

till we have faces cs lewis

till we have faces cs lewis is a profound work that stands out in the literary canon for its unique blend of mythology, philosophy, and theology. This novel, written by C.S. Lewis, diverges from his more famous works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, offering readers a deeply introspective and allegorical narrative. The story is a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, but it is told from the perspective of Psyche's sister, adding layers of complexity and emotional depth. *Till We Have Faces* explores themes of love, faith, identity, and the nature of the divine, making it a significant study for those interested in literary fiction with spiritual undertones. This article delves into the background of the novel, its plot and characters, key themes, and its reception and legacy. The analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of why *till we have faces cs lewis* remains an important work in modern literature.

- Background and Context of *Till We Have Faces*
- Plot Overview and Main Characters
- Thematic Exploration in *Till We Have Faces*
- Literary Style and Symbolism
- Reception and Legacy of *Till We Have Faces*

Background and Context of *Till We Have Faces*

Till we have faces cs lewis was published in 1956 and represents one of Lewis's most mature works. Unlike his earlier, more accessible fantasy tales, this novel is a sophisticated reimagining of classical mythology. Lewis drew inspiration from the ancient myth of Cupid and Psyche, originally found in the Roman novel *"The Golden Ass"* by Apuleius. By retelling the story through the voice of Orual, Psyche's older sister, Lewis introduces a fresh perspective that questions human understanding and divine justice.

Author's Intent and Philosophical Influences

C.S. Lewis was not only a novelist but also a scholar and Christian apologist. *Till We Have Faces* reflects his deep engagement with questions of faith, love, and human nature. The novel can be seen as an exploration of the human heart's capacity for self-deception and the journey toward genuine

self-awareness and spiritual transformation. Lewis's background in classical literature and Christian theology heavily influenced the novel's themes and narrative style.

Mythological Foundations

The myth of Cupid and Psyche serves as the foundational myth for *Till We Have Faces*, but Lewis's version deviates by focusing on the perspective of the sister who remains in the mortal world. This shift allows the novel to probe the tensions between faith and doubt, appearance and reality, and the human and the divine.

Plot Overview and Main Characters

At its core, *till we have faces* by Lewis tells the story of Orual, a princess who is deeply attached to her beautiful younger sister, Psyche. The narrative unfolds as Orual recounts her life, her struggles with jealousy, love, and faith, leading up to her eventual confrontation with the gods.

Summary of the Plot

Orual's story begins in the kingdom of Glome, where she grows up overshadowed by Psyche's beauty. After Psyche is taken away by a mysterious god, Orual embarks on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening. The novel is structured as a confessional, with Orual writing a letter to the gods to plead her case and make sense of her experiences.

Main Characters

- **Orual:** The protagonist and narrator, whose complex emotions and inner conflicts drive the narrative.
- **Psyche:** Orual's younger sister, whose beauty and innocence are central to the mythological plot.
- **The Fox:** A counselor and mentor figure to Orual, who offers guidance and wisdom.
- **The God of the Mountain:** A mysterious deity who takes Psyche as his bride, representing divine love and mystery.

Thematic Exploration in Till We Have Faces

Till we have faces cs lewis is rich with themes that resonate on multiple levels, making it a compelling work for both literary and theological analysis. Central themes include love, identity, faith, and the quest for truth.

Love and Jealousy

The novel explores different facets of love, from Orual's possessive and flawed love for Psyche to the divine and transformative love symbolized by the god. Jealousy acts as a critical emotion that drives much of Orual's pain and misunderstanding, highlighting the complexities of human relationships.

Faith and Doubt

Faith is portrayