

Till We Have Faces Study Guide

Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis

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Plot Summary

Till We Have Faces explores Queen Orual's lifelong battle to reconcile her religious heritage with her Greek tutor's agnosticism, brought into conflict when her beautiful sister, Psyche, believes she has become the sacrificial bride of the Wind-Spirit and loses him, when Orual demands proof. In old age, Orual writes and then appends corrections to her telling of the story, sure some day that wise Greek readers will judge between her and the gods.

Aged Queen Orual writes to eventual Greek readers asking they judge between her and the gods over how she has been mistreated. Orual begins her story the day her mother dies, and a slave shears her plain locks and younger sister, Revival's, golden curls. A Greek slave, the Fox, becomes their tutor while waiting for a half brother, who turns out to be another girl, the supremely beautiful and quick-witted Istra/Psyche.

An epidemic strikes, and a popular belief arises that Psyche can cure fever by touch. The King orders Psyche out among the people, who begin offering Psyche worship due to the jealous goddess, Ungit. The Priest rallies them to demand action to end the kingdom's many woes by having Psyche as the "Accursed," undergo the Great Offering on Grey Mountain. Orual argues against this craven act and offers to substitute for Psyche, but the King shows her in a mirror she is too ugly to be a god's bride.

In a final meeting, Orual fails to comfort her half-sister, because Psyche's belief the god of the mountain has been wooing her for years offends her intellect. Orual intends to accompany Psyche to the Offering and either free her or to kill her to keep her from the Shadowbrute's clutches, but collapses and raves in bed for several days. Recovering, Orual decides to give Psyche a proper burial, and Bardia, who trains her in swordsmanship, accompanies her on her quest.

Orual and Bardia find Psyche not dead at the Tree, but in a beautiful valley. As Psyche tells of her release by the Wind-Spirit, Orual grows impatient and demands to see proof. Their conflict over perception ends a draw, and they part with Psyche hoping for another chance. Too worked up about the "riddle" of Psyche's marriage to sleep, Orual receives a fleeting vision that increases her vacillation between allowing Psyche to be happy, however she wishes, and rescuing her from a horrible fate she is too blind to see as horrible.

After a brief return home, Orual undertakes a second mission, which quickly turns to sharp conflict. Psyche insists she is subject now to her husband rather than Orual who, seeing words accomplish nothing, stabs herself in the forearm and threatens to kill them both, unless Psyche puts her "husband" to the test. Certain her world will be destroyed, Psyche agrees to the fateful test, and is right. Orual watches the magical valley leveled by no Brute of a god but by a beautiful being. Orual resigns to her fate and her agnosticism vanishes, but she still rankles the powerful gods will not act out of kindness.



Back home, Orual strengthens her mind and body and vows never to show her face publicly again. Confrontation with the god removes fear of her father, and she begins standing up for herself. She acts decisively when thrust into authority, while the King lies dying. Civil war in Phars brings rebellious Prince Trunia to seek refuge, and Orual proposes to be his champion against pursuing brother Argan. Quickly victorious in battle on the day after her father dies, Orual enters upon a 40-year reign that restores prosperity, security, and institutes social reforms. Grown bored, Orual decides to see the world. During the trip, she hears Psyche's story, stripped it of its riddle, turned into part of the cult of a young goddess, Istra. This is intolerable, and Orual sets to writing the truth, but ends doubting the gods have any answers.

Knowing she is dying, Orual hurries to correct errors in her text, and works so hard she sees a series of visions, the most frightening of which convinces her she is the goddess Ungit. A climactic vision brings Orual to a judicial hearing of her case against the gods. Orual views a three-walled animated painting that shows how she and Psyche have cooperated, Psyche doing, and Orual bearing the grief. The gods are not silent, once their human interlocutor has a face. Orual surrenders to divine transcendence and dies writing a repudiation of her previous views.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Till We Have Faces explores Queen Orual's lifelong battle to reconcile her religious heritage with her Greek tutor's agnosticism, brought into conflict when her beautiful sister, Psyche, believes she has become the sacrificial bride of the Wind-Spirit and loses him, when Orual demands proof. In old age, Orual writes and then appends corrections to her telling of the story, sure some day that wise Greek readers will judge between her and the gods.

No longer fearing the gods, Queen Orual as an aged, husbandless, childless, nearly friendless woman, writes to eventual Greek readers asking they judge between her and the gods over how she has been treated. The powerful goddess Ungit, who in the form of a black stone sits in the darkness of the House of Ungit, hates Orual, the eldest daughter of the King of Glome. Her story begins the day her mother dies and the slave nurse Batta shears her plain locks and younger sister Redival's golden curls. Batta torments the girls by hinting they will suffer under a stepmother, but the girls are comforted by a bright-eyed Greek slave purchased to educate the King's still unborn son.

"The Fox" is assigned to "practice" on the girls, particularly Orual, who loves this man who never complains or boasts of former greatness, but cheers himself by remembering all the world is one city and everything is as good or bad as one's opinion makes it. The Fox eagerly learns Glome's heritage, and when Orual tells him about Ungit's bloody cult, identifies Ungit with the Babylonian version of Aphrodite, whose legend he recites. The Fox hastens to disclaim this as "the lies of poets." Redival hates studying and abets the cruel tricks the slaves play on the Fox.

The King marries the third daughter of the King of Caphad, a once great monarch sinking to the point of allying with a poor kingdom. The palace is extravagantly adorned and a great feast prepared, and the Fox teaches the daughters of nobles a Greek bridal hymn. Previewing the performance, the Priest of Ungit, whose aura of holiness Orual fears, asks whether the girls are to perform veiled or unveiled. When the King calls for thick veils lest his bride be frightened, Orual first understands she is ugly. Orual fears her new stepmother until she sees the bride's terrified visage as they prepare her for the King's bed.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

Several key characters are introduced, and the setting and premise of the novel is established: Queen Orual in old age wants future Greek readers to judge how the gods have mistreated her. Male chauvinism, the nature and importance of beauty and

ugliness, and the conflict between rationalism and theism are established as themes recurring throughout the novel.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

Orual grows friendly with the homesick new Queen, who is quickly pregnant. Wailing as on the day her mother dies frightens Orual, and she rushes to the Bedchamber. The King emerges in a rage, demanding wine. He stabs the slave who brings it. He blasphemes Ungit to the Priest, who bravely says this will bring doom to his descendants, and again at being surrounded by girls. He assaults Orual and the Fox, whom he vows to send to the mines. Orual advises the Fox to flee, but he is too old and prefers honorable suicide, to be resolved into the elements. Orual points to his trembling as proof he believes in the gods and Those Below, which he says is his disgrace.

The arrival of messengers from Phars intervenes, and the Fox proves too valuable in negotiating a treaty to be put away. Orual, the "curd-face" daughter spends the day in dread of the Fox's fate before Batta comes to shorn the princesses and explains the Queen has died delivering a daughter. The Queen is cremated, and the baby named Istra, which in Greek is Psyche. For love of the late Queen, Orual goes to see the large, fair-skinned baby, and her joys begin. The Fox proclaims Psyche a new-hatched Helen and believes the bloodline must indeed be divine. Orual guesses the Fox had been a father before being enslaved, and the trio is together always. A maturing Revival goes her own way.

Psyche is the essence of beauty at every age and makes beautiful everything around her. From childhood, she is in love with Grey Mountain and talks of one day marrying the greatest king of all, who will build for her a castle of gold and amber on the summit. When the Fox compares Psyche to Andromeda, Helen and Aphrodite, Orual admonishes him to speak words of better omen, but he tells her the divine nature is not envious. Orual knows it is not good to talk that way about Ungit.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Orual describes the tragic birth of her supremely beautiful and quick-witted half-sister, Istra/Psyche, and the close bond that develops between them and the Fox. Psyche's childhood dream of marrying the greatest king of all, who will build for her a castle of gold and amber on the summit, comes about later in the novel but drives a wedge between the half-sisters whose relationship Orual is beginning to describe. The King's murder of a wine steward in wrath over receiving yet another daughter shows both his chauvinism and an impetuous character that weakens his realm, and Orual often fears he has passed to her genetically. The meaning of death begins to be discussed, a theme developed throughout the novel.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Feather-headed Redival grows wanton, and her dallying with a young guardsman, Tarin, is found out. Tarin is castrated and sold into slavery, and the Fox and Orual are ordered never to let the "salt bitch" out of their sight. Redival fearfully submits but loathes Psyche, which brings the older sisters to blows. A year after their fight, troubles begin in Glome in the forms of a bad harvest, the refusal of two royal houses to ally in marriage, and Redival's mocking worship of Psyche as a goddess. Psyche objects that she has merely allowed a pregnant woman to kiss her to make her baby beautiful, something that has been repeated at least ten times. Orual warns Psyche it is dangerous to provoke the jealous gods, but the Fox calls this folly. Redival reminds the Fox that while he may be the true King of Glome, he will fall, when she marries a handsome king.

The next year is no better. Tarin's father leads a rebellion that is put down at great cost and a second bad harvest and epidemic follow, which nearly claims the Fox. Orual cannot nurse him, because the King makes her take over scribal duties. Orual learns how desperate the King's affairs are, threatened externally by war and internally by concern about a male successor. Psyche cares for the Fox and his recovery creates a myth she can cure fever by her touch. Within days, the palace gates are surrounded and when the mobs demand bread, the King orders Psyche out among those she regards as "our people," but he derides as "our rump."

As Psyche steps out regally, the people sink to their knees. Someone proclaims her Ungit in mortal form. Psyche wears herself out, touching foul subjects. She's carried to her bed, feverish and babbling about her gold and amber castle. Her face loses its youthfulness and grows more radiant. Some she touches survive, and others die. However, the gods do not tell why. The people gather daily with offerings sacred to Ungit. This would frighten the Fox, if the Priest were not sick and unable to cause mischief. Redival grows pious and visits the temple often, praying for a husband, Orual hopes.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Orual and Redival fall out over Psyche, whose beauty turns her into an object of worship by the masses. Orual worries the gods, particularly Ungit, will become jealous and strike Redival. However, the Fox continues rationally to discount this. Psyche's going out among the ailing masses will be paralleled by her going out as a sacrifice in following chapters, en route to Grey Mountain and the realization of her childhood dream. Redival's treachery will continue to grow, and her desire to marry a future king will be realized, but she will not rule Glome. Orual rather than Psyche proves to be Ungit in mortal form. Note the chauvinistic worry about a male heir for the King.



Part 1, Chapters 4-5

Part 1, Chapters 4-5 Summary

The people's love for Psyche is short-lived, and they begin clambering for food and a male heir. Redival and Batta become thick as thieves and report Psyche's sorties into town alone, where hundreds are dying daily. When Orual finds Psyche and leads her home, Psyche no longer accepts Orual's rebukes as a child and explains en route home from curing her old wet nurse, she is called "The Accursed." Orual explains those who take others' diseases on themselves always suffer abuse and wishes she could tear them to pieces. Psyche calms her half-sister's rage, so like their father's. It's a rebuke that still smarts Orual in old age. Their forebodings of greater troubles come weeks later, as a fearful drought kills livestock and draws lions down from Grey Mountain. The plague continues. Old enemies wait like crows to fall on Glome, and the King's rages come and go. The Priest of Ungit recovers and, smelling of old age and sacredness, comes to the palace to confer with the King.

Weak and vulture-thin, the Priest speaks with the voice of Ungit and in the name of the elders, nobles, and people of Glome who have gathered overnight - traitorously in the King's view - to demand action to end the famine, pestilence, drought, war, lions, and the King's hateful barrenness of sons. The King points out his abundant animal sacrifices, but the Priest says in 63 years of ministry he has learned Ungit never angers without reason and is not satisfied without expiation. "The Brute" has again appeared, as in the days of the King's father and grandfather, and is too angry for bulls and rams to suffice. The Accursed must be found and die by the rite of the Great Offering. When the Priest talks of Ungit's anger at "mortals aping gods," Orual and the Fox know Redival is a traitor. The Fox questions the validity of sightings of the Brute, but the Priest warns the King not to listen to Greek wisdom lest the fearful people burn down his palace. The Great Offering must take place on Grey Mountain, where the perfect victim is chained to the Holy Tree and left to the Brute, who may be Ungit, her son, or both. Holy language speaks in mystery of the victim as the "Brute's Supper."

As the King grows clammy, the Fox again criticizes childish gibberish: how can the Accused in the past be a wickedest person to be punished but now the best person and be married to the god as reward? Orual realizes the Fox's love and fear for Psyche has overcome his normal wiles, and the Priest puts him in his slave's place. Gods live in dark, holy places and do not reveal themselves in words as the Greeks say. The Fox is cowed, Orual enraged, and the King asking what comes next. When the Priest reveals the conclave has narrowed down the Accursed to the King's household, the King orders Bardia, captain of the palace guards, to kill the treasonous temple guards outside the gates. The Priest warns he has the King outnumbered ten-to-one and asks the pious Bardia if he wishes to fight Ungit. When Bardia sides with the gods, the King dismisses him and presses a dagger to the Priest's chest. Orual marvels that the old man does not flinch and believes the Priest, when he declares the Great Offering will be made, whether he lives or dies. Dead priests can be dangerous indeed.



The King falls back into his chair and hears out the rest of the Priest's story. As the Priest narrows in on Psyche, the King is glum but relieved, Orual babbles, weeps, and begs her Father - a name she never uses - and gets bruised as he kicks her away. Unable to move, Orual hears planning to imprison Psyche overnight, pending her sacrifice.

Part 1, Chapters 4-5 Analysis

These two chapters form a unit, showing first the common people turning on Psyche, which Orual explains in Christ-like terms (the back cover making clear C. S. Lewis is a Christian author), followed by King and Priest meeting to arrange her formal expiating sacrifice through the Great Offering. When the Fox objects to the Priest's explanations of the bloody ritual, the Priest responds with a classic statement of "apophatic" theology. It states that nothing one can say about divinity is true, because divinity transcends all human words and conceptions. Note Psyche's growing independence worry Orual and opens a rift, which will widen as the novel continues, but Orual's love is so powerful that she goes out of proud character to implore the King as "father."



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

The King has Fox help him lift Orual gently onto a chair and offers her a cup of wine. He cannot have women meddling his business, he explains. Orual cannot accept Psyche's sacrifice, but the King stands firm: it is set for tomorrow. The Fox whispers to Orual it is easier for everyone if it is done quickly, but when asked what he would do in the King's place, declares he would stall for time, offer his crown to the King of Phars to save Psyche, and arm the peasants and promise them freedom to rise up, rather than go Down Yonder with innocent blood on his hands. Orual points out the blood of gods runs in their veins, and it is great shame to let future generation say the King has hidden behind a girl to save his life. The King lashes out, pacing, declaring one would think Psyche is Orual's daughter rather than his. Orual is so ugly there must be cunning behind her sobbing and scolding over a beautiful sister, which he will ferret out.

The King declares he is to be pitied for this duty he must perform. He feels sorry for Psyche, but Ungit must have her due, and the life of one girl is nothing if it brings safety to all. Orual agrees in theory and offers herself in Psyche's place. The King gently drags her to a great mirror, his proudest possession, hung in the Pillar Room, and asks if Orual thinks she looks like the bride of a god's son. Orual departs wordlessly and first notices a pain in her side. The palace is alive with chatter about the coming sacrifice. Redival feigns tears over their poor half-sister, and Orual promises to hang Redival by her thumbs if she becomes queen for betraying Psyche. Reaching to the top of the stairs, where Psyche is shut up under guard in a five-sided room, Orual is in greater pain in her side and ankle. She demands Bardia let her in, but he is under strict orders and resists Orual's tears. She fetches a sword and confronts Bardia, but is swiftly disarmed. Frustrated, Orual wishes Bardia had killed her. Touched, Bardia risks his life by letting her into Psyche's cell on condition she swears to exit, as soon as he knocks three times.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

The theme of expiation continues, looking at the idea it is fitting one die for the sake of many. The sacrifice must be perfect however (as in Leviticus), and Orual sees in a mirror she is too ugly to qualify. Her confrontation with the traitorous Redival shows her looking forward to being Queen, and her crazy assault on Bardia sets up a relationship that develops throughout the rest of the novel. The King's prized mirror as a means of focusing on reality comes in the final dream sequences in Part 2. Note particularly the King's out-of-character comment about Orual acting more than he like a grieving parent. Orual's self-defensiveness about how she has raised her half-sister blooms in later chapters, and Psyche's refusal to be treated as Orual's child leads to their tragic break. Suicide, earlier mentioned as an honorable "out" for the Fox, is here changed into Orual's desire to be killed swiftly, and Orual will twice more consider taking her life.



Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

The sight of candlelit Psyche on a bed in their great grandfather's unfinished tower is burnt into Orual's mind. Before she can speak, Psyche comforts her over her bruises, reversing their usual roles. Psyche calls her *Maia*, the baby name Fox has taught her. When Orual renounces their father, Psyche sits calmly, regally, and reminds her of the Fox's lesson that they should daily recall the evil are to be pitied. Psyche asks Orual to promise not to kill herself but to stand by the Fox as soldiers in battle. Psyche commends Bardia as prudent and courteous, declares the King a stranger to her, and even pities Revival. Orual can bear no more and slumps weeping into Psyche's lap. Psyche says her only fear is perishing slowly while tied to the Tree and finally breaks down, giving Orual the relief of comforting her.

