: to encourage her to bask in the glory and beauty of his presence, just as for Christians, Christ is the divine Logos, or Word, as Michael Ward notes, and therefore only His utterance will suffice (Ward 2008: 161). Knowing through seeing the face of the god, in Orual’s case, or that of Jesus, the Logos Himself, in the Christian’s, imparts meaning directly without need for the ‘middle man’ of human words and their potential to cloud or misconstrue meaning.

Knowing directly also reminds us that sheer force of will does not bring the knowledge we seek. Lewis writes in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, ‘And all men are idolators, crying unheard/To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word./Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in Thy great,/Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate’ (Lewis 1933: 163). According to Barbora Šmejďová, these lines demonstrate our need for God to translate our speech into higher spiritual realities, as Jesus did when He elevated the speech of the Samaritan woman at the well by explaining living water to her (Šmejďová 2019: 108-109). Šmejďová further observes this encounter demonstrates the correlation between our willingness to allow Christ to translate our speech and our openness to becoming the image of God (Šmejďová 2019: 113). As Lewis points out, because we are creatures fashioned by God, ‘Our highest activity must be response, not initiative’ (Lewis 1940: 44). Elaborating on this notion, Šmejďová says that we ourselves are ‘not a word but a response’ to God, the Word in Whose image we are made, and we must shift our perspective accordingly to present our words and deeds to God for transformation through His divine use of them (Šmejďová 2019: 111, 113). She further notes Lewis’s related emphasis in *Letters to Malcolm* on our need to submit to all experiences, both blessings and seeming afflictions, if we are to receive all the gifts God offers (Šmejďová 2019: 111; Lewis 1963: 26). Therefore, our words, uttered even in pursuit of truth, are in vain unless spoken in response to God, Who alone imparts truth when we respond to the divine Word.

Once we receive both the face of self-knowledge through humility and the face of transformation and know God as persons, and know Him as a Person, God not only translates our verbal words, but elevates them so that, as Ward writes, ‘[s]aying is swallowed up in being’ and we speak ‘at the highest pitch of articulacy, through an irradiation of [our] whole selves with significance and relation, and by means of physical acts... a response which is not merely verbal, but actual’ (Ward 2008: 160). Ward observes that in prayer, ‘God speaks to God’ when we so allow Him—when our wills are so aligned with His by a life of sanctity (Ward 2008: 160). Thus, the ‘wordless relationship’

such as Orual achieves with the god means that our belief in Christ translates into physical acts, such as praying, worshipping, and following His commandments. As Lewis says, 'I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation... Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him' (Lewis 1958: 95, 97). Therefore, the fulfillment of the face of transformation lies in enjoying God through the actual language of praising Him with our lives. Ward explains that this language of action in following God's will imitates the language that is 'more adequate', as Lewis puts it (Lewis 1993: 289), than any other: the historical, lived language of Christ's life, or the 'Word *sans paroles*', in Ward's terminology (Ward 2008: 160). According to Ward, this wordless connection with God means that 'such small and inflexible things as words are buoyed up by meaning' so that this meaning, overflowing from the Christian at prayer, fills him and selects the proper words for him (Ward 2008: 161). Thus, a wordless relationship with God does not mean that words do not matter any longer. To the contrary, it enables Christ, the Logos, to saturate and magnify those words beyond their verbal forms and thereby to teach us a crucial element of the *imago Dei*: how to respond to God as Jesus did by speaking the actual language of an obedient life.

This actual language, which involves our entire selves, naturally finds its fullest expression in love, because as Lewis explains, love is a 'living, dynamic activity... that has been going on in God forever' (Lewis 1952: 174-175). God's charitable agape love thus characterizes the second face of transformation, particularly its power to 'tame' our natural loves (Lewis 1960: 50-51). As Lewis notes, however, this taming ability also simultaneously preserves and elevates our natural loves: 'Divine Love does not *substitute* itself for the natural—as if we had to throw away our silver to make room for the gold. The natural loves are summoned to become modes of Charity while also remaining the natural loves they were' (Lewis 1960: 133; emphasis in original). Divine agape love therefore not only mortifies Orual's selfish love for Psyche but paradoxically returns it to her in a purified form. As Jesus teaches, in 'losing her life' for the god's sake, Orual finds it; or in Lewis's words, she finds her 'real personality' (Matthew 10:39, ESV; Lewis 1952: 226). In other words, through the second face of transformation through love, Orual fully 'takes her place' in '[t]he whole dance... of this three-Personal life' of our Trinitarian Lord, as Lewis describes the dance of self-giving in *Mere Christianity*, so that God's 'love works through [her]' (Lewis 1952: 176).

