

# St. Maria Goretti Book Club 2022

*Till We Have Faces* by C. S. Lewis

## Discussion Session 3 Notes (Pages 201-284 [Pt. I, Ch. XVI-XXI])

There was a lot of discussion about the veil and what it might represent. From a purely practical standpoint, it hides her face, which she is so insecure about. It also creates an air of mystique - she becomes a faceless, mysterious force of nature, and that serves to make her more intimidating as a ruler.

Metaphorically, it serves for her to partition off her two identities: the Queen, which she has separated from herself out of her own self-loathing and sense of ugliness, and because she desires to put a wall between herself and all love/forms of connection. However, in spite of this separation, it was debated/discussed in the large group if her good deeds as queen represent the good in herself she denies, and an imperfect ability to love (even if she doesn't always feel it) her people.

Spiritually, it also creates a parallel to Ungit, which in her more primitive/powerful form is a faceless mass. Other comparisons could be drawn to the way we veil things that are holy and mysterious. It may be that the veil is part of her journey of purification/healing as, similar to how the veil is torn in the Crucifixion, eventually we are able to meet the Gods face to face (hence the title of the book), although this might be more germane to the last part of the book.

Another aspect of the veil is that it de-sexes her, as Orual also rejects her own womanhood despite being an exceptional queen, in part because her entire life she has been made to feel like her womanhood is lacking and she can't be seen as one (especially given her upbringing and the things her father said to her). She is a good queen but, in many ways, achieves this through rejecting a lot of what she sees as traditional womanhood. (We were not sure as to whether Lewis himself is saying that the only way a woman could be a good ruler is to reject femininity and be Not Like The Other Girls, or if this is just more of Orual's own unreliable narration/skewed viewpoint. What would a more integrated person would look like - see the writings of Edith Stein/JPII's Letter To Women on the topic of women in non-domestic spheres, or women with masculine traits)

I believe there was also some discussion on Bardia and what he may or may not have felt for her, or if he ever did see her as a woman despite her claim to the contrary, especially given that he was genuinely in love with his wife.

Towards the end, it was also discussed that despite Orual being a woman and some of her issues being specific to how her being a woman (and her rejection of it) affects her role in her society, many of the themes are unique to the human experience, especially as they pertain to love (and how it can be perverted), brokenness and transformation, our relationship to the gods/religion, etc.