Recovering first, Psyche claims to believe the Priest's contention that the world is not as simple as the Fox has taught them, but Orual interrupts, angry at the gods for tearing them apart. Fox is wrong disbelieving in the gods or thinking them better than men are; foolishly, he has never considered the gods are real - and vile. Psyche suggests the gods are real but do not do things as humans perceive. Orual grows angry, as Psyche speaks steadily, thoughtfully, and dispassionately. Orual nearly shrieks her opposition that those who so recently have worshipped Psyche now cowardly prepare to murder her and feed her to a monster. Addressing her eventual Greek reader, Orual agrees she ought to have comforted her half-sister about the Brute rather than arguing against him, but pride blinds her at the time.

Psyche is resigned to ransoming Glome, which means death in some form. No one can explain how being eaten by or married to a god is different. Orual's mind is revolted at either thought. Psyche reminds Orual how Bardia whistles at death six times a day, and the Fox has taught them not to be scared of death, which is an opening from a small, dark room into a place of light. Orual screams, "Cruel!" and asks if Psyche has ever loved her. Psyche insists she has, and they will soon be reunited; were she to live, life and marriage would soon separate their paths. They have already experienced the best part of life during their childhoods.

Psyche confides for the first time to anyone, as they hold hands, that she has longed for death since she can remember. The beauty they have shared convince her there must be even more of it, like a caged bird watching free birds fly home. Kissing Orual's hands, Psyche lets them go, stands, and begins pacing like their father. Orual feels Psyche slipping away. Orual confesses to her readers she feels amidst the love bitterness over Psyche's evident courage and comfort. Psyche reminds Orual of her old stories of the gold and amber house the greatest King of all will build for her, and wishes Orual could believe in it and not let grief shut her ears and harden her heart. Things are not as evil as they seem, because at least she is going to Grey Mountain, for which she has yearned since childhood.



Orual sobs at Psyche's cruelty and heart of iron or stone, but Psyche speaks on, unhearing. Grey Mountain is where she ought to have been born, so this is not a going but a going back. The god of the mountain has been wooing her for years, and Psyche wishes Orual could rejoice with her going to her lover. Orual objects Psyche has never loved her and is become as cruel as the gods. Before Psyche can respond, Bardia knocks, and Orual is true to her word. The half-sisters embrace, unbearably.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

The last meeting between the half-sisters is unbearably sad, because Orual cannot accept Psyche's embracing of her fate and decision to believe the dubious mythology and see it as a joyful going home. This takes up the primeval and by no means universally agreed upon theme of death as liberation to a higher form of existence. Recalling events in old age, Orual accepts she ought to have been more comforting, but pride makes her stubborn, and she argues dry theory. The confrontation will be revisited twice more as the half-sisters are reunited on Grey Mountain, and Orual's selfish motivations come to the surface. Continuing the Christ imagery, "Tree" is frequently in Christian literature a synonym for "Cross." Note the half-sisters joining of hands; a posture repeated later and remembered by Orual as a significant symbol.



Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Although the King has decreed neither princess should attend the Offering, Orual is determined to accompany Psyche and either free her after everyone leaves or to kill her to keep her from the Shadowbrute's clutches. Orual cannot force herself to eat, falls asleep, and is lifted into bed. Awakened before dawn, she howls with pain but does not weep for Psyche like the slaves who dress and feed her. Overlooking the pain, Orual makes her way to the staircase and sees Psyche appear, sitting upright on an open litter between the King in splendid robes and the bird-headed Priest. Painted, gilded, and bewigged like a temple girl, Psyche looks strange and lifeless.

The gods are not content just to kill Psyche, but make her father serve as murderer and turn Orual's last view of her into an ugly doll. Orual learns later that trying to descend the stairs, she falls, is carried to her bed, and raves for many tortured days. The cruel gods forbid her escape into sleep or madness, make Psyche appear as her greatest enemy, and fill her with desire for revenge. Returning to her right mind, Orual knows she loves Psyche but is hurt, recalling how much Psyche had spoken of others during their last meeting and so little of her.

The Fox appears, telling Orual it is raining and thanking Zeus for her recovery. Orual is too weak to feel grief or anger and is treated lovingly by the Fox and her servants. They talk not of Psyche, but of the passing of drought, the hopes for winter gardens, the end of the fever, and the return of game birds, ending the famine. The Fox confides the King is, temporarily, the darling of his people, much pitied and praised for making the Great Offering. At the Tree he wails, weeps, embraces Psyche (as never before), and proclaims her death is for the good of the people. He had been sincere at the time, and his tears no falser or truer than Reival's.

In other news, war within a year with Phars is unlikely, since the king has passed over second son Trunia and named third son Argan as his successor (the eldest is excluded as a simpleton), making civil war likely. Orual asks the Fox if the end of drought and plague following Psyche's death does not disprove his idea Ungit is product of poets' and priests' lies, but the Fox insists it is pure chance and clarifies it is the great web of Nature or "the Whole" that has changed the weather. Orual asks if this implies Psyche has died in vain, and the Fox recommends Orual be comforted by the fact the evil and the ignorant have done the evil deed, while Psyche dies full of courage and patience.

The Fox breaks down before he can finish his speech, his love for Psyche overcoming his philosophy, but next day apologizes and continues: to love and lose what one loves are both appointed by nature. Psyche has kept chastity, temperance, prudence, meekness, clemency, and valor to the end, and her name stands with Iphigenia's and Antigone's. The next day, Orual is resolved, like Antigone, to give her sibling a proper



burial, whatever the Brute has left behind. The Fox proclaims this pious but warns winter is coming. Orual will not be put off her duty.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Psyche's fate drives Orual mad and, as she raves, the conflict with her half-sister yet to come begins to brew. The Fox cannot bear the sterile, matter-of-fact pronouncements of Greek philosophy, which he intends to comfort Orual. By the mere mention two Greek names, the classicist Lewis sets up a complex imagery. He fails to explain why Orual says, "I have *missed* being Iphigenia," a character whose story always involves sacrifice but Iphigenia is not always herself the offering, but clarifies why Orual believes she can be Antigone. This could refer to Orual's future reign as a beloved Queen, but Lewis specifies it concerns proper burial of the dead. Continuing the Christian imagery, Orual goes to the Tree (Cross) to attend properly to the sacrificial remains.



Part 1, Chapter 9

Part 1, Chapter 9 Summary

Orual feigns weakness to avoid being put back to work in the Pillar Room as she plans her difficult trip to the Tree. As she has never learned to ride, she must go on foot, which will take at least eight hours; allowing two more to perform her work and six for the trip home, Orual realizes she must spend a night on the Mountain, which means packing food and warm clothing. She wants to put it off as long as possible, because she sees nothing to do in the world once it is accomplished. She is dejected during endless days.

One day, Orual slips out sluggishly and is hailed by Bardia, who admits he has often felt such sorrows but cured it by going to war. He offers to train her in sword fighting, assuring her she has a natural gift. He shows her how to flick a shield butterfly-like and grip a sword firmly but lightly, how to stand, how always to concentrate on her opponent's sword rather than his face, and how to guard. They work for an exhausting half-hour, and Orual discovers sweat is far better a comforter than philosophy. After the session, Orual goes to the dairy for a refreshing bowl of milk, the first morsel she has relished since the troubles begin. She overhears Bardia talking with some soldiers, agreeing it is a pity Orual is so ugly and the King's daughter, for she is brave and honest and would make a blind man a good wife. It is the nearest thing to a love speech ever made to Orual. They practice daily thereafter, and time resumes moving at a normal pace.

Orual tells Bardia about her travel plans, and he insists on accompanying her. She will ride behind him on one horse along a secret shortcut, but will need to spend a night on the Mountain. He will have no trouble getting time off from the King, who gets along better with soldiers, shepherds, and huntsmen than with women and priests. Six days later, they set out before dawn. Beneath her hooded cloak, Orual wears her fencing cloths and a sharp sword. She carries in her lap an urn. The city is silent beneath a sharp rain as they ride along, but the clouds break when they ford the Shennit, still in darkness. They pass the ancient stone walls of the House of Ungit, looking like a huge slug lying in the fields. The priests say it resembles - or in mystery is - the egg from which the whole world is hatched (or the womb that laid it). Every spring, the Priest is shut in and must pretend to fight his way out for the New Year to be born. Fire always burns before Ungit within. Orual's mood changes as they enter sweet-smelling country she has never before seen. Bardia leaves the Holy Road through dense woods for a steep climb through grasslands.

The Mountain seems not solid in the distance. Orual is conflicted, because this is a sad mission but a wordless voice seems to beckon her heart to dance. She has infinite reasons not to - the loss of her beloved half-sister, ugliness that will prevent any other kind of love, the King, and Redival who must some day be dealt with. This grand new world puts mad ideas in Orual's head, of wandering away, forever. She believes she has misjudged the world from the drought and ugliness she has seen and feels even she is



lovely and desirable deep within. As they ride on, Orual fights this mood, lest she laugh at Psyche's burial. She reminds herself the world is haunted by gods and filled with plague, decay and tyranny. Humans are but the gods' bubbles, to be blown up big before being pricked. Orual will not allow them to play her like a pipe.

The struggle ends, as Bardia and Orual look down into a cursed black valley at the foot of the actual Mountain, which appears like a giant's back teeth. Facing frightful cliffs, Orual is no longer merry. Bardia points to a smooth saddle backed by nothing but sky, and a single leafless tree silhouetted against it. Orual grows childishly afraid as they near the Tree, but cannot say why. On the gaunt, barkless tree the chains clank in the wind but there is no trace of bones, rags, or blood. Bardia, a god-fearing man, believes the god has taken her, for no natural beast could lick its plate so clean. Only Shadowbrute could pluck the body whole from the irons, but would have left the jewels. The emptiness of life comes over Orual, as she contemplates defeat, but they search in expanding circles nonetheless in the coldness.

At the edge of the saddle, beyond which no one is known ever to have gone, Bardia finds a ruby and calls out, part of Psyche's holy gear. Orual insists they search further into "the gods' country." Climbing steeply toward the sky, they come to a cliff and behold a new world at their feet, a gemlike valley, hills, and forests, like a cleft in the Mountain's chin. Descending, they find the air warmer and sweeter every minute. Bardia proclaims it the "secret valley of the god," and Orual agrees it is secret enough. At the bottom, Orual hears two voices cry out. One is Bardia's and the other, six feet away on the far side of a river, is Psyche's.

Part 1, Chapter 9 Analysis

Bardia rescues Orual from despair and accompanies her on her quest to retrieve the bones of her half-sister. The details of Orual's training in swordsmanship will be developed, and the fruit of her training eventually show in her serving as a David-like champion of the kingdom against an invading king. Bardia's trusting piety contrasts with Orual's agnosticism, learned from the Fox and soon to be challenged mightily. For a moment, nature's beauty, which she has never in her sheltered life seen before, suggests to her even she may not be impossibly ugly, but the contrary has been so thoroughly drubbed into her that she abandons the thought. The theme will continue coming up, with the same conclusion.



Part 1, Chapter 10

Part 1, Chapter 10 Summary

Orual cannot recall what she babbles through tears and laughter before Bardia warns bright-faced Psyche may be a wraith or goddess, for she is the bride of the god. Other than the rags she wears, Psyche appears to be well and welcomes Orual as Maia. She is happy they have come, as she knew they would. She may invite only Orual to cross the stream. Bardia, feeling it a dreadful place, is happy to remain behind. Psyche helps Orual ford the cold, swift current, and they sit together, holding hands as they had on the last night in Psyche's prison. Psyche offers Orual berries and wine and suggests they be merry and let their hearts dance. Orual is happy enough to forgive the gods and perhaps even Reival some day, but is anxious they concentrate on their escape, for winter is near.

Psyche continues comforting Orual and wonders why her half-sister has not asked her story or been struck by wonder at her magnificent dwelling place. Psyche tells about being drugged dreamlike by two temple girls, painted and dressed. Everything combines to make her feel she is not the one to be sacrificed. She sees Orual on the stairway, is unable to wave, but is unconcerned, believing they will soon awaken to see this is a dream, as in a sense it is. Riding on the litter, she notices every pebble and tree, but the whole journey seems short. Toward the end, she regains her wits and wants to protest, but is drugged again on orders from a bird-headed man. Next thing she knows, she is off the litter and fastened to the Tree. The sound of clanking iron clears her head. The King mourns and actually looks at her, as if seeing her for the first time in her life. She wants to be alone so she can cry, and she grows terribly afraid.

Orual interrupts the narrative, anxious to flee to safety, which amazes Psyche, who cannot imagine anywhere safer than her home. She insists on telling the bad part of her adventure. Everyone leaves, and Psyche is in silence, parched and unable to sit down. She despairs and weeps for Orual and the Fox, prays to the gods that whatever is to happen will happen soon. Lanky mountain cattle moo at her, and a lynx sniffs about her feet. However, all leave her alone. She tries to believe in her gold and amber palace but cannot. She doesn't understand how she ever had. Orual inwardly rejoices to hear this confession.

Psyche sustains herself by recalling Fox's philosophy about the "divine nature," but muddles it with the Priest's teachings about blood, earth, and how sacrifice makes the crops grow. Suddenly, the weather turns refreshing, and she knows through her the gods are bringing rain. Psyche sees the West-Wind in human shape but unmistakably not a human being. Psyche gives up trying to explain how this could be to Orual but promises she will see for herself and understand. When she first sees the West-Wind, Psyche feels ashamed of being mortal, but he takes her in arms that burn without hurting, frees her of the iron girdle, and carries her into the air, invisibly. When Orual suggests this is a dream, Psyche asks how else she might have gotten here and feels



like her life before the Tree is more dreamlike than after. She is upset that Orual keeps interrupting her tale. West-Wind is a merry, rough, young god. He carries Psyche to the threshold of a kind of house unknown anywhere. It's unmistakably a god's house, not a temple, where he is worshipped. A voice sweeter than music bids her enter her house (as bride of the god) and Psyche must, despite shame over being mortal. Women's voices draw her forward into a cool parlor, where fruit and wine await. Psyche wants to worship these spirits, but must accept she is their mistress. With hands that burn but cause no pain, the spirits lead her next to a bath in sweet water beneath an open sky. Psyche is shy about undressing, but allows their ministrations, is dressed splendidly, and led to a banquet and finally the marriage bed. When Psyche begins to talk about the divine Bridegroom, Orual can stand it no longer. She demands to see Psyche's palace, which astonishes her half-sister. They are standing on the stairs of the great gate.

Part 1, Chapter 10 Analysis

Psyche tells the story of her Offering and release by the Wind-Spirit. For an instant, she reflects the Fox's agnosticism, which gladdens Orual, but she is utterly convinced that her deliverer is not an impersonal force but an unseen but palpable force. Orual, who has shown earlier the makings of a temper like her father's, grows impatient with the story and demands to see proof. Psyche, who sees with different eyes, is amazed her half-sister cannot see the god's palace, not the one for which she has longed since childhood but different and infinitely better.



Part 1, Chapter 11

Part 1, Chapter 11 Summary

The half-sisters look like enemies met for a battle to the death, nerves taugth and watchful. Realizing this is the part of the story on which her charge against the gods chiefly rests, Orual is careful to overcome blurriness and write the whole truth. Fighting madness in them both, Orual insists they leave this terrible place. The gods of Glome are too close to the people to dismiss the reality of this invisible palace as Greeks would, particularly in the heart of the Mountain where even priests fear to go, but Orual cannot let reality slip away. When Psyche points out gates and walls, Orual lashes out in fury to deny anything is there. Psyche too is angry and guides Orual's hands in feel them. Orual pulls away and then shakes Psyche like a child to make her stop pretending. Much too strong now to be treated thusly, Psyche breaks away and insists Orual has tasted the wine and honey cakes. Orual claims to have played along, as Psyche offers her water from her cupped hands and berries.

With sadness and pity, Psyche mourns Orual's blindness. Psyche has shaken Orual a dozen ways but not been herself shaken at all, and Orual realizes in this dreadful place there may be hundreds of things she cannot see. Greeks cannot understand the horror of such a thought and in later dreams Orual touches objects to convince herself they are real, experiencing two worlds rasping together like ends of a broken bone. She grieves that she and Psyche are no longer one piece; the gods have stolen and removed her. They embrace, but it is like holding a dream.

Sitting on the mossy bank, Psyche comforts Orual, and Orual briefly permits it. Psyche's voice is deep for a woman but soft and rich, as she promises to implore the god to let her see. This meeting is not going as she had hoped, but he seems to have known it. Psyche's use of "he" hardens Orual, and she demands to know who this is. Psyche declares him her god, lover, husband, and master of her House. These words, spoken with feeling, rekindle Orual's rage, and she returns to the idea Psyche must be mad. She demands again to see the god or at least hear what he is like, and Psyche says he comes to her only in holy darkness and forbids her bringing light into their chamber. Orual forbids her to say such things again, but Psyche in a queenly voice insists she has never lied to her.

Orual tries to soften her tone, but it comes out wrong. She suggests it is terror, loneliness, the drugs and imagination. She says that they will cure her. Psyche asks how she can be in such good condition, if it is all her fancy. It's a fact Orual cannot deny, as Psyche is more perfect than ever. The god, Psyche insists, will let her see. Orual refuses and proclaims she hates everything about this story, so like living in the House of Ungit. Psyche's expression draws tears from Orual, who begs Psyche to return to the real world, where they can be happy. Psyche is surprised and cannot, because she is now a wife. Orual says savagely Psyche ought to have lived as one of Ungit's girls



amidst horrible blood, incense and muttering. Psyche insists she cannot go back, but Orual must come to her.

At this point, Orual believes, the gods ought to have spoken, but instead they sent a light rain, so the half-sisters can argue about getting wet. Raindrops cover Psyche's cheeks, as she insists she is indoors in her palace. At that moment, Orual sees clearly that she must choose one opinion or the other, and knows which she has already chosen. Psyche is raving mad, winter is coming, and she must go home. Psyche clarifies. They see things differently, and who is to judge?