### **The Most Beautiful Mirror**

In learning the demanding steps of the dance of self-giving, Orual undergoes what we as Christians call sanctification. God insists we endure this grueling

process because He embodies love, which '[by] its own nature, demands the perfecting of the beloved', in Lewis's words (Lewis 1940: 38). This 'perfecting', he elaborates, consists of Christ rebuilding in us 'the defaced image of Himself' (Lewis 1958: 114), which is accomplished by our being 'derivative, in reflecting [Christ] like a mirror... Our whole destiny seems to lie... in becoming clean mirrors filled with the image of a face that is not ours' (Lewis 1967: 7). In reflecting Christ, we also reflect His agape love and mercy to those around us, in both life and art, because Lewis explains that although 'earthly art and philosophy' are 'clumsy imitations' of eternal communications (Lewis 1940: 155), they are the means by which 'each soul... communicate[s] its unique vision [of God] to others', which is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy' *to one another* (Isaiah IV, 3)' (Lewis 1960: 61-62; emphasis in original).

Orual's two books together are her way of crying 'Holy' about the god in actual language, for her participation in the divine dance and expression of the divine love now coursing through her manifest themselves in the actual language of writing. No longer seeing the god—Lewis's representation of Cupid, the god of love himself—in a mirror dimly, but rather face to face enables Orual to find and write about the 'one aspect of the Divine beauty' that she 'forever know[s] and praise[s] ... better than any other creature can' (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV; Lewis 1940: 154). To be sure, it might be argued that her books are composed merely of words, which Orual herself acknowledges as an obstacle when they are empty and simply 'led out to battle with other words' (Lewis 1956: 308). Writing in response to the divine Word Himself, however, as Orual does in her haste to complete her second book before she dies so that she may share her face-to-face encounter with the god with others, should be viewed as a form of actual language because such a response is our 'highest activity' (Lewis 1940: 44). Even the writing of her first book is also a form of actual language because it responded to the gods' communication through the priest's story and thereby began the gods' surgery and her journey of memory that summoned her to the first face of self-knowledge through humility. Orual's writing has thus come full circle: whereas it initially assisted in the purification of her own memory to lead her to the gods, it now directs itself outward to beckon others in to 'come and see' for themselves (John 1:46, ESV).

Orual's art and life thus set an exemplary example for Christians in the correlation of her two books to the two faces she gains. As we have seen, the first face of self-knowledge is an essential step in salvation. Therefore, art must first reflect our sin, as Orual's first book mirrors her own sin and that of its readers. But to communicate Christ and His gift of the second face of transformation through love, art must also point us beyond ourselves. In *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis observes that art, by allowing us to 'transcend'



the ‘prison’ of our individual selves and see with other eyes, is like love in that they both help us to understand the perspectives of our neighbors (Lewis 1961a: 140-41). The highest perspective art can direct us toward is that of Christ Himself, which Orual’s second book accomplishes in its reflection of the beauty of the gods and their love and mercy toward her.

As in art, so in life: Orual reminds us that through a personal relationship with Jesus, we recover the *imago Dei* untarnished by sin so that our faces, as Lewis says, ‘are mirrors whose brightness, if we are bright, is wholly derived from the sun that shines upon us’ (Lewis 1960: 131). As Orual discovers, our lives serve their highest purpose when they embody the cry of ‘Holy’ about our ‘unique vision’ of Christ to demonstrate our faith not merely as a word we say, but an action we live, which itself is a language we speak as we pick up our crosses and follow Christ. For Christians, our lives do not merely imitate art; they *become* our art. In the inverse of Nietzsche’s aphorism that when we stare into the abyss, the abyss stares into us, the longer we gaze at the face of Christ, the more deeply He transforms and sanctifies our own faces, thereby creating the most beautiful work of art: a life lived for Him. In reflecting His divine light to nonbelievers through the actual language of our lives, Christians mirror Christ’s face to nonbelievers so they may see Him as a Person, begin Orual’s journey anew for themselves, and find their answer in response to His most urgent question to each individual: ‘But who do you say that I am?’ (Matthew 16:15, ESV).

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