

St. Maria Goretti Book Club 2022

Till We Have Faces by C. S. Lewis

Character Overview (Ch. I through Ch. VIII)

Orual:

- Narrator of the book
- First-born daughter of the King
- Ugly (stated many times throughout)

Psyche (Istra):

- Third daughter of the king
- Step-sister to Orual and Redival
- Beautiful, goddess-like beauty

The Fox:

- A Greek slave philosopher
 - o Naturalist who sees all things on a “horizontal plane”
 - “According to Nature”
 - o Denies or explains away most transcendent or godly events
- Adviser to the King
- “Grandfather” to the sisters
- Fears death and “shakes” at the idea of being sent to the mines

The Priest of Ungit:

- A priest of the temple of Ungit
- Speaks on behalf of Ungit
- Described as being “totally devoted to Ungit”
- Steady in the face of death

Redival:

- Middle sister of the three
- Sister to Orual, step-sister to Psyche
- Beautiful compared to Orual, but Ugly compared to Psyche

Ungit:

- The Deity
- Female Goddess
- Represented by a rock in the temple

The King:

- Prone to fits of rage
- Passionate
- Illogical
- Narcissistic
- No legitimate concern for anyone except himself, his image, and his kingdom (i.e. a male heir)

Batta:

- The nurse for the girls
- Cold-hearted and cruel
- Seems only to want to insight fear in the girls

Bardia:

- Captain of the King's Guards
- Top characteristic seems to be Loyalty or Honesty
- Has a certain affection for the girls
 - o Perhaps just a sense of duty?

Notable Discussion Points

The beginning part of this book is largely setting the scene and illuminating the different relationships and character traits (flaws?) of the different figures. The **King** is a hot-headed narcissistic man who only cares about preserving himself and his image, even to the expense of his own daughter's well-being. Even the apparent grief he shows at losing Psyche seems to be self-referential. He has a disdain for his daughters because all he wants is a male heir.

Orual is devoid of all meaningful relationships at the beginning of the book. "I am old now and have not much to fear from the anger of the gods. I have no husband nor child, nor hardly a friend through whom they can hurt me" (pg. 1). She eventually has Psyche and describes loving her as passing to "the beginning of all of my joys." But we soon see that this love is a selfish, possessive love that struggles to let go of Psyche when she is chosen for sacrifice to the gods. It seems to be that Orual is at the center of all her apparent love...remind us of any other character?

Redival is Orual's biological sister, and we see the lack of both father and mother in her and Orual. Redival is described as beautiful but then is completely surpassed by the beauty of Psyche when she is born. This leads to jealousy that causes her to betray Psyche and for Redival to take up romantically with a guard.

Psyche has at least a relative perfection to her. She's described as beautiful, but like a goddess-like beauty. She eventually starts believing she is a goddess who has powers to heal from The Fever, but takes on the fever herself. Her relationships with the Fox ("grandfather") and Orual seem to have preserved her from the damage that the King (and Batta?) have caused Redival and Orual.

The Fox is a father-figure who replaces the absent King in the girls lives. Notice how they call him "grandfather" and show genuine affection for him. Redival is noticeably more distant from him and he doesn't much care for her either. His constant analysis of things is "natural" - that is, he looks to explain all things through worldly, nature-based causes. Skeptical that the gods are real, but still afraid of the Priest, and shakes in the face of possible death.

The Priest of Ungit is the one who offers sacrifices to Ungit, the Deity they worship, in the temple. He advises the kingdom about the desires of Ungit. Notably, he is steady in the face of death, unlike the Fox. Smells "holy", which is referring to the smell of blood from sacrifices.

Christian themes are intentionally present throughout the book. Though it is a pagan myth, C. S. Lewis was a devout Christian and the different Christian images are worth paying attention to because they aren't accidental, even if they aren't advancing the story specifically.

Love is a big part of the first section of this book. Some familiarity with C. S. Lewis's work *The Four Loves* can be helpful. Below is an "at-a-glance" summary of them, and a Wikipedia link for a summary. As we keep reading, pay attention to the different - mostly distorted - ways that these four types of love are shown throughout the book.

The Four Loves at-a-glance:

Source: Wikipedia

For full article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Loves

Storge – empathy bond

Storge (storgē, Greek: στοργή) is liking someone through the fondness of familiarity, family members or people who relate in familiar ways that have otherwise found themselves bonded by chance. An example is the natural love and affection of a parent for their child.

Philia – friend bond

Philia (Greek: φιλία) is the love between friends as close as siblings in strength and duration. Friendship is the strong bond existing between people who share common values, interests or activities.

Eros – romantic love

Eros (erōs, Greek: ἔρως) for Lewis was love in the sense of "being in love" or "loving" someone, as opposed to the raw sexuality of what he called Venus.

Agape – unconditional "God" love

Charity (agápē, Greek: ἀγάπη) is the love that exists regardless of changing circumstances. Lewis recognizes this selfless love as the greatest of the four loves, and sees it as a specifically Christian virtue to achieve.