Bardia is forbidden to cross the river. Growing wetter by the minute, Psyche declares as a wife she no longer must obey Orual. The half-sisters wrestle, and Orual realizes how one can hate someone one loves. She intends to drag Psyche back to Bardia's house and lock her up, until her senses return. Psyche is stronger than Orual (and they say mad people have double strength), so struggling is senseless. Having accomplished their purpose, the gods let the rain end. Psyche cannot remember Orual ever being angry at her and asks her not to start now. It is nearly sunset, and Orual must leave, but with an invitation to come again as soon as he can. The lovely valley now looks hideous to Orual, and the air is chilly. The half-sisters embrace on the bank. Orual tries once more to lure Psyche home, or to wander the world together anywhere she likes. Psyche cannot, because she is a wife. All will be better than Orual dreams, she says, and disappears among the trees. Orual calls for Bardia.

Part 1, Chapter 11 Analysis

The conflict over perception of reality comes to a dramatic head and ends a draw. The half-sisters part with Psyche hoping for another chance, god willing, but Orual is too worked up about the "riddle" of Psyche's marriage to go home quietly. Note the first mention of Bardia's marriage, a factor that grows in importance and becomes crucial in Part 2.



Part 1, Chapter 12

Part 1, Chapter 12 Summary

Orual cannot tell Bardia about her encounter with "the Blessed," so he prepares camp for the night. They eat and lie together back-to-back under two cloaks, as soldiers do to ward off the cold. Orual rues being so ugly Bardia proposes this. Bardia sleeps soundly, but Orual's mind cannot let go of Psyche and the riddle. Going down to the river for a drink, Orual is shocked to see through the mists a vast grey palace, solid, motionless, and beautiful. No lights shine from this house asleep, and Orual imagines Psyche in the arms of something or someone holy or horrible, beautiful or strange. Orual knows she must cross over, even if it costs her life, make her petition, and beg forgiveness of Psyche and the god. Orual repents of her blasphemies and having dared scold her. Before she can stand up, however, the building vanishes into swirling mists that still somehow look like towers and walls, but then fade, leaving Orual's eyes smarting from staring into the fog. Orual asks her Greek readers to decide. Had she seen a house, and does this tell against the gods or against her? What defense would the gods make? What use is a riddle that answers with another riddle? Orual will grant the gods nothing. If they have a sincere intention to guide humans, why do they not guide plainly? Psyche at three had spoken clearly; why can the gods not do likewise?

Bardia is just awake, when Orual returns, but she tells him nothing about the vision. This book is the first time she tells anyone. The ride home is comfortless, and the riddle works on Orual's mind all morning, and she confides everything but the vision to him. He listens diligently and silently, and Orual has to draw out of him what he makes of it, because he talks as little as possible about divine matters. Bardia will not admit Psyche could be mad and is unsure what can be said about houses of gods. He will say nothing about Psyche's lover who comes to her by night, for he cannot charge the Blessed with lying. Mortals cannot judge why a god, even one called Brute, would withhold his face and form. This is the most horrible of the options jostling in Orual's head all morning - that the god and Shadowbrute are one. Rain and peace with Phars have come from the gods in exchange for one of them enjoying Psyche.

As they ride along, Orual no longer fights this torturous but now-evident truth. She regrets not having killed Psyche as Bardia has taught her, to save her from the Brute, but then tenderly thinks she has no right to interfere with Psyche's happiness. In sight of the House of Ungit, Orual's mind overcomes her heart, and she resolves not to let Psyche make sport with a demon. They are a king's daughters, after all. Forging the Shennit and slipping into the palace by the back way, Orual can guess how the King will react if he learns she has journeyed to the Tree.



Part 1, Chapter 12 Analysis

Orual's wrestling with the riddle, as she will for the rest of the novel, brings a sleepless night, which leads her to the river bank and a vision that increases her turmoil. Although his piety prevents him from being a useful advisor, Bardia's importance to Orual is growing, making painful his willingness to spend the night with her in relative intimacy - in terms both of when Lewis writes (the era of the Everly Brothers' "Wake Up Little Suzie") and the King's do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do insistence on his daughters' chastity. Orual cannot get past her ugliness or step down as her sister's keeper. On the ride home, heart and mind clash as the step-half-sisters just have, Orual vacillates between allowing Psyche to be happy, however, she wishes and rescuing Psyche from a horrible fate she is too blind to see as horrible. Note seeing the hated House of Ungit marks the turning point, for Orual loathes the god and her cult in both heart and mind.



Part 1, Chapter 13

Part 1, Chapter 13 Summary

Like a cat at a mouse hole, the Fox is waiting for Orual, who says Psyche is alive, well, and claiming to be happy. For this the Fox thanks Zeus. Orual then tells him the bad news, omitting her vision in the fog. The Fox is at a loss what to do to save and restore her, and he inquires about what Orual has surely been thinking. In the absence of Orual's seeing the palace, the Fox cannot believe her testimony to Psyche's apparent sanity - and does not doubt the reality of things unseen, concepts like Justice, Equality, the Soul, and Music, and things done behind one's back or far away. He is dismayed at how little Orual has learned from him when she asks about soul-houses, and believes he should dose Orual with hellebore (a folk remedy for dealing with spirits) even before Psyche. Orual is tempted to tell about glimpsing the palace, but knows the Fox is the worst hearer of such a story. Instead, she suggests the lover is part of Psyche's madness, but he points out Psyche looks well fed - and has, quite impossibly, been freed of her irons.

Orual says if she hinted a god freed Psyche, the Fox would laugh her to scorn. The Fox objects he would more likely weep, for it shows he has not washed from her profane, ridiculous notions of the Divine Nature. He is certain one of the many evil men that inhabit the Mountain is responsible. Orual cannot abide the thought of a royal princess consorting with a commoner, but the Fox calms her by maintaining she has been too crazed to resist a liberator, babbles about her gold and amber house, which the fellow falls in with and claims to be the god's messenger. He convinces her the god will come to her by night and substitutes for him in darkness. Orual finds this explanation too plain and evident to doubt it, just as Bardia's comments had seemed irrefutable. Still, the Fox maintains, the real riddle remains to be guessed, the King's mistreatment has addled his brains, and there is little time to act. Orual knows she cannot avoid the Pillar Room much longer and fears she will never return to the Mountain.

Fortuitously, the King is leaving at daybreak to lead a 5-6-day lion hunt, which offers them an opportunity. When the Fox mentions Psyche is likely pregnant, Orual vows to tear the father apart with her teeth. The Fox reprimands her passion, which darkens their planning - and her own soul - about where to hide Psyche should they lure her home. Orual suggests Bardia's house, but the Fox is sure Bardia is too much a superstitious fool to take in someone who has been sacrificed to the gods. Angry at such Greek superiority, Orual defends Bardia's bravery and honesty.

The Fox continues. He says that even if Bardia would go along, his wife would forbid it; the whole town knows she rules Bardia like a slave. The Fox sees no alternative to spiriting Psyche out of Glome to her late mother's family, and declares taking her from the Mountain by force is impossible. Orual resolves to wander the world with Psyche, like Oedipus, and the Fox declares he will go with them. If she cannot convince Psyche to leave the Mountain, Orual will kill her, to spare the family name the shame of her lying



in a beggar's arms. The Fox is aghast. Orual's heart, he says, is one part love, five parts anger, and seven parts pride. He loves Psyche and mourns her error, but cannot condone such passionate impiety. Marriage, he asserts exists by law and custom but not by nature. Man persuades a woman to unite with him, and she consents. When Orual objects this filthy man forces and deceives rather than persuading, the Fox, as an alien slave, takes offense. Orual says Psyche agrees there are matters he does not understand, and the Fox is glad she has mastered that lesson about him well. The Fox believes all men are of divine blood, for there is the god in everyone, and all are one. The man who has Psyche is probably a rascal and villain, but might be a good man forced to become outlaw and runaway. Orual has no response.

The Fox is sleepy, and Orual bitterly allows him to retire, not having yet understood that even the truest of males cannot remain focused as long as females and give their best only if their distraction - food, sleep, joke, or girl - is tolerated. Orual feels alone in caring for Psyche. She stretches herself on the floor and calls upon the gods wholeheartedly, repents of all she has said against them and promises to do whatever they want in exchange for a sign.

When no sign comes, Orual resolves to act alone in the morning, but she cannot force herself to sleep in preparation. She realizes both Bardia's and the Fox's explanations contain a certain truth, but one must necessarily be false. She must give up trying to judge between Glome's doctrine and Greece's wisdom and concentrate on the one thing on which they agree: something evil or shameful has taken Psyche for its own and forbids her to see it. No lover could act this way. Tonight, Orual vows, is the last night for that. Again, however, Orual vacillates between gentle mother and avenging fury, reminding herself anything might be true, and she ought not to meddle. Who knows what ruin Orual might bring down on both their heads? No, children must obey. Lying down on her bed to wait for morning, Orual knows what she will do.

Part 1, Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter suddenly shows the Fox as contemptuous of Bardia for his simple piety and being controlled by a demanding wife. It also reveals in Orual an antipathy towards males for reasons other than their mistreatment of females: they lack focus on essentials. Self-reliance, which will culminate in her assuming the throne of Glome, is rising within Orual, and she realizes the conflict she has felt between her dogma-based heritage, and the wisdom of Greece learned from the Fox is trivial. Action is required. After another crisis of heart and mind, Orual accepts that she alone can decide Psyche's fate. Note her brief concern she may be bringing down something terrible and unknown on both their heads; this will be a major burden for the rest of the book.



Part 1, Chapter 14

Part 1, Chapter 14 Summary

Bardia cannot accompany Orual, being under orders to guard the palace, but he provides a trustworthy, taciturn substitute, Gram. Tucking a dagger into her belt, Orual bids Bardia farewell, unsure what the day will bring. The trip up the Mountain contrasts sharply with the previous day's, being wet, drab, and void of conversation. Toward evening, they reach the secret valley, touched by sunlight. Burdened and resolute, Orual leaves Gram to greet bright-faced, joyful Psyche, who appears to be waiting near the bank. Psyche proclaims herself a prophetess of reunion, which startles forgetful Orual.

Settling on the grass, Psyche remarks on the storm cloud in Orual's face, a look she remembers from childhood. Orual reacts it always hurt her to scold or deny Psyche anything. They resolve not to find fault with one another today. Orual reminds Psyche, and Psyche gratefully accepts she has no family other than Orual; their father counts for nothing. The Fox too plays a part, but Orual insists she alone can care for, counsel, and shield Psyche. Psyche gently objects her husband belongs in the list and begs Orual to understand their love. Orual hides a shudder and struggles to find an opening for her argument. She returns to a childhood event Psyche had mentioned day before, about how a barber pulls a thorn from her hand. Orual had allowed him to inflict pain on her to make her better. Love often hurts, and Orual must hurt Psyche again today, because she is little more than a child. Psyche objects her husband is now her guide. Angry at Psyche harping on this unseen husband, Orual demands sharply to know who or what he is and insists if she were not so badly deceived, Psyche would rather die than lie in his bed. Psyche comes close to anger at the contention her husband *dares* not show his face. Only thieves and murderers - worse than the Brute - inhabit the Mountain and, lecherous as goats, naturally pounce on someone as lovely as Psyche. God or man, this lover stains their bloodline. Psyche is silent while she conquers her anger and then forgives her well-meaning but mistaken words. If Orual has ever loved her, she must retract them. Orual insists the Fox and Bardia agree Psyche's husband is either Shadowbrute or a felon.

Psyche resents Orual spreading her story. Orual reddens at being likened to Batta but sticks to the point: no upright husband could hide out, slink about, and demand secrecy. Unhearing, Psyche is perplexed the Fox would side with Orual - or believe in the Brute at all. Orual insists none of them believe Psyche's husband is a god, any more than that the wild heath on which they sit is a palace. Psyche objects that as his wife, she alone knows the truth, to which Orual counters, how then has she never seen him? A virgin like Orual could not possibly understand.

Orual sidesteps the taunt to propose a test. Psyche must accept Orual's lamp and sneak a look at her sleeping husband. Insulted, Psyche refuses and again flings Orual's virginity in her face. Orual admits she knows less than Redival, Ungit's girls, and the



King's prostitutes, but this is not the true love she has in mind. Eyes full of sorrow but no humility, Psyche declares Orual is raving. Shocked by this bold new Psyche, Orual reiterates Psyche make the test and holds no husband better than their Father would make her ashamed of disobeying him. Psyche insists her god-husband must have grounds she cannot fathom. Orual presses. The test will prove him a god and alleviate Orual's fears.

As sunset approaches, Orual bluntly commands obedience, and when Psyche replies her duty is no longer to her half-sister, plunges a dagger through her own forearm. Psyche does not panic as Orual hopes, but binds the wound and asks why Orual has done this. To show her earnestness, Orual demands Psyche swear on the bloody blade she will carry out the test that night, or die in a murder-suicide. Looking betrayed, Psyche says love used as a tool of manipulation and torture is little better than hatred and suspects she has never known Orual. Past and future are dead to each other. If she goes through with this, Psyche says hotly, it is not because she doubts her husband but to let Orual think better of him. He is not cruel, will understand she has been tortured, and will forgive. Orual insists he never needs to know. An old look of nobility and scorn comes to Psyche's face, as she lashes at concealing this. She admits Orual has chosen her threat well and gives her oath.

Having won her victory, tormented Orual wishes she could unsay everything and beg forgiveness, but stands her ground. Psyche believes this betrayal will destroy her happiness, but does it to spare Orual's life. She turns away and dismisses Orual, who finds herself afraid of Psyche, as she crosses over the river.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Analysis

The half-sisters' reunion turns quickly to sharp conflict. Orual is defensive about her raising of Psyche and tries to reprise her maternal role. She claims the Fox and Bardia back her view. Psyche counters she is no longer a child and subject now to her husband. She strikes a nerve referring to Orual's virginity, and Orual's elevation of platonic love above the carnal is unconvincing, although her misandry on the basis of sexual dalliance is better taken than her earlier complaints about males' easy distraction. The Fox is on the mark describing the complexity of love, as is Psyche on pointing out the fine line between love and hate. It is easily manipulated and terrible as a tool of testing.

Orual's threat is too well-designed for Psyche to avoid the trap and, having applauded herself as a prophetess but failed to see what their reunion would come to, she now accurately and bitterly prophecies her wonderful world will be destroyed, when she carries out the fateful test. Orual again wavers but stands firm and now fears her grown-up and queen-like half-sister.



Part 1, Chapter 15

Part 1, Chapter 15 Summary

Orual is cold, thirsty, and in pain. She imagines seeing the lamp go on and off and helping a repentant Psyche across the river, but also struggles not to think the god might be real, or Psyche ruined through her plan. Again, she refrains from rushing to Psyche to call it off. Worst of all, Orual fears, as the Fox has hinted, Psyche might now hate her. Sobbing, "Cruel Psyche," as during her sickness, Orual watches for the lamp, which soon enough flickers and vanishes. Orual is sure all is well, whatever *well* means. She fantasizes shamefully about dying and being mourned by Psyche, the Fox and Bardia, and loved by all posthumously.

Suddenly, the stillness breaks, as light brighter than Orual thinks possible erupts. A great voice fills her with holy terror. It is stern but not ugly, filled with heartbreak. Thunder and lightning fill the valley and suggest the pillars of Psyche's house are falling down. The walls of the Mountain fragment, and boulders bounce like a child's ball. The river overflows and swallows Orual to the waist, while tyrannous rain pelts her from above. Beaten and blinded, Orual feels vindicated. Psyche's god-husband has risen from feigned sleep. At least the half-sisters will die disenchanting and reconciled unless, possibly, they survive.

Orual cannot cross the river, but sees a motionless giant, whose beautiful, subdued and passionless face is revealed by flashes of lightning Orual cannot bear. His eyes know all Orual has thought, done or been, and rejects, denies and answers all. The Greeks claim the gods cannot change the past, but he blows away all she has written about in this book. Great silence falls, and the god speaks without anger, like a bird singing on the branch above a hanged man, announcing Psyche goes into exile, and those he cannot fight, including Orual, must do their will on her. Orual shall be Psyche.

Light and voice end instantly. Only weeping remains, pitiable enough to make the whole world weep and seek to comfort the afflicted. It comes from the unexplored end of the valley. Orual cannot cross the raging river or vast swamplands now surrounding it. At daybreak, Orual surveys the desolation and calls out to Psyche, knowing she has gone into exile, weeping for her lost lover and for Orual. Certain the gods hate her, Orual awaits punishment, perhaps riding home by plunging down a cliff, being struck by a falling branch, succumbing to infection, or being turned into a beast. She is unafraid and finds it comforting to know that, certainly, the gods are her enemies. She accepts otherwise she will go into exile, as certainly should the King die, for Glome will not accept being ruled by a woman. Hard and cheerless strength rises in Orual, trained by her ugliness to be a good beggar and by Bardia to fight. As she travels, she wonders how much of this story she will tell to Bardia and the Fox.



Part 1, Chapter 15 Analysis

Psyche is right. The test destroys her life and the whole magical valley, but the god Orual sees is no Brute, but a dispassionate and wonderfully beautiful being, who reaches back through time to make her recall always having believed in him. Orual accepts her fate and, in her resignation, finds the strength she will need to reign as Queen of Glome. Having in the past only mused about how she would settle affairs with Redival, it is unexpected that she should now focus on this, and she doubts it will come about, but has through the Fox, Bardia, and the lifelong experience of ugliness gathered the strength to rise to the occasion. It is known from Page 1 that she ascends the throne and rules for decades, and the rest of Part 1 will detail her many triumphs. Note her agnosticism has vanished, but Orual still rankles the powerful gods will not act out of kindness.



Part 1, Chapter 16

Part 1, Chapter 16 Summary

Orual slinks into the palace, before the King returns from the hunt. For the first time, she hides in shame from the Fox, who she knows will rebuke her for forcing Psyche. As she eats, he comes to her chamber, praising the gods for bringing her home after a day that has tormented him greatly. Orual conceals her wound as she declares, too fiercely, she had decided while he slept. The Fox accepts the rebuke and asks for news of Psyche. Orual details everything except facing the god. Pressed for details, Orual reveals the plan of the lamp, and the Fox demands what demon made her think of that - what good could have come of it? If a fugitive, her companion will kill her for betrayal or drag her off somewhere. Orual wonders why this had not occurred to her, and conceals most of what she had said to Psyche and her self-wounding.

Orual knows the Fox cannot understand what it had been like on the Mountain. She says simply she persuaded Psyche. The Fox accepts Orual is keeping a secret from him and promises not to raise a barrier between them by berating her; that is harder on a relationship than keeping secrets. He will never stop loving her who, with Psyche lost forever, is all he has in old age left. Orual is secretly glad when the Fox leaves, and considers how much kinder he is than Psyche. Orual never tells Bardia the story.

Before she sleeps, Orual vows never again to be seen barefaced. Neither denying her ugliness, as she had in childhood, or using Batta's cosmetics and fine dresses have worked. She makes a pact with ugliness by always wearing her veil. Her forearm heals and, when the King returns, drunk and frustrated over the hunt, the Fox and Orual are put to work in the Pillar Room. The King mocks the veil, but after hearing the god's voice, she no longer fears her father's roar. She says defiantly she is scolded both for showing her face and for hiding it. White rage rises and subsides in the King, who asks in a whisper if she is beginning to set her wits against him. "Yes," Orual replies, as quietly and very clearly, the word coming out of her spontaneously.

The King stares long, shrugs and goes back to work. Never again does he strike her and, believing the gods will soon strike her down, Orual never again fears or kowtows to him. She demands to be relieved of responsibility for Redival and Batta, his frequent but non-sexual companion assumes the task.

Orual puts Psyche's room in order, should she ever return, preserving childhood memories but burning recent papers and dresses. She tries to think only about their early, happy years and talks about Psyche with no one, even the Fox, who now brings her little comfort. She questions him about the physical sciences and politics, and takes fencing lessons from Bardia. Orual wants to drive everything womanly to be strong, hard, and joyless when the god's sentence is executed. Some nights she wonders how Psyche is fairing and calls on the gods briefly until she rebuilds the dam on her tears.



Bardia teaches her to ride horseback and talks with her increasingly like a man, which both grieves and pleases her.

When the King breaks a thigh slipping on icy steps during the Midwinter feast, Orual dictates his medical treatment and summons the Second Priest, Arnom. For three days and nights, the King glares at Orual and demands she be taken away, raving he knows the torture she intends for him. Arnom is certain the King will die, and Orual and the Fox are certain she will be driven out to become another Psyche. Arnom, however, reveals the old Priest is also dying, and he will succeed him, unless the King forbids it. Ungit and Glome need to stand together at this time, lest an enemy arise against them both. Arnom wishes Orual were married so she could lead the troops in battle, and Bardia proclaims "this Queen can."

Arnom worries about "the Crumbles," good lands on the far side of the Shennit over which they have long quarreled. Claiming to be the King's mouth, Orual assigns the Crumbles to Ungit, free and forever, achieving an amazing diplomatic coup. In return, Ungit's guards will serve under the captain of the King's Guard, paid for their hours by whichever side they serve - another spur-of-the-moment decision. The Fox and Bardia commend her wisdom as Arnom obeys King's summons. In the empty great hall, Orual contemplates what being Queen will do to her emotional dam and then is dizzied by thinking about freedom once her father is dead. Hearing weeping Orual slips out of the palace to find it. Seeing a cloaked form dart toward the bushes, she seizes a man, who asks to be taken to the King's threshold.

Part 1, Chapter 16 Analysis

Orual's mission sadly loosens the bonds between her and the Fox. She diligently strengthens her mind and body and vows never to show her face publicly again. Her battle with ugliness is finished. Her confrontation with the god removes fear of her father's wrath, and she begins standing up for herself. She acts decisively - even impetuously - when she is thrust into authority while the King lies dying, overcoming her loathing of Ungit to forge a useful alliance with the priest who like her will come to power, when the old generation of rulers, secular and sacred, shortly pass away. A mysterious character - not Psyche, whom Orual expects - is introduced, who will pull together everything Orual has been doing in the chapters ahead.



Part 1, Chapter 17

Part 1, Chapter 17 Summary

Orual jumps back and reveals her dagger. The tall slender, flirtatious stranger is neither Redival's lover nor a thief, but the King's suppliant. Orual identifies herself as Queen, and he identifies herself as Trunia of Phars, seeking a few nights' lodging and protection. His brother Argan has defeated him in a skirmish and is pursuing him. Trunia will ride on to Essur to rejoin his main army to renew the fight. Orual accepts legally she must accept him, but she cannot afford to go to war with Phars, so she must lodge him as a prisoner. Fleeing such a fate, Trunia trips, sprains his ankle, and cursing fate accepts Orual's offer, which he fears means the hangman's noose. Orual promises to do all she can for him, short of full war, has him cover his face to avoid recognition, leads him into the hall, and orders him fed and his ankle bound. Arnom has gone, and the King has grown worse.

The Fox tells Oruan about a message from Argan that he has crossed the border, pursuing his brother. Yesterday, such news would have meant nothing to Orual, but for her tonight, as Queen, it is a slap in the face. She reveals Trunia is in the palace, and out of the King's earshot, which confers with the Fox and Bardia. Trunia is lodged in Psyche's old prison. They agree that Trunia's party will increase over time, because Argan is false, cruel, hated, cowardly, and held in contempt. Phars under Trunia will be a better neighbor, particularly if they befriend him at his lowest, and the plague has left Glome's forces too weak to take on Phars or even Argan's party at present.

From nowhere, Orual suddenly asks if Argan is a good swordsman. Bardia says there are two better at the table, but he wants to remove his reputation for cowardice. If Glome offers a champion to fight him in single combat, will Argan accept? Bardia recalls an old song and believes Argan will have to for many reasons. The Fox sees an upside for Glome even if their champion is defeated. Orual proposes making their champion be utterly contemptible so Argan will be ashamed not to accept. They will put forth a woman. Bardia understands, but the Fox is bewildered, until they explain Orual has been taking fencing lessons and has a natural gift for it. A true Greek, the Fox declares this goes against custom, nature and modesty, but Orual responds that, if nature has made her hard-featured as a man, why should she not fight like a man? The nobles and the people are not yet for her as Queen, but this might catch their fancy. Bardia heartily agrees, but the Fox pleads not to be left alone, not to lose home, freedom, Psyche and Orual.

Orual sees that the Fox is imploring her with the same anguish she implored Psyche and fights back tears behind her veil. Orual's mind is made up and orders a herald sent to Argan at the Red Ford with her challenge and her terms. If she falls, Trunia will be turned over, but if Argan falls, Trunia has safe passage wherever he wishes. Either way, all aliens evacuate Glome within two days. Having given her orders, Orual bids them good night.



Alone in silence, Orual realizes she now thinks separately as Queen and as Orual. How could the Queen propose such a plan? Orual knows she could fight, even though she has never used sharps. What if her courage fails in true combat? How will she face the Fox or Bardia? She recalls meek and gentle Psyche's bravery in going to the sacrifice and strength when they had wrestled. Orual fears her sickness is coming back and considers Argan may be the gods' executioner, which would be a good thing. Queenship has changed her, and Orual resolves to be Queen rather than a stricken woman for as long as the gods allow her. If Orual vanishes altogether into the Queen, the gods will almost be cheated. Orual returns to the King's Bedchamber, where Batta sleeps suddenly in his chair. The King seems wide-awake and filled with terror. She wonders whether it is fear she will murder him or of Psyche coming back from the deadlands. Looking at him, Orual fears he will live, and her deliverance be dashed. She is comforted by the thought even if he lives he will never have his mind again, and goes to her chambers to sleep soundly.

Part 1, Chapter 17 Analysis

The civil war in Phars, first mentioned in Chapter 8, comes to Glome when rebellious Prince Trunia seeks temporary refuge. Earlier Orual's father has lamented he cannot cement a treaty with Phars, because Orual is too ugly to marry off, and this theme of ugliness returns with a twist. Flirtatious Trunia finds her voice beautiful. It comes up again when the Fox objects to Orual's plan to fight Argan to save Trunia's life and put him on the throne. If she has a man's rough features, why can she not fight like a man? Bardia's training now has a purpose, and the assumption of monarchy has transformed Orual, who meditates on the two distinct parts of her personality. She fully intends to be Queen for as long as the gods allow - although they may be using Argan as executioner. If so, Orual is sanguine.



Part 1, Chapter 18

Part 1, Chapter 18 Summary

Checking on the King's condition in the morning, Orual encounters a blubbering Redival, seeking reassurance of what will happen when he dies and news about the handsome visitor. The fawning sickens Orual, who promises her a whipping and a husband or two. The Fox apologizes for manipulating Orual's emotions the night before. Bardia arrives with a peacock-like messenger from Argan, who accepts the challenge but will hang Orual if he defeats her, rather than stain his sword with woman's blood. She concedes, and an hour of negotiations begins. The Fox is still pained. Vested in skins, bladders, and the bird mask, Arnom announces the old Priest is dead, and he has succeeded. Orual has no sense Ungit enters the room with him and knows he will not be terrible.

While the others enter the Bedchamber, Orual goes with Bardia for a pep talk and warning the first time one sinks a sword into human flesh is the hardest, no matter how brave in practice. Picturing her raging father, she is sure her hand will not fail her - as it had not when she stabbed herself. Bardia makes her go through the standard recruit exercise of butchering a hog, an act she has seen frequently since childhood. Having performed this duty, Orual summon Bardia and Arnom to the Pillar Room to witness her freeing of the Fox. She cannot take a chance on his fate, should she die, but mourns at the loss of his councils. Overcome, the Fox asks a day to mull this over and gropes out of the room.

Orual wanders in bitter cold in the orchard, avoiding the plot where she, Psyche, and the Fox had been the happiest, thinking thoughts she as an old woman is ashamed to write. She cannot understand what draws the old Greek to his homeland, having lived her whole life in Glome. She is bitter this pillar of her life might want leave her. She is also bitter that Bardia might prefer his wife and brats to her. They say prisoners tame rats for pets and love them after a fashion, but come freedom, they abandon them. Orual is certain the Fox would not leave if Psyche were here. He loved Psyche, never Orual. Orual knows this is false, but cannot get it out of her mind. The Fox seeks Orual out before bedtime, subdued, and declares as a limb of the Whole he must stay here. Orual weeps. His father is dead and his children have doubtless forgotten him, the journey is long and dangerous, so he might never see the sea.

That night, Orual dreams restlessly of combat and the changes the gods are sending to her: the old Priest's death, her freeing of the Fox, and her father's approaching death. She is entering a new world so strange it blots out memory of Psyche. Ceasing to love Psyche will kill her Orual part, which could never be Queen.

The day before the battle is dreamlike. Her fame is celebrated by the crowds (as they had Psyche), and some nobles and elders seem to accept her as Queen. She speaks little and watches them watch her veil. She tells imprisoned Trunia they have found a champion to fight for him, without revealing it is she. This makes him uneasy. Orual calls



for wine and, surprisingly, Redival delivers it, meekly, modestly and dutifully. Trunia is stricken by her beauty, and Orual introduces them. He asks why Orual cruelly hides her own face, and Orual assures him Redival will make it clear.

Trunia suggests if the champion wins, he marry into Orual's line. Perhaps, the marriage will be with the Queen, herself. She objects there is no room for two on her throne, but Renewal might be a possibility, if the wise men concur. Bardia insists on a last practice and to remind her to ignore the fear that will come and to substitute for her hauberk (chain mail armor) something better befitting a queen and champion. While they search the King's rich bedside armory, the Fox announces, "It's finished." They search on and settle on her old hauberk, but scoured well to resemble silver. Orual looks at the dead King and considers how little stir anyone's death makes.

Part 1, Chapter 18 Analysis

Orual arranges her hated sister's marriage to the imprisoned prince, meets Arnom for the first time vested as Priest, frees her lifelong mentor and advisor, and learns unemotionally of her father's death - all in the shadow of the coming combat. The Queen in Orual is taking over, best seen in her pithy rejection of marriage to Trunia. The Orual part hangs on in her torment over the Fox and Bardia preferring other places and people to her.



Part 1, Chapter 19

Part 1, Chapter 19 Summary

As with meals, which require much preparation and cleanup, Orual's actual fight with Argan takes but ten minutes, but the whole day is given over to the event. Now a freedman and the "Queen's Lantern," the Fox attends, splendidly (against his wishes) attired. Bardia argues Orual's veil will blind her but she refuses to fight barefaced. They compromise on a customized mask that makes her look ghostlike and dreadful. Trunia goes along, protected by truce. Orual is struck by how the turnout resembles Psyche's two goings out among the people and considers this is what the god might have meant, saying she shall be Psyche. She might also be an offering.

With all these eyes on her, Orual concentrates on making a brave show. Some of the nobles riding out with her assume she will be defeated, and the masses care only about getting a free show. Priest Arnon in his bird-mask awaits on the field of battle, having already sacrificed a bull for Orual. Across the field, Argan sits among his horseman, straw haired, bloated, pouting, and altogether unpleasing. Still, Orual marvels that soon one of them will have killed the other without every speaking a word between them. They ride out, dismount, partake of the sacrificial bull meat, and take an oath on behalf of their people to obey the agreements. The seconds confer some more.

Finally, Bardia wishes the gods be with her, the Fox sets his face like iron, and Trunia gapes when Orual steps out onto the open grass. Both sides cheer as the combatants close and strike. Argan clearly despises Orual until she skins his knuckles with a lucky stroke. While never taking her eyes off his sword, Orual studies his expressions, which show fear. Orual treats it like another practice session. She is certain he cannot kill her but uncertain she can kill him. She fears only the battle will stretch out, and Argan will have greater stamina, but suddenly the unmistakable look of raging for life comes over him, and he makes two mistakes. Orual misses the first one but on the second strikes a mortal wound to Argan's thigh. People run to him, and the mob roars, echoing in her helmet.

Orual is scarcely out of breath but feels suddenly weak. She imagines this is how women feel when they lose their virginity. Bardia and the Fox rush to her, and she weeps hard with her head down so they will not see. She has a score of things to do but wishes she could drink milk alone as she had the first day she used a sword. She and Trunia ride out to face the horsemen of Phars. A few loyalists gallop off, but the rest acclaim Trunia and call for peace. He rides off to confer with the captains.

Bardia advises Orual to invite 25 of both sides' notables, and arnom to a feast in the palace. The pig and part of Ungit's sacrificial bull can be served and remaining wine in the King's cellar will make the bean-bread less noticeable. Orual feels like she has returned to being a woman caught up in housewife's cares. Trunia praises Orual as they ride to the palace, begging to see her face; this is so novel she enjoys the banter and



realizes for the first (and last) time in her life she is happy and hopeful. The gods, however, prick the bubble the instant Orual crosses the threshold. A slave tells Bardia his wife is in labor, and he asks leave to hurry home. Orual understands her father's rages, but constrains herself politely and piously. Bardia does not understand how the words, "the day's work is over" hurt Orual, for they reduce her to a mere employer.

The banquet is the first and only one Orual forces herself to sit through to the end. She is the only woman present, and she alternates between feeling bitterly alone and trying to be one of the guys. The party, convinces her men are truly vile creatures. She misses Psyche and Bardia, who become in her mind inseparable; and relieves her pain by drinking herself drunk and playing the fool. Going to her fool's bed, Orula hears a girl crying in the garden. She knows it is not Psyche and realizes she is now a great Queen and warrior, above calling out for her half-sister. The Queen in Orual vows to kill the alter ego. The King is dead, never to pull her hair again.

Part 1, Chapter 19 Analysis

The moment of battle is squeezed into a few deft sentences in a chapter that shows Orual becoming the Queen. As in the valley, Orual remarks bitterly that the playful gods blow bubbles large before pricking them, and she blows Bardia's request to attend his baby's birth out of proportion. Already disappointed, Orual watching males at their revels for the first time and misandry grows to the point of declaring men universally disgusting. She has, however, no other choice than to be like them. Woman's lot is reduced to its starkest terms. When Orual declares her life momentarily "gay," and the context makes clear she means it in the historical sense of "carefree," although Lewis writes on the eve of the sense of "homosexual" taking over firmly. To read the modern sense into Orual distorts her.



Part 1, Chapter 20

Part 1, Chapter 20 Summary

They cremate the King, betroth Redival to Trunia (the wedding is a month later), the strangers depart, and Orual's real reign begins. The Orual part sleeps deep within like a reverse fetus, daily growing smaller and less alive. Tales and songs about her reign are exaggerations, conflation with another northern queen, and pure imagination. Orual fights only three wars, never assumes she is a great general, but in a war with Essur does kill seven men ambushing Bardia and is wounded. Her true strength lies in: 1) good and complementary counselors in the Fox and Bardia, who come to admire one another, never flatter her, and indeed do not think of her as a woman; and 2) her veil, which makes people pay attention to her voice and creates a myth of what it conceals. On assuming the throne, Orual moves her quarters to the north side of the palace to avoid the sound of the chains in the well that make her think of Psyche, whom she knows must be long dead or enslaved. Bidders in slave markets and travelers' tales reveal nothing about Psyche.

In her first year, Orual orders Batta hanged and frees many household slaves, including Poobi, allowing them to choose their own spouses. Orual transforms the silver mines from penal colony to a source of wealth and gives slave workers the incentive of freedom after ten years' service. She moves the Fox into a noble apartment and gives him money to buy books from far away, which Arnom and other young nobles read. Orual makes a point of showing courtesies to the ladies of the land, including Bardia's wife, Ansit, unshapely after eight children and hardly the beauty she expects. Ansit is a scared mouse; jealous over never having shared the unique bond of warfare with her husband. Orual envies the male's ability to go back and forth between Queen and wife, doing his duty to both. The one sin the gods never forgive is being born female.

Orual loathes offering sacrifice in the House of Ungit. The goddess is weakened when Arnom makes the place less holy by opening windows and scouring it after every offering. As the Fox's pupil, Arnom commissions a realistic statue to set up in front of the shapeless ancient stone. Orual insulates the well with thick stone walls and hears Psyche's weeping no more. As the Fox ages, Orual allows him to retire to write a history of Glome. He grows less a philosopher and more a poet, and mistakes Orual for Psyche, but she is too busy to spend time with him, revising the laws, deepening and narrowing the Shennit, bridging the old ford, digging cisterns, and implementing wise stock management.

Despite all the bustle, skill and glory of queenship, Orual still sleeps and arises bitterly alone. When the Fox dies, Orual gives him a kingly funeral and fine tomb behind the pear trees. Time goes on like a wheel until Orual cannot bear to endure seeing the same things every day. With Glome at peace and almost ruling itself, she resolves to travel to other lands. With Bardia's son Ilerdia and Poobi's daughter Alit, servants, and guards, Orual rides out of Glome.



Part 1, Chapter 20 Analysis

Orual skips rapidly over the years of her reign, downplaying the tales and songs that have arisen about them. She makes Glome once again prosperous and secure, institutes social reforms, grows bored, and decides to see the world. Her veil becomes a mystery, which she utilizes to benefit.



Part 1, Chapter 21

Part 1, Chapter 21 Summary

Orual spends ten days in Phars, marveling at Redival's decline in beauty and constant talks about her children, the second of whom, Daaran, will succeed Orual as King of Glome. Journeying westward into Essur, they spend three nights in the King's house, he being slavish-courteous to Orual and the Queen being terrified by Orual's veil and stories about her. Orual allows a detour to a natural hot spring 15 miles further west on a hot autumnal day, when the world rests from labor, making Orual think about cutting back on her work load and allowing Bardia to rest, as well. She sees the wisdom of old age beginning.

While camp is being set up, Orual hears a temple bell, walks toward the sound, and finds a small Greek-style temple. Inside it is cool, fresh-smelling, clean, empty, and silent, much more pleasant than the House of Ungit, and clearly the home of a small, peaceful, vegetarian god. A two-foot-high carved goddess stands on the altar, marred by a black covering on the face. An old man with quiet eyes enters and asks if Orual wants to make an offering to Istra, only recently become a goddess. He singsongs a sacred story. Istra is previously a mortal, the youngest and most beautiful of three princesses on whom Talapal (the Essurian Ungit) becomes jealous and offers her to a mountain brute, but she is rescued by Talapal's son Ialim, the most beautiful of the gods. Istra forbids him to see her face for fear Talapal discovers Ialim is in love with her hated enemy.

The story scarcely moves Orual, but she asks where the priest has learned this. He is perplexed she would ask such a foolish question about a sacred story and continues: Istra's two sisters visit and both see her beautiful palace. Orual feels as though the gods have laughed and spat in her face by twisting Psyche's story and stripping it of its central riddle. How can these gods show themselves openly and not torment humans with glimpses?

The priest continues. The jealous, wicked sisters plot to ruin Istra. At that moment, Orual resolves to write a book, speaking the truth and laying out the case against the gods' game of cat-and-mouse. The priest continues. Istra is wandering the earth, weeping, and Ialim can do nothing, because he fears his mother. When Talapal has tormented Istra all she can, she releases her to return to Ialim and become a goddess. At that point, the priest says, he exchanges his black robe for a white one. Understanding in the priest's mind the story and its liturgical enactment annually are one, Orual leaves. During the trip home, she spends every day and many nights recalling every passage of the true story, dragging up all she has for years suppressed. She works hurriedly, lest the gods find out and silence her.

Back home, work has piled up, and Bardia is sick in bed. Arnom says its is merely old age, but Orual is certain his wife is keeping him from the palace. Orual finishes her book



and asks the reader to choose between her and the gods, who have given her nothing in the world to love but Psyche, then stolen her away without revealing her fate, and, when Orual guesses wrong what has happened, punished Psyche through her. The gods are unfair, neither leaving humans alone to live out their short days nor telling them what they want done. Hinting and hovering in dreams and oracles, appearing and vanishing, staying silent when questioned, playing cat-and-mouse and blindman's bluff are intolerable. Why must holy places always be dark? Orual challenges the noxious gods to answer her charges but figures they will more likely strike her mad or leprous or turn her into a beast, bird, or tree, because they have "no answer."

Part 1, Chapter 21 Analysis

Part 1 ends with an explanation of why Orual has written this book, earlier having hinted the reason, at the end of a vacation trip intended to relax her. The capricious gods have distorted Psyche's story, stripped it of its riddle, and created a cult for the young goddess Istra. This is intolerable, and Orual means the world to know about it. Having in the previous chapter appreciated how her own myth has been encrusted, Orual is unsympathetic to the same thing happening with Psyche's liturgical celebration.



Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

Within days of writing "no answer," Orual realizes she must correct points in her story but, knowing she is dying, appends them rather than editing. The first fix concerns Redival, when from the Great King comes a eunuch Orual recognizes as Tarin. Tarin is thankful Orual's father has castrated and sold him, because it set him on the road to fortune and greatness. Tarin says Redival had been lonely when the Fox and Psyche arrive and fail to love her. Orual has never considered Redival's feelings, being unable to get over jealousy for the golden curls. Orual's daily sifting and sorting of materials, separating motives and pretexts, inspire nightly dreams of sorting a huge pile of mixed seeds by kind, knowing if she makes a single mistake, infinite punishment will befall her. Sometimes, Orual is an ant pushing seeds larger than her body.

Orual grumbles at not having Bardia to ease the writing and blames his wife. Arnom, now a trusted counselor, says Bardia is very weak. Plus, with the Fox gone, no one has the power to inspire him to fight the sickness. He warns Orual rushing to his side may make him less likely to survive, because as an obedient and loving subject, he will overstrain himself. This is the bitterest truth Orual has ever tasted, but she drinks it and miserably holds off. On the fifth day, when Arnom approaches in tears, Orual knows Bardia is dead, and mourns never having whispered, "Bardia, I love you." Custom dictates that as non-kin, Orual refrain from wailing or beating the breast at Bardia's pyre and, on the third day, visiting the widow she knows does not want to see her.

Orual begs Ansit to "un-queen" her, so they can talk candidly about their mutual loss, and Ansit declares Orual has worked Bardia to death. He conceals from her weariness he cannot hide it from his wife. The mines are not the only place a man can be worked to death. Orual objects she has worked herself equally hard, but Ansit counters women are tougher than men, and Orual is younger than Bardia. Her heart shriveling, Orual laments had she known, she would have let him retire, but Ansit insists the Queen does not understand how fortunate she is to have such loyal servants. Ansit insists she knows they have not been lovers, but Orual has used him nonetheless for everything she needs before sending him home, too tired to eat or talk. Orual removes her veil and demands if Ansit can be jealous of such a face, and the women embrace and speak the language of sobs. Ansit knows Orual has loved Bardia and is suffering, too. The softness is short-lived, and they part enemies ever after. Replacing her veil, Orual demands why Ansit never told her until it is too late. With proud wonder, Ansit replies retirement would break such a proud soldier and make him resent her intervention. Ansit resents Orual having taken Ilerdia into her service, fears he will turn his back on her, but will not lift a finger to prevent it.

Ansit believes Orual, like all who spring from the gods, understands love as devouring. Orual argues Ansit would have been widowed long before had she not saved his life in battle and still bears an aching wound to prove it. Ansit counters she has borne the pain



of eight deliveries, and Orual has acted out of thrift. Bardia is too valuable a swordsman to throw away. Orual has gorged on many lives, including Bardia's, the Fox's, and both her sisters'. Orual is tempted to put Ansit to torture but knows Arnom will object and Ilerdia rebel. Leaving, she observes her father would have cut out Ansit's tongue for speaking like this, Ansit defiantly asks if Orual is afraid of her tongue. Riding homeward, Orual vows to send Ilerdia home to lose all the benefits she could have given him, but does not follow through.

The gods torment Orual by making her recall how she has invented work to keep Bardia in the palace, for the joy of hearing his voice. Without him, she is empty. Orual wonders if she has hated Bardia, for love is often 90% hatred. She recognizes her nighttime visions, in which he implores her love, always include making him work hard for forgiveness. The passion passes and withers, and Orual's love for Bardia (not Bardia himself) becomes a sickening thing. She regrets the craving and admits she and Ansit have both tormented him. With the loss of craving, almost everything inside Orual goes with it. She feels a gap in her soul, like a pulled tooth and believes the gods cannot drag her any lower.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

Part 2 begins Orual's correction of the record. She knows she is dying and wants nothing left incorrect. Through Tarin, a minor character in Part 1, Chapter 3, Orual reevaluates her relations with Redival and, while not changing her opinion of her character, accepts she has mistreated her. She also comes to grips with having worked Bardia to death as his widow valiantly counters every self-serving argument. Anger flashes but passes, and Orual cannot punish her or her son for speaking plainly. Orual has frequently hinted she inherited her father's temper, but rarely carried out her threats. The dreams/visions that begin coming to Orual will be recapitulated and explained in the final chapter.



Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

Orual must play a role in the rite of the Year's Birth, witnessing the Priest's mock battle with Ungit. As a woman, she is spared the all-night vigil required of kings and only attends the climax. She hates entering the smothering House of Ungit, but takes her place beside a wearied Arnom opposite the flat stone. She watches rows of temple girls who face horrible, senseless lives and mourns the waste. She studies the stone, not fallen from the sky, as are sacred stones in many myths, but pushed up from the underworld. In its irregular, blood-crusting surface, Orual pictures Batta in a rare loving mood.

When Orual asks Arnom who Ungit is, he replies in a modern fashion learned from the Fox: Ungit signifies the earth, the womb and mother of all living things. When Orual challenges the mythology, he explains how Ungit can also be mother of the god of the Mountain and his wife. Arnom concedes it is strange how priests wrap this up and hide it from the vulgar. A poor woman enters, weeping over her own concerns, offers a live pigeon, and sinks, shaking, at Ungit's feet. When she arises, she is calm, and Orual asks if she prays always to the shapeless stone rather than the Greek image. The woman says Greek Ungit is for nobles and learned men and does not comfort commoners, like her.

At noon, Priest and Queen emerge into the light to cries of "He is born!" Orual is amazed at the joy a ritual can inspire, strong even to make confirmed enemies embrace as brothers for the moment. Feeling old and weary, Orual goes home to bed, sunk in deep thought. Her father's voice commands she rise, all her years of queenship shrink, and Orual quakes, wondering how to escape the King. As she puts on her veil, the King orders her to stop the folly, and she obeys. She follows him to the Pillar Room, fearing he will see his precious mirror missing, given as a coronation gift to Revival.

The King orders his goblin daughter to help him break up the paved floor, and overpowers her to make her jump with him into the deep hole beneath. They land safely on their feet in a warmer, oppressive, smaller replica of the Pillar Room. They dig again, and Orual resists jumping, but the King chides her for setting her wits against him and taunts her she has no Fox to help her. They land safely in a still smaller version of the Pillar Room, made of living rock, and claustrophobia seizes Orual. Demanding, "Who is Ungit?" the King drags Orual to a mirror, and her terror increases, seeing him looking normally while she has the face of Ungit in the rock. Wailing, "I am Ungit," Orual finds herself in cool daylight in her chamber.

From this time forward, Orual cannot distinguish dreams from real visions. She knows she is Ungit, the Batta-thing, all-devouring, womblike, and barren. Glome is a web, and she a swollen spider, gorged with men's stolen lives. Refusing this role, Orual draws her old sword, but is too weak to wield it against herself. Orual puts off the veil by which all



recognize her and walks barefaced through the streets, no less shamed than if she had been naked. People, she is sure, will recognize her as Ungit and worship her. No one in the sleeping city takes note, however.

At the Shennit, Orual finds a place where the bank is high, fearing she will lack the courage to wade in gradually. She ties her ankles, lest fear tempt her to swim. She hears a voice beyond the river saying, "Do not do it." A wave of fire passes over Orual and, having once heard a god's voice, she knows this is authentic. The voice says she cannot escape Ungit in the deadlands, for Ungit is there also. "Die before you die. There is no chance after," it advises. Orual objects she is Ungit and, typically, this god falls silent, and Orual, no longer a rebel, crawls home, and falls asleep.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

An annual ritual sets Orual up for a dream about her late Father in which the insults of Part 1 are resurrected. The powerful Queen is once again a cringing daughter, dragged deep into the earth and told she is the goddess Ungit. Too weak to kill herself to end her misery, Orual accepts the premise, lays aside the mask that no longer conceals her but announces her royal presence wherever she goes, and walks barefaced through Glome, awaiting acclamation as the ugly goddess. She walks unnoticed. Tempted to end it all in the waters of the Shennit, Orual hears the unmistakable voice of an unknown god and lives on, warned she must die before reaching the nether world where Ungit also wields power. The dreams/visions that will be recapitulated and explained in the final chapter continue.



Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

For several days, the gods leave Orual to mull over being Ungit. She recalls Greek legends of Eleusis living again after postmortem rituals and Socrates talking about the soul being "dragged back through the fear of the invisible" after death. Orual believes, with the gods' help (if they will help), she can change her ugly soul into a fair one, and she strives to be calm and wise, but rage, resentment, fantasy, and bitterness flow back swiftly. Without beauty of soul, the gods will not love her any more than a man would without beauty of face. Winners and losers are marked out from birth, and fate must be accepted. In a waking dream, Orual finds herself on a riverbank opposite a flock of golden rams. Figuring if she can steal one, she will have beauty, Orual wades across, and the rams approach, but in a savage onrush of joy they trample her without killing her. Standing up, she sees a lone figure effortlessly harvesting golden wool from thorn bushes.

Orual despairs of ever ceasing to be Ungit and feels dead already, while continuing to perform her queenly duties. She finds herself wiser but disinterested when seated on the judgment seat. Accepting she has devoured Bardia, Orual is comforted to know she has loved Psyche truly and, thus, bested the gods. She sits in the garden, rereading what she has written about Psyche, when a waking vision comes to her. Orual walks over burning sands carrying an empty bowl, knowing she must find a spring rising from the water of death and bring it, without spilling a drop, to Ungit.

Orual walks 100 years, until she reaches great cliffs no one can scale. Orual despairs, until she sees a circling eagle sent by the gods. The bowl turns into a book of complaints against the gods, and the mountain echoes as the eagle leads Orual into court to have her case heard. It grows colder, and the voices hush, as she reaches the courtroom. Orual finds herself on a rock pillar in a great cave. As her eyes adjust, Orual sees the darkness is alive with tens of thousands of faces watching her, including Batta, the King, the Fox, and Argan - all ghosts. The unisex judge, veiled in black, orders Orual stripped naked, and orders her to read her complaint.

The roll in Orual's hand is not the book she has written, and Orual wants to complain about the substitution but finds herself reading the vile scribble in her father's voice. The text admits she knows the *real* gods are not like Ungit and, having been shown a real god and his house, Orual ought to know this - and she does. She could have endured a brute devouring Psyche, but not a handsome god stealing her love. Do the gods think mortals will find them easier to bear if they are beautiful? It will make them 1,000 times worse, because they will lure and entice everything worth having.

Stealing Psyche's heart and making her see things hidden from Orual are unjust. Had the roles been reversed, Orual would have told and shown Psyche everything. There is no room for both gods and mortals in one world. Psyche has been Orual's and no one



else has a right to her. The gods may claim they have brought Psyche bliss Orual could never have given her, and Orual ought to be glad for Psyche's sake, but the separation is cruel. Wife- and slave-robbers act that way. The gods are thieves and seducers, not blood-drinkers and man-eaters. The judge says, "Enough," and utter silence falls. Orual realizes she has been re-reading the text a dozen times and might have continued forever. Now she knows she has her real voice. "Are you answered?" asks the judge, and Orual confirms she is.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

Orual meditates on the theme of beauty and then experiences a vivid waking vision of a crucial mission to fetch water for Ungit from the underworld. It turns into a judicial hearing of her case against the gods, but they substitute for Orual's book a text of their own, which confesses she has been given all she needs to know the truth about them. The text states honestly that Orual begins to hate the gods, only when they steal Psyche from her and continues the theme of beauty. The gods use beauty to seduce humans, which is far more horrible than simply devouring them. Orual confesses to selfishness about Psyche. She had wanted Psyche's happiness on her own terms.



Part 2, Chapter 4

Part 2, Chapter 4 Summary

The complaint is the answer. Orual recalls the Fox's glib saying the art and joy of words is to say precisely what one means. Orual has now said aloud things she has been repeating idiotically in her heart for 40 years, and she realizes it is senseless for the gods to speak to humans until babble gives way to what humans truly mean. They cannot meet face-to-face until humans have faces. The specter of Orual's father volunteers to teach her, but the Fox steps forward to accept her blame and punishment as her mentor. He admits teaching her to parrot phrases and neglecting to tell her about Ungit's other faces and the real, living gods.

Stuck by trite phrases, Orual has never asked penetrating questions, and he has never admitted he does not see what the old Priest gets from the dark House through sacrifices. The Fox asks to be banished to Tartarus, if this can cure glibness. Orual wants to object the Fox has given her all that is costliest, but there is no time. The trial is finished. The judge declares the plaintiff having been heard and answered the defendant gods have the right to accuse her before a higher court.

Finding nowhere to go on the rock pillar, Orual leaps into the blackness, and the Fox catches her. She is surprised he is not cold as Homer says the shadows are; the Fox explains the poets are often wrong and asks her forgiveness. Orual claims to have known his reasons for staying on as a freedman are disguises for pity and love. She has used him and others, as Ansit says. The Fox is glad to have something to forgive, but the judges are at hand, and he must lead her there. When Orual despairs of being judged by the gods, the Fox says, infinite hopes and fears may both be hers. She will surely *not* get justice, for were the gods just, humans would be doomed. The Fox leads Orual to a light, cool, greenish chamber, walled on three sides. The fourth side has pillars, through which Orual sees level grass and shining water.

While they wait for the judges, the Fox suggests they study the amazing painted walls. In the first panel, Psyche, more beautiful than ever, binds her ankles and is ready to plunge into the water, but Orual cries out madly not to do it. Psyche, without appearing to hear her, walks away. At the next animated scene, Psyche in rags and iron fetters sorts seeds with the help of ants. Her face is grave but not anguished. Orual wants to ask the Fox a question, but he hushes her and leads her to a third scene, where Psyche creeps along a hedgerow, wondering how to gather golden wool. Orual marvels at her childishly bewildered face. Scenting an intruder, the rams charge and overwhelm her, but Psyche laughs and harvests wool from the hedge. In the next scene, Orual sees Psyche and the shadow of herself, trudging across burning sands, Psyche holding an empty bowl, and Orual a book full of poison. Psyche is parched and pitiable but appears to sing. At the foot of the precipice, Orual vanishes, and an eagle bears Psyche's bowl away and returns it filled with the water of death.



Standing before the third wall, the Fox asks Orual if she has understood. Orual asks how Psyche could have come through all this unscathed and almost happy. The Fox replies, "Another bore nearly all the anguish," and reminds her all are limbs and parts of one Whole. Men and gods flow in and out and mingle. Realizing she has borne Psyche's anguish while Psyche does the work, Orual thanks and blesses the gods. The Fox tells her to be strong. Orual sees Psyche walking down a gentle subterranean slope, undertaking Ungit's last task. The Fox explains all are born into the House of Ungit and must die giving birth to Ungit's son - or change. Psyche must fetch beauty in a casket from the Queen of the Deadlands to make Ungit beautiful. If Orual speaks to anyone along the way, she will never return to sunlit lands. Everything is at stake. A crowd of familiar faces from Glome calls out to Psyche to be their goddess, but she walks past.

Further down, an older, paler, grayer Fox calls to Psyche to forget such foolishness, rebukes her for not understanding his teaching, and summoning her to obey reason, calmness, and self-discipline, not the gods. If she drops this barbarianism, he will lead her back to their grass plot. Psyche walks on. Further yet, an unknown woman arises, cried out from despair, humiliation, entreaty, and reproach, and Orual fears kindhearted Psyche will be entrapped. As a quiver goes through Psyche, and she sobs, Orual begs the gods to defend her and let her pass quickly. The woman reaches out, her left arm bleeding, and wails to Psyche as her only child and love, to return to Maia and live happily together. Psyche bites her lip until it bleeds, weeps bitterly, but keeps walking towards death. That is the last picture.

Orual and the Fox are alone, she asks again if these scenes are true, and he assures her everything here is true. They have been Psyche's most dangerous enemies. In the future, when the gods are all beautiful, this will happen more often. Human jealousy will grow and seek to keep souls from uniting with the Divine Nature, which can change the past, so nothing is yet in its true form. As the Fox says this, a cry goes up: the goddess Psyche is returning to her house from the lands of the dead, bringing a casket of beauty. The Fox leads Orual into the sunlight, to an immense bath of clear water in the center of the courtyard. Orual prostrates before Psyche, begs to be hers, and repents of having been a craver. Psyche raises dear Maia up to present her the casket.

As they face one another, Orual sees Psyche is truly a goddess, 1,000 times more her old self than before the Offering. Psyche asks if she has not said they would one day meet in her house with no cloud between them. Joy silences Orual. Psyche's face suddenly changes, as the blue sky deepens and sighs, and voices proclaim the god is coming to judge Orual. Psyche prevents Orual from sinking in terror, joy and overpowering sweetness. Orual is unmade and becomes no one. Orual loves Psyche as she never has thought possible and is willing to die any death for her, but looks beyond her to the dreadful and beautiful approaching god. In the pool, Orual sees two figures reflected, two Psyches, one clothed and the other naked. Both are beautiful but not identically. A great voice proclaims, "You also are Psyche." Orual dares to look up, sees no god, and the oracle vanishes, while the words still ring in her ear.



This happens four days ago. They find Orual lying on the grass, speechless. Orual knows she will die soon and wonders why will people weep for her, when she has done so little to please them. Why has she not loved and taught Daaran? Having ended her first book with the words, "no answer," she now understands why. The Lord is the answer, and before his face all questions die away. Words cannot suffice. Orual has long wanted to fight and to hate, and has not feared the Lord. As she writes, "I might," the narrative ends abruptly and Arnom, Priest of Aphrodite, adds a postscript. Orual has died writing and wishes her story to reach Greece. He has ordered it delivered by the first stranger willing to take an oath to deliver it safely.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Analysis

Till We Have Faces ends with the gods recapitulating the visions they have given to Orual in a three-walled animated painting that shows she and Psyche have cooperated, Psyche doing, and Orual bearing the grief. The gods are not silent once their human interlocutor has a face. Orual surrenders to divine transcendence and dies writing a repudiation of her previous views. Note the Fox as guide in the final vision sequences interprets according to his Greek myths, presuming the judge is Minos, Rhadamanthus, or Persephone - Greek judges of the dead and asks to be cast to Tartarus, the underworld. Confessing the odd sin of glibness, he too repudiates his agnosticism and says the gods can change the past, so the present is unsettled. Arnom has become Priest of Aphrodite.



Characters

Orual ("Maia")

The narrator of *Till We Have Faces*, Queen Orual is the eldest daughter and successor of Trom, King of Glome. After a 40-year reign, nearing death, and no longer fearing the gods, she writes for eventual Greek readers, whom she calls on to judge between her and the gods. Orual's father mocks her ugliness, but provides her and beautiful younger sister Redival a learned Greek mentor, the Fox. When even more beautiful half-sister Psyche is born, Orual treats her as a daughter. Orual fails to spare Psyche's life when the Priest demands a Great Offering to purge the kingdom; ugly Orual is not an acceptable substitute sacrifice and falls too sick to affect a rescue.

At their final meeting, Psyche angers Orual by her calm acceptance, and Orual fails to be any comfort. Recovering, Orual recruits her fencing tutor, Captain Bardia, to take her to recover Psyche's remains, but they find her very much alive, albeit deluded she has wed an unseen god. By night, Orual glimpses in mist Psyche's grand palace, and heart and mind thereafter battle about her right and/or duty to continue as her sister's keeper. Orual returns, fails again to reassert control, and, stabs herself to guilt Psyche into testing who or what her husband is. Orual watches in awe as the god reveals himself, destroys the valley, and laments Psyche must go into exile, and Orual must become Psyche. Accepting whatever fate the gods decree, Orual stands up to the King and, as he lies dying, takes command of the realm. She vows never again to go barefaced in public. Taking in the rebel son of a neighboring king, Orual concocts a plot to save him by challenging his brother to single-handed battle.

The King dies before the day of battle, Orual wins easily, is hailed by the mobs and crowned. During a long reign, she restores prosperity and security, and institutes social reforms., but works Bardia to death. A foreign priest relates a myth that is an insulting distortion of Psyche's story, and Orual accepts dredging up repressed memories to record the whole truth as an indictment of the injustices and caprices of the cruel gods. Feeling death approach as a first draft is finished, Orual corrects the account in some particulars and continues seeing visions, the worst of which proves she is Ungit. All Orual has dreamed is recapitulated and explained in a final epic vision, where she learns the gods are real and powerful beyond words. Orual dies writing a repudiation of her earlier, agnostic views.

Lysias ("The Fox")

A learned Greek taken prisoner of war and sold to the widowed King Trom of Glome to educate his still unborn son, red-haired, bright-eyed Lysias, nicknamed "the Fox," is told to "practice" on the princesses Orual and Redival. Orual loves the Fox, whom she addresses as "Grandfather," and admires how he never complains or boasts of former greatness, but cheers himself by remembering all the world is one city and everything is



as good or bad as one's opinion makes it. The Fox eagerly learns Glome's language, history, religion, and natural sciences, teaches the girls poetry, and proves himself a deft negotiator and scribe. The Fox finds newborn Princess Istra/Psyche more beautiful than Andromeda, Helen, and Aphrodite, and neglects Redival, who has no interest in his teachings, but is forced to she not become pregnant before she is betrothed.

Years later, Psyche nurses the Fox during the plague, and a myth develops The Fox fails to argue the Priest of Ungit out of sacrificing Psyche in the Great Offering to end the kingdom's woes. As a foreign slave, he may not attend the rite, but hears the details and imparts them to Orual to convince her Psyche has died a noble death. Orual journeys to Grey Mountain to retrieve Psyche's remains, and returns with stories Psyche has chosen to live as wife to some being that will not let her see him. The Fox rejects the idea of killing Psyche rather than let the family name be marred, but is too sleepy to come up with a workable plan. He is hurt and worried when Orual undertakes a second mission to Psyche, mourns the beautiful girl's being lost to them forever, and accepts Orual's decision to withhold details from him, because he cannot lose her love too. The Fox is the last male to see Orual's face before she takes the veil-and complements her on her first decision as the "King's mouth." Surprised to learn of Orual's lessons in swordsmanship, the Fox reacts to her plan to fight Arnan of Phars with typical Greek chauvinism.

On the eve of Orual's combat, she frees the Fox from slavery, fearing what might befall him should she die. He decides Greece holds too little for him to abandon his post, and as a freedman becomes the "Queen's Lantern," is royally attired, moved from his wretched quarters, allowed eventually to retire to write local history, and buy books, but is too busy to see him often as dementia comes over him. When the Fox dies, Orual gives him a kingly throne and buries him near their beloved pear grove. In the last epic vision of Orual's life, the specter of the Fox is her guide, repents of being too sterile and glib in his instruction, and offers to accept her punishment. Posthumously, the Fox sees and proclaims the gods are real and powerful.

Istra / Psyche

Supremely beautiful, Istra loses her mother at birth and is raised by her half-sister, the future Queen Orual. They call one another Psyche and Maia only in private. At every age, Psyche is the essence of beauty and makes beautiful everything around her. Her tutor, the Fox, compares Psyche to Andromeda, Helen, and Aphrodite. From childhood Psyche is in love with Grey Mountain and talks of one day marrying the greatest king of all, who will build for her a castle of gold and amber on the summit. When an epidemic befalls Glome, Psyche nurses the Fox, word of his recovery makes her a godlike healer, and the mass call for her to come out of the palace and heal them. Psyche exhausts herself walking among her people, is stricken with fever herself, and is bedridden.

Recovering, Psyche loses her youthful look and gains a new radiance. Learning her old wet nurse is ill, Psyche goes to cure her, but en route home, called "The Accursed." The Priest of Ungit demands Psyche be sacrificed in the Great Offering, and her acceptance



of this fate angers Orual during a final meeting. Psyche says she has always felt as though she should have been born on Grey Mountain, so this is a going home, and she embraces the myth of marrying or being eaten by the god in preference to dying slowly, tied to the Tree. Glome can only be redeemed by death and Psyche is comfortable in her role. On the day of the Offering, Psyche is drugged, painted, gilded, and dressed as a temple girl, seated on an open litter, and borne to Grey Mountain.

Weeks later, Orual and Bardia ride there to recover Psyche's remains but find her in a lush valley in territory even priests dare not explore. Psyche believes she has married the Wind-Spirit, who does not allow her to see him, and lives in a palace superior to the house of her childhood dreams. They fight for the first time in their lives but part hopeful Orual will visit again. At their second meeting, Orual tries to reassert quasi-parental control over Psyche and dramatically stabs herself to force Psyche into lighting a lamp to verify who or what her husband is. Caught between beloved half-sister and new husband, Psyche agrees to the test she fears will destroy her happy world.

Betrayed, the god destroys the mysterious valley and sends Psyche into exile. Orual posts agents in all slave markets and reads travelers' stories in hopes of finding Psyche, but eventually accepts she is dead. Late in life, on a vacation trip, Orual encounters a foreign priest who tells the sacred story of a young goddess Istra, which is a corruption of Psyche's tragic tale. Orual resolves to write the whole truth to indict the cruel gods.

Bardia

The honest captain of the palace guards, Bardia first meets future Queen Orual, when he is assigned to guard Psyche pending her sacrifice in the Great Offering. Bardia begs he is following orders when he refuses entry to Orual, but admits her when she fetches a sword and confronts him. Easily disarming her, he tells her how hard a death it is, being run through with a sword, and lets her in after she swears on his sword to leave when he signals. A big, kindly man several years older than Orual, Bardia offers to train her in sword fighting as a sure remedy to sorrow. When Orual reveals her plans to fetch Psyche's remains for proper burial, Bardia insists on being her guide and protector.

Reaching the Tree and finding no trace of Psyche, Bardia piously says this proves the god has taken her away, but accompanies Orual into unexplored territory beyond. They descend into a beautiful lush valley, and run into Psyche, very much alive. Bardia is content not to cross the river as the half-sisters are reunited and, hearing Orual's description of the even, refuses to second-guess the gods, and cannot find any other explanation for Psyche's survival. Bardia continues training Orual and increasingly treats her like a man. After Orual's alliance with the Second Priest as the "King's mouth," Bardia is the first to whisper, "Long live the Queen," before the scepter passes to her. Bardia approves of Orual's bold plan to fight Argan of Phars single-handed for the life of his rebellious brother, Trunia, but warns her everyone is troubled at the first strike into human flesh.



Bardia serves as Orual's second, congratulates her on her quick victory, advises her to host a party for both sides' nobles, but then asks to excuse himself to attend his baby's birth. Orual takes this as betrayal, but later tries to become friends with Bardia's standoffish - and, Orual believes, jealous wife, Ansit. When Orual returns from her vacation trip abroad, she finds aging Bardia sick in bed, but suspects Ansit is merely keeping him from the palace. When Bardia dies, Orual wishes she could once have whispered her love in his ear, and his widow boldly accuses her of working him to death, and Orual sees she is indeed at fault, because being apart from him is so painful.

King Trom

The gruff, unfeeling, and cruel King of Glome, father to Orual and Redival by an unnamed queen who dies while the princesses are young, Trom eagerly awaits the birth of a son. He buys a Greek slave whom he nicknames "The Fox" to "practice" tutoring that future heir on his daughters. The King sacrifices to the gods while his new bride is pregnant, but is disappointed when she dies in childbirth after delivering a daughter, Istra / Psyche. Trom takes no notice of the girls until Redival is caught in the arms of a guardsman, whom he orders castrated and sold into slavery, and puts the Fox and Orual, his "goblin daughter," in charge of keeping the "salt bitch" from becoming pregnant, until he can marry her off. Tarin's father makes common cause with other lords to rebel, but the King puts it down at great cost.

When epidemic strikes Glome, the King sends Psyche out among the people, lest they storm the palace, and acquiesces when the Priest of Ungit identifies Psyche as the Accursed to serve in the Great Offering as expiation for the kingdom. When Orual clings to his feet to appeal the decision, the King thrashes her and decries being surrounded by females, and points out in his prized mirror she is too ugly to take Psyche's place as victim. The King holds he ought to be pitied for having to sacrifice a dear daughter for the good of all and, having done so, his reputation briefly improves. The King slips on ice returning home from the Midwinter feast, breaks his thigh, and is given little chance of surviving. Contemplating a world of freedom after his death. Oruel assumes the duties of "King's mouth" and forms an alliance in his name with the Second Priest of Ungit, whose own superior is dying. King Trom survives several days, anguishing every time he sees Orual, and dies quietly while she and Bardia rummage through his bedside armory to outfit her properly for combat.

Towards the end of Orual's long and prosperous reign, as she is correcting her book accusing the gods of unfairness, the King comes to her in a dream, returning her to a quaking child, renews all the old insults, and drags her two layers into the earth to a miniature replica of the Pillar Room. He shows her in a mirror she is Ungit, inspiring her twice, unsuccessfully, to attempt suicide.



Argan

The third-born son of the King of Phars, Argan is challenged by jealous older brother, Trunia. After a skirmish, he pursues Trunia into Glome. Queen-apparent Orual cannot afford to be drawn into war and agrees only to treat Trunia as a prisoner. Conferring with the Fox and Bardia, Orual concocts a plan to save Trunia as the likelier candidate for King of Phars to deal well with Glome. Orual challenges Argan to a duel, certain he will want to redeem his reputation for cowardice, agrees to Argan's chauvinistic insistence if he prevails he will hang Orual rather than stain his sword with a woman's blood, finds him no match for her talent and skill, and swiftly slays him with a fatal slash to the thigh.

Arnom

The smooth-cheeked Second Priest at the time the King takes to his deathbed, Arnom is heir-apparent to the dying old Priest. As it grows clear both will die, Orual and Arnom discuss the need for solidarity. Arnom suggests Orual marry to lessen opposition to the succession, and brings up the touchy question of the Crumblings. To prop up Arnom's position and out of genuine concern for justice, Orual cedes the lands to Ungit, cementing a key alliance. Days later, the old Priest dies, and one of Arnom's first priestly acts is to sacrifice a bull before Orual's battle with Prince Argan of Phars. During Orual's long reign, the Fox becomes Arnom's tutor and his influence is shown in the cleaning up of the House of Ungit and installation of a Greek-style natural statue. By the end of Orual's life, Arnom is a trusted counselor, and in the postscript to Orual's book identifies himself as "Priest of Aphrodite."

Batta

The big-boned, fair-haired, hard-handed slave assigned by King Trom to care for his daughters, Batta torments Orual and Redival by hinting they will suffer when a stepmother arrives. During the plague, Batta and Redival become thick as thieves and, after a newly bold Orual returns from her second mission to Psyche, Batta becomes Redival's official "jailer." Batta has, by the time of the King's final illness, become a frequent visitor to his Bedchamber, albeit not for sexual purposes, and keeps him comfortable with wine during his sufferings. In the first year of Orual's reign, she orders Batta hanged, and the tone of the household improves immediately. Studying the stone in the House of Ungit, Queen Orual believes she sees Batta's face in a rare happy mood, and this follows her when the King's spirit tells Orual she is Ungit.

Daaran

The childless Queen Orual's intelligent nephew (Redival's second son by King Trunia of Phars), Daaran is Orual's designated successor as King of Glome.



Gram

The dark-eyed, scared-looking soldier Bardia assigns to accompany Orual on her second visit to Psyche in the valley, Gram is trustworthy but says little more than yes and no. His function in the novel is to make clear how superior a companion Bardia is to Queen Orual.

Ierdia

Bardia and Ansit's son, whom Queen Orual takes under her wing, Ierdia nearly becomes a victim of his mother's conflict with Orual after his father's death. However, Orual repents of returning him to his mother and ruining his chance for a life of greatness.

Poobi

Queen Orual's loyal slave, Poobi can be safely spoken in front of in Greek. Orual frees Poobi and is sad at her loss but happy at the good marriage Poobi enters. Orual takes into her traveling entourage Poobi's daughter, Alit.

Priest of Ungit

Dressed in skins, dried bladders, a great bird's head mask and reeking of blood sacrifices and incense, the Priest of Ungit has an air of holiness that terrifies Orual as a youngster. Having ministered to the House of Glome since the current King's grandfather's day, the unnamed Priest is present, ministering, at the birth of Psyche, and falls too sick of the fever to object to her being divinized by the people during the plague. He survives, however, and comes to the palace accompanied by temple girls, leaving an army at the gates.

The Priest recalls how "The Brute," whose sins in previous generations have been expiated by the bloody ritual of the Great Offering, has again arisen and points to Psyche as the "Accursed." The King lunges at him in anger and holds a dagger to his ribs, but the Priest does not flinch but announces the Great Offering will go forth whether he lives or dies. He warns that dead priests are all the more dangerous. The Priest rides with the King on either side of Psyche, the sacrificial offering, en route to the Tree. When old Priest already lies on his deathbed, the King breaks a thigh and appears to be near death. They die within a day of each other. Arnom, who comes under the Fox's Greek influence, introduces reforms, and eventually identifies himself as Priest of Aphrodite, succeeds the Priest.



Redival

The pretty, golden-curl, second daughter of Trom, King of Glome, three years younger than Orual, Redival hates studying and plays cruel tricks on their tutor, the Fox. As she matures, Redival grows aloof from the Fox, Orual, and younger half-sister Psyche, and one night is caught in the arms of a guardsman, Tarin, whom the King orders castrated and sold into slavery. The Fox and Orual are made responsible for seeing the "salt bitch" does not become pregnant until she can be married her off. Redival mocks Psyche for allowing the people to divinize her during the great epidemic, grows thick as thieves with Batta, pious, and frequents the temple, praying for a husband.

When the Priest of Ungit demands Psyche be victim in the Great Offering, Orual realizes Redival has betrayed her and meets Redival's crocodile tears with a promise to hang her by her thumbs should Orual ever ascend the throne. As their father's death approaches, Redival worries about her fate and asks if Orual will arrange a marriage for her. When Redival appears in Prince Trunia's prison to deliver wine, Trunia is struck by her beauty and asks her hand - after Orual turns him down as co-monarch. Redival is betrothed to Trunia the day after her father's funeral, and they married a month later. By the time Queen Orual sees Queen Redival next, the latter has gained weight, lost her beauty, and talks incessantly about her children. Trunia ignores her babblings.

Tarin

A young guardsman, Tarin is seduced by the King's middle daughter Redival, and when this is brought to the King's attention, is castrated and sold into slavery in Ringal. Tarin's father makes common cause with nine strong northwestern lords to rebel against the King. He puts it down, at great cost. Decades later, Tarin visits Glome as a haughty emissary from the Great King to the southwest, thankful to the late King for castrating and selling him. Tarin has become wealthy and influential in a kingdom far greater than Glome. Tarin clears up many of Orual's misconceptions about Redival recorded in Part 1, which she hastens to correct in Part 2.

Trunia

The second-born son of the King of Phars, Trunia like his simple elder brother is bypassed in the succession, rebels, is thrown from his horse fleeing a skirmish, and blunders into Glome, where he seeks sanctuary until he can rejoin his main forces in Essur. Orual cannot afford to be drawn into war and agrees to care for the tall, thin, flirtatious prince as a prisoner. Word comes from Prince Argan he intends to capture his brother, and Orual concocts a plot to save Trunia as the likelier to deal well with Glome as king. Trunia is troubled when Orual tells him her plan to have a champion decide his fate (concealing she is the champion).



When Redival delivers wine, Trunia is struck by her beauty and asks for her hand - after Orual turns him down, unwilling to share her throne. Trunia is amazed to see the Queen walk out as his champion and after he swift victory begs playfully to see her face. Redival is betrothed to Trunia the day after her father's funeral, and they marry a month later.

Ungit / Aphrodite / Talapal

The powerful chief goddess in Glome, Ungit corresponds with the bloody Babylonian version of the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Essaurian Talapal. She sits in the form of a headless, faceless, handless black stone in the House of Ungit, opposite the Shennit River from the City of Glome. Ungit is said never to anger without reason and is never to be satisfied without expiation by the "Accursed." For allowing the people to worship her as Ungit, Psyche becomes the "Accursed," subject to the bloody rite of the Great Offering. In the Essaurian myth of Istra, the mother goddess is jealous of mortal Istra's beauty but her son Ialim falls in love with her and spirits her away. Afraid of his mother, Ialim cannot keep Istra safe, and Talapal torments her until she tires of this, returns her to Ialim, and Istra becomes a goddess.



Objects/Places

Glome

The small, impoverished kingdom in which most of the action of *Till We Have Faces* takes place, Glome consists of many villages spotting the plains around a walled and fortified capital city, also named Glome. It is located near the Shennit River, a day's journey northwest of the border town of Ringal. The militant priests who keep Glome's official cult, control the territory opposite the Shennit, suggesting this may be breakaway territory of a once larger kingdom. King and Priest squabble like cats and dogs over good lands on the far side of the river (the "Crumblings"), which Orual and Second Priest Arnom, the two successors, end by concluding a treaty ceding it to Ungit and allowing the two powers to stand united during the crucial time of transition. During Orual's 40-year reign in Glome, it returns to prosperity and security, experiences social reform and civic improvements, and lives at peace with its traditional enemies.

Caphad

Once the greatest of the kingdoms in the vicinity of Glome, Caphad is a sinking when its king offers his third daughter to the widowed northern King Trom in marriage to seal an alliance. Trom resents having Caphad's declining fortunes withheld from him when he learns three cities have been lost to enemies.

The Great Offering

A ritual of human sacrifice occasionally (rarely) demanded by the goddess Ungit to end her wrath against Glome someone "Accursed" offends her and his/her sins must be expunged. The Priest identifies Psyche as this generation's Accursed, and the King accepts his daughter's sacrifice. The victim is drugged, painted, gilded, and dressed like a temple girl, and carried for six hours on an open litter between the King and Priest out of the city, past the Holy House of Ungit, and along the Holy Road to the Tree, set in the midst of a great iron saddle on Grey Mountain. There the victim is chained, and the celebrants of the sacrifice depart. Mythology variously explains the sacrifice as the victim's marriage to Ungit's son, the god of the Mountain, or his/her being consumed bodily.

The Greeklands

The Greeklands are to Queen Orual's mind a place of wisdom appreciating freedom of speech, even about the gods, and she writes her book with the intention of having it some day reach the distant southern shores. Lysias ("the Fox") hails from Greece, having been taken as a prisoner of war, longs for his homeland and idealizes its history, art, philosophy, language, and literature to the young princesses he tutors. He refers to



the inhabitants of Glome as "barbarians," the classical designation of those who speak anything but Greek or Latin.

Grey Mountain

The rugged highlands lying south of the Shennit River, Grey Mountain is the domain of the son of Ungit, the god who hates Orual. Half-sister Psyche from childhood is in love with Grey Mountain and talks of one day marrying the greatest king of all, who will build for her a castle of gold and amber on the summit. The Tree at which the Great Offering is made, situated on an iron saddle, is as far as anyone is known to have traveled, but Orual and Bardia discover and descend into a beautiful, lush valley beyond, and there discover Psyche, very much alive. Orual cannot see the grand palace in which Psyche is certain she and her divine bridegroom, the Wind-Spirit, dwell, and the half-sisters argue and fight over reality. This leaves Orual so worked up she returns to the river banks intent on crossing without permission to confront Psyche, when she sees a palace and watches it dissolve into mist.

Holy House of Ungit

The temple to Ungit, the chief goddess in the Kingdom of Glome, the House of Ungit sits in the fields across the Shennit River from Glome and with its ancient stone walls patched with brick and roofed in thatch, it resembles a huge slug lying in the fields. The priests say it resembles - or in mystery is - the egg from which the whole world is hatched (or the womb that laid it). Every spring, the Priest is shut in and must pretend to fight his way out for the New Year to be born. Fire always burns before Ungit within and blood sacrifices are regularly offered, but the Great Offering may not be performed here, but only at the Tree atop Grey Mountain. Under the influence of the Fox during the priesthood of Arnom, the House of Ungit is opened to light, cleaned after every blood offering, and thus loses much of its holiness. Still, Queen Orual finds it depressing to enter, with its staff of girls doomed to a useless life of poverty. The people ignore the new Greek-style statue of Ungit Arnom erects, claiming that version does not understand the common folk.

Phars

A rival kingdom neighboring Glome, Phars is torn by civil war when its king names named third son Argan rather than second son Trunia as his successor (the eldest is excluded as a simpleton). Orual on her first day as queen slays Argan as Trunia's champion, and gives her sister Redival to Trunia in marriage.

Pillar Room

The Pillar Room is that part of the palace of Glome where the Fox and Orual are forced by the King to perform his massive clerical work. In it hangs the King's treasured mirror,



rather than in the adjoining Bedchamber, because the King wants visitors to admire it. Queen Oruval gives the mirror to sister Reival as a coronation present. In a dream scene, the King comes to Oruval, makes her help pry up the flooring tiles, and leap down the dark hole. They land safely in a smaller version of the Pillar Room, also lacking a mirror, repeat the digging and leap, and land in a smaller still version, which is quite claustrophobic. There, the King drags Orual to the mirror and shows her she is the goddess Ungit.

Shadowbrute / Brute / Wind-Spirit / God of the Mountain

The Shadowbrute, sometimes shortened simply to Brute, is a terrible being of immense power inhabiting Grey Mountain and associated with - and occasionally blending with - the son of the goddess Ungit, whom Psyche identifies as the Wind-Spirit. By threatening to end both their lives, Orual convinces Psyche to light a lamp and take a forbidden look at her husband. The Shadowbrute appears as the most beautiful of men after destroying the magical valley, and with a calm, sweet voice announces Psyche must now wander the world in sorrow, and Orual must become Psyche.

Shennit River

The large waterway flowing from the foothills of the Grey Mountain, the Shennit separates the Kingdom of Glome from the House of Ungit. As the Shennit overflows its banks every spring, the two cities are set back beyond the mud fields that in summer are filled with waterfowl. During the drought that accompanies the plague, the Shennit dries to a trickle, but rains restore its flow. During her reign as Queen, Orual dredges the Shennit to accommodate commerce. After the late King reveals to Orual she is the goddess Ungit, Orual tries to commit suicide by binding her ankles and plunging into the Shennit, but is dissuaded by a mysterious voice.



Social Concerns And Themes

In an introductory note to the English edition of the novel not included in the American editions, Lewis presents four themes which "suddenly interlocked: the straight tale of barbarism, the mind of an ugly woman, dark idolatry and pale enlightenment at war with each other and with vision, and the havoc which a vocation, or even a faith, works on human life." Each of these themes is explored throughout the two-part retelling of the Psyche/Cupid narrative. The barbarism of Glome is personified in the king, Trom, with his arbitrary and thoughtless cruelty toward his daughters. Glome's goddess, Ungit, expresses the barbarism even as her worship has about it depths of significance which indicate that the opposing rationality of Fox, the Greek tutor of Orual, although more humane is not necessarily the correct alternative. Finally, in the character of Orual, the protagonist, what happens when a mission, even a noble one, absorbs a human being's whole person to the exclusion of love, is exposed in all its pathos.

Clearly, Lewis in this novel is not interested in social commentary or in satirizing contemporary trends and movements as he is in his space trilogy. Rather, he is dissecting a soul, describing its operations, its motions, its growth from self-delusion to truth through pain and love.

Techniques

Lewis employs a first-person central reminiscent point of view in the novel.

Readers see what Orual sees, as she remembers it in the first part; as she learns it in the second. Her dreams and visions, vehicles for much of the archetypal subtext, are also used by Lewis to prefigure the revelations of the second part and to justify them. And the twopart structure itself is an original means of organizing the narrative. It enables Lewis to present this autobiography with an immediacy a more conventional ordering would not have.

Moreover, by casting the account in the form of a deposition, a legalistic accusation of the gods for their abuse of humankind, Lewis strengthens his protagonist's characterization, for on her believability rests the plausibility of the novel.



Themes

Death

Life is cheap in *Till We Have Faces'* Kingdom of Glome. Animal and occasionally human sacrifice are integral to the cult of the goddess Ungit. Premature natural death claims two queens, the second during childbirth, and the grieving King's response is to stab a wine steward to death and vow to send his slave, the Fox, to the mines, a certain death sentence. Princess Orual advises her beloved tutor to flee, but he prefers honorable suicide in the Greek manner. Thus he will be resolved into the elements - but still he trembles at the prospect. When plague comes to Glome and death claims hundreds a week, the Priest declares Psyche must be offered as expiation, and Psyche is resigned to dying, recalling how Captain Bardia whistles at death six times a day, and the Fox has taught them not to be scared of death, which is an opening from a small, dark room into a place of light. Psyche insists she has, and they will soon be reunited; were she to live, life and marriage would inevitably separate their paths.

When the King wavers and threatens the Priest, the old man warns dead priests can be dangerous indeed. Drought and plague disappear following Psyche's death, which the Fox interprets as coincidence, but denies Psyche has died in vain, for she dies full of courage and patience, and to love and to lose what one loves are equally appointed by nature. Psyche's name has become immortal. The death of the King and old Priest open opportunities for swift change in Glome, but looking at her father's corpse, Orual is amazed how little stir anyone's death makes. Forty years later, Orual is too busy writing her story to be overly upset by the Fox's passing, but deeply mourns Bardia's death, and slowly accepts responsibility for working him to death as her aide, as surely as if she had sent him to the mines. In a dream, Orual's late father convinces her she is Ungit and, while she mulls this over, she recalls Greek legends of Eleusis living again after postmortem rituals and Socrates talking about the soul being "dragged back through the fear of the invisible" after death. Orual hopes to change her ugly soul into a fair one, without which the gods will love her no more than a man would without beauty of face.

Aged Orual twice contemplates suicide, but a voice warns, "Die before you die. There is no chance after." Twice Orual dreams she and/or Psyche are tasked with fetching beauty from the Queen of the Deadlands to make Ungit/Orual beautiful. As Orual's guide in the final vision sequences, the Fox's specter asks to be cast into Tartarus to spare Orual, whom he has glibly failed to teach properly about the gods, who are able to change the past and create an alternative future. Death's permanence is thus made questionable.



Love

The characters in *Till We Have Faces* debate the complex topic of love, platonic and sexual. Young Orual loves her Greek tutor, the Fox, and half-sister Psyche/Istra above all, but from earliest childhood, Psyche foresees one day marrying the greatest king of all, who will build for her a castle of gold and amber on Grey Mountain. The people love beautiful Psyche briefly when she heals their fevers, but turn fickle and call for her sacrifice. In the crisis, the Fox's love for Psyche overcomes his normal wiles, and Orual's causes her to go out of character to implore the King as "father" to spare her. In their last meeting, when Psyche accepts her fate, Orual asks hurtfully if Psyche has ever loved her. Orual is hurt to overhear Bardia saying she would make a blind man a fine wife, but riding with him through glorious landscapes, she briefly believes she is lovely and desirable deep within, but quickly fights off the mood.

Fighting with Psyche, Orual realizes how one can hate someone one loves. When Orual reports the confrontation to the Fox, he replies her heart is one part love, five parts anger, and seven parts pride. Marriage, he asserts, exists by law and custom but not by nature. In the half-sisters' next confrontation, Orual recalls a childhood event when she has a barber to pull a thorn from Psyche's hand and observes love often hurts. Psyche claims a virgin cannot possibly understand, and, while admitting she knows little about sex, Orual maintains this is not the true love she has in mind. Looking betrayed, Psyche says love used as a tool of manipulation and torture is little better than hatred and suspects she has never known Orual. Having lost Psyche, Orual grows bitter about Bardia's loyalty to his wife and children and recalls prisoners tame rats for pets and love them after a fashion but, come freedom, abandon them.

When Bardia dies, Orual mourns never having whispered to him, "I love you," and briefly bonds with his widow, Ansit, in their mutual loss, until Ansit boldly declares all who spring from the gods (i.e., the royals) understand love as devouring. The gods torment Orual by making her wonder if she has hated Bardia, for love is often 90% hatred. Accepting she has devoured Bardia, Orual is comforted to know she has loved Psyche truly and, thus, bested the gods. In a final dream sequence, Orual loves a deified Psyche as she has never thought possible, but looks beyond her to the dreadful and beautiful approaching Lord.

Male Chauvinism

There is no more "political correctness" in *Till We Have Faces'* Kingdom of Glome than anywhere in the real-life ancient world. Misogyny begins at the top, where the brutal King Trom is openly contemptuous of females. He ignores his two motherless daughters, assigning them to the care of slaves. They receive an education only, because the King wants his learned Greek slave, the Fox, to hone his teaching skills for the day when the King will have a son for him to tutor. The Fox brings from his native Greece a typical male chauvinism that is offended by women walking about Glome with faces uncovered, but as a slave, the Fox must remain silent.



Years later, the Fox discovers his by then grown ward, Princess Orual, has been secretly studying swordsmanship behind his back (withholding this, because she knows he will disapprove of such unnatural behavior for a female) and plans to take the field in single-handed battle. He is aghast and opposes the plan. The nobles of Glome, however, have long been vocal in their concerns the King secure a male succession - to the point of placing it on par with ending drought and plague as reasons for sacrificing Orual's beautiful sister, Psyche/Istra to the goddess Ungit. When the King and the old Priest lie on their deathbeds, the latter's heir-apparent suggests to Orual she arrange a quick marriage with some near-by royal, in order to improve the chances of her popular acceptance as Queen. Orual declines, having decided after growing up derided for being a girl -- and an ugly girl at that -- she will reign alone, and makes two shrewd political moves to demonstrate she will be a competent monarch. Orual laments the only crime the gods consider unforgivable is the unpreventable one of being born female.

When her beloved Captain Bardia increasingly relates to her asexually, Orual grows increasingly bitter and outwardly misandrous - man hating. When Orual returns from her failed mission to save Psyche and needs to discuss tactics for a second attempt, the Fox is too sleepy to think, and Orual allows him to go to bed; 40 years later, as a bitter old woman writing up the scene, Orual criticizes her youthful naivety at not having yet understood even the truest of males cannot remain focused as long as females and give their best only if their distraction - food, sleep, joke, or girl - is tolerated. Realizing she alone cares for Psyche, Orual undertakes the disastrous second trip up Grey Mountain. Her encounter with the beautiful but destructive Wind-Spirit on the Mountain removes Orual's fear of her father and prepares her for her a lengthy and progressive reign, which passes without her subjects ever seeing her face. Orual's veil both admits and conceals Orual's ugliness, and over time creates useful mystery about her person.

In the final dream sequence she records, Orual points to the fact her judge is veiled head-to-toe, so his/her gender cannot be determined. The judge orders Orual not only unveiled but stripped naked to prepare for the final revelation that the gods (and goddesses) are beyond human questioning, "till we have faces," e.g., self-understanding and accepting.



Style

Point of View

Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis is narrated in the first person past tense by Queen Orual, an aged, husbandless, childless, and nearly friendless woman, who has overcome her lifelong fear of the gods, has heard a distorted version of her beloved sister Psyche/Istra's tragic story, and vows to correct the record. She hurriedly pens a polemical text intended someday to reach the Greek lands, where her late tutor has taught her wise men appreciate free speech even about the gods. Orual lays out her case against the gods, who she claims have done her great wrong in life. She is particularly angry at the god on Grey Mountain who accepts Psych as a sacrifice to his mother, Ungit, and asks the Greeks to judge whether she or the gods are in the right.

Orual frequently quotes bits of dialog from memory, in the present tense, of course, and comments parenthetically on how youth and inexperience have colored and distorted her understanding at the time she is taking part in the events she now relates. Orual is brutally honest about her many mistakes, occasionally base motivations, too frequent outburst of hereditary anger, and above all the ugliness that has led her to wear a veil at all times, downplays her legendary fame as a great warrior, and wants so desperately for the record to be accurate that she goes beyond those already embedded in the first-draft text, but is too old and close to death to undertake a comprehensive revision. Her initial conclusion, that the gods have no answers to give, no longer suits her, so she feverishly pens an addendum that describes visions, which end her agnosticism and convince her the gods cannot talk to human beings "Till we have faces." She dies before she can declare her beliefs fully.

C. S. Lewis, as noted in the all-too-brief author's biography on the back cover, is a noted writer about Christianity. He is also a specialist in classical philosophy and mythology and puts much of this knowledge into the novel. He stays scrupulously in the background, allowing his narrator, Orual, alone to speak. Lewis suffuses the narrative, however, with Christian themes of expiation, woven into a thoroughly pre-Christian story.

Setting

The setting of *Till We Have Faces* must be inferred from tidbits sprinkled throughout the novel. The small, impoverished Kingdom of Glome lies on a plain irrigated by the Shennit River in the shadows of a rugged mountain range, somewhere north of the "Greeklands," and clearly beyond the boundaries of its linguistic domination, for they speak an unspecified vernacular language for which there appears to be yet no written form. This places it somewhere above modern Bulgaria and Albania in the Balkan Peninsula. Classicist C. S. Lewis provides through the enslaved Greek philosopher Lysias ("The Fox") references to Alcibiades, Oedipus, Homer, Euripides, and Heraclitus,



and above all, Aristotle, not by name, but as the author of a difficult book that begins, "All men by nature desire knowledge," as revered cultural icons, which allow *Till We Have Faces* to be set no earlier than the early second century, B.C.E.

Importantly, Hellenistic culture has not influenced Glome before the Fox arrives as an enslaved prisoner of war and engaged to tutor the royal children and later to the young Priest of Ungit. Early in the novel, Glome faces famine, pestilence, drought, war, and no male successor to the throne. The old Priest warns the King not to listen to Greek wisdom lest the fearful people burn down his palace, but his successor, under the Fox's influence, introduces classical reforms to the brutal cult of Ungit, a goddess he equates with Aphrodite. The common folk dismiss the innovations as the sphere of nobles. During her 40-year reign as Queen, Orual restores prosperity and security and institutes social reforms in Glome, which remains, nevertheless, a minor and despised power in the region.

While most of the action is confined to the Glome palace and immediate environs, an extended portion is set in the heavily wooded foothills of Grey Mountain, on his craggy heights, where The Holy Tree serves as a place of ritual execution for victims of the Great Offering. Narrator Orual goes there to retrieve the remains of her beloved sister Psyche/Istra, and proceeds beyond where even the priests dare tread, to a hidden, miraculously lush valley, fed by another river, where Psyche believes she lives in an invisible palace with her invisible Wind-Spirit husband, who rescues her from the Holy Tree. Towards the end of the novel, Orual takes a vacation trip to several kingdoms, and in a Greek-style temple hears a distorted version of her sister's tragic fate. This inspires her to write her own history. Several dream sequences occur in Orual's imaginative mind.

Language and Meaning

Till We Have Faces, is a retelling of the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche. In his author's note, C. S. Lewis explains Apulius' *Metamorphoses* is a source for *Till We Have Faces*, not an influence or model; therefore, he omits picaresque, horror-comedy, mystagogous and pornographic elements. Appropriately, Lewis fills it with quaint phrasing and made-up vocabulary, which infuse a mythic flavor. Biblical English is not mimicked, because this is a purely pre-Christian story. The narration reflects the conservative strain in mid 1950s British writing, before semicolons and in-line parenthetical comments fall out of fashion.

Lengthy compound sentences abound and subordinate sentences are not rare - but never as convoluted as one sometimes finds in other contemporary works. Characters are briefly but vividly sketched, and the major ones build up over many chapters enough color to be full portraits. Descriptive similes are used frequently but metaphors and explicit symbolism - other than Orual's veil - are rare. References to Greek philosophy, literature, and mythology serve as tools to spark emotions or set up events. Generally, their importance is made clear in context, but sometimes non-classicists must simply move on.



Never do these impede following the story, which flows smoothly and relentlessly forward by rich narrative passages and that allows characters to speak for themselves, deepening their individuality. Dialogs are carefully set up and interpreted emotionally from Orual's perspective in context, and the speakers are always explicitly identified. Befitting the mythic framework, dialog is often florid and subjunctive, chopped and staccato, and conversational in mid-20th century style. Scenes of nature thrill the narrator, so long shut up in the palace, when she escapes, and she focuses on every detail or sight, sound, and scent.

Rain and wind, thunder and lightning accompany many major events. Scent is the most powerful sense for Orual when discussing the Holy House of Ungit, repulsive before the reforms and strangely stripped of holiness afterwards. The aged and depressed narrator is terse and subdued about a 40-year reign, which the Priest of Aphrodite describes after her death as wise, just, valiant, fortunate, and merciful. When reviewing how she and her sisters grow up, she is more open and opinionated, generally objective, but candid when she or others are at fault. Her ugliness, standing in stark contrast to her sisters' beauty, becomes an obsession on which she dwells, sometimes in passing, sometimes in probing, emotional analyses. She is throughout her telling of the story deeply introspective, and brutally honest about the mistakes she has made, some because she had been young and dense, but others out of base emotions. Above all, Orual is a polemicist.

The title, *Till We Have Faces*, is explained in the final vision sequence: humans cannot dialog with the gods until they achieve self-understanding - faces. Orual has hidden for 40 years behind a veil that both admits and conceals her ugliness, and over time creates useful mystery. In the final vision, she is stripped physically naked and also sees how earlier visions have shown how she and lost Psyche have been and are intertwined, as the gods morph into one another. One cannot insist on consistency and fairness when dealing with the gods, because they cannot be thus contained. They can - and do - change the past to create a new present and future. Orual dies before she can draw out the meaning of this new understanding.

Structure

Till We Have Faces by C. S.,. Lewis consists of two parts of unequal lengths. The 21 untitled chapters in the first part tell the narrator, Queen Orual of Glome's story of how the gods have mistreated her, ending with a declaration, perhaps the gods have nothing to say. The story begins with Orual explaining why in old age she is dredging up painful, long-repressed memories dating from childhood and young womanhood and recording them in a book. She hopes someday it will make its way to Greece, where she has heard people are open-minded about criticizing the gods.

Beginning the day her mother dies, Orual describes her royal upbringing under the influence of a learned Greek slave, the Fox, loses her beloved sister Psyche/Istra to the Wind-Spirit atop Grey Mountain, intervenes, and destroys Psyche's joyous life. The momentous events of Orual's 40-year reign are dismissed in a few paragraphs, before



she tells how on a vacation trip she hears Psyche's story misinterpreted and incorporated into a sacred cult, and decides she must tell the truth, even though, at the end, she draws no conclusion.

The four chapters of Part 2 are ostensibly Orual's reconsideration of this position soon after writing the words, for the series of meetings and visions she describes in this part convince Orual she has missed the point. Realizing she is close to death, she appends clarifications rather than undertaking a thorough revision. She wants no misconceptions to keep the record from being full and absolutely truthful. Orual manages to recant her errors and confess she has long hated and not feared the Lord, but dies before she can explain her new understandings. Arnom, Priest of Aphrodite - formerly Ungit - adds a postscript, explaining Orual has died mid-sentence and preserves for future priests Orual's assumed intention that the manuscript eventually reach Greece, where open minds are willing to confront the gods. At this point, it is unlikely Orual would desire this.

A four-page note initialed C.S.L. summarizes the relevant parts of the myth of Cupid and Psyche as preserved in the *Metamorphoses* (sometimes called *The Golden Ass*) of Lucius Apuleius Platonicus. He explains how he has used the myth, how he has modified it to make Psyche's ugly sister the narrator, and omitted some of the literary peculiarities of the original.



Quotes

"Oh, make your mind easy, Half sister,' says Redival. 'It's not me they worship, you know: I'm not the goddess. The men are as likely to look at you as at me, now they've seen Istra.'" Part 1, Chapter 3, pg. 34.

"I, King, have dealt with the gods for three generations of men, and I know that they dazzle our eyes and flow in and out of one another like eddies on a river, and nothing that is said clearly can be said truly about them. Holy places are dark places. It is life and strength, not knowledge and words, that we get in them. Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood. Why should the Accursed not be both the best and the worst?" Part 1, Chapter 5, pg. 50.

"At this the King scratched his head and looked very blank. 'That just like the gods,' he muttered. 'Drive you to do a thing and then punish you for doing it. The comfort is I've no wife or son, Fox.'" Part 1, Chapter 6, pg. 58.

"Orual,' she said, 'you make me think I have learned the Fox's lessons better than you. Have you forgotten what we are to say to ourselves every morning? 'Today I shall meet cruel men, cowards and liars, the envious and the drunken. They will be like that because they do not know what is good from what is bad. This is an evil which has fallen upon them not upon me. They are to be pitied, not - " She was speaking to a loving mimicry of the Fox's voice; she could do this as well as Batta did it badly." Part 1, Chapter 7, pg. 68.

"The sight of the huge world put mad ideas in me, as if I could wander away, wander forever, see strange and beautiful things, one after the other to the world's end. The freshness and wetness all around e (I had seen nothing but drought and withered things for many months before my sickness) made me feel that I had misjudged the world; it seemed kind, and laughing, as if its heart also danced. Even my ugliness I could not quite believe in. who can *feel* ugly when the heart meets delight? It is as if, somewhere inside, within the hideous face and bony limbs, one is soft, fresh, lissome and desirable." Part 1, Chapter 9, pg. 96.

"You have seen a lost child in a crowd run up to a woman whom it takes for its mother, and how the woman turns round and shows the face of a stranger, and then the look in the child's eyes, silent a moment before it begins to cry. Psyche's face was like that; checked, blank; happiest assurance suddenly dashed all to pieces." Part 1, Chapter 10. pg. 115.

"Was it madness or not? Which was true? Which would be worse? I was at that very moment when, if they meant us well, the gods would speak. Mark what they did instead." Part 1, Chapter 11, pg. 125.

"An end of this must be made,' I said. 'You shall do it. Psyche, I command you.' "Dear Maia, my duty is no longer to you.' "Then my life shall end with it,' said I. I flung back my



cloak further, thrust out my bare left arm, and struck the dagger into it till the point pricked out on the other side. Pulling the iron back through the wound was the worse pain; but I can hardly believe how little I felt it." Part 1, Chapter 14, pg. 164.

"To be alone there and in the silence was like coming suddenly under the lee of a wall on a wild, windy day, so that one can breathe and collect oneself again. Ever since Arnom had said hours ago that the King was dying, there seemed to have been another woman acting and speaking in my place. Call her the Queen; but Orual was someone different and now I was Orual again. (I wondered if this was how all princes felt)." Part 1, Chapter 17, pg. 199.

"But to hint and hover, to draw near us in dreams and oracles, or in a waking vision that vanishes as soon as seen, to be dead silent when we question them and then glide back and whisper (words we cannot understand) in our ears when we most wish to be free of them, and to show to one what they hide from another; what is all this but cat-and-mouse play, blindman's buff, and mere jugglery? Why must holy places be dark places?" Part 1, Chapter 21, pg. 249.

"She was weeping; and I. Next moment we were in each other's arms. It was the strangest thing that our hatred should die out at the very moment she first knew her husband was the man I loved. It would have been far otherwise if he were still alive; but on that desolate island (our blank, un-Bardia'd life) we were the only two castaways. We spoke a language, so to call it, which no one else in the huge heedless world could understand. Yet it was a language only of sobs." Part 2, Chapter 1, pg. 263.

"I ended my first book with the words *no answer*. 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? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words. Long did I hate you, long did I fear you. I might - " *"(I, Arnom, priest of Aphrodite, saved this roll and put it in the temple. From the markings after the word might, we think the Queen's head must have fallen forward on them as she died and we cannot read them. This book was all written by Queen Orual of Glome, who was the most wise, just, valiant, fortunate and merciful of all the princes known in our parts of the world. If any stranger who intends to journey to Greece finds this book let him take it to Greece with him, for that is what she seems mostly to have desired. The Priest who comes after me has it in charge to give up the book to any stranger who will take an oath to bring it into Greece).*" Part 2, Chapter 4, pgs. 308-309.



Topics for Discussion

What function does Redival play in the novel? Is Orual's conception of her correct?

What function does Bardia's wife, Ansit, play in the novel? How does meeting her change Orual's preconceptions?

How does the human drive to mythologize figure in the novel?

How do reforms in the House of Ungit change traditional religion, and how does it remain the same?

What is the Great Offering, and how can the Fox's questions about its ambiguities be resolved?

How does Orual's veil shape her reign as Queen?

What might Orual have written, had she not died in mid-sentence?

Literary Precedents

In a "Note" appended to the novel, Lewis writes that "The story of Cupid and Psyche first occurs in one of the few surviving Latin novels, the *Metamorphoses* (sometimes called *The Golden Ass*) of Lucius Apuleius Platonicus, who was born about 125 A.D." After summarizing the original, Lewis says of Apuleius, "in relation to my work he is a 'source', not an 'influence' nor a 'model.'"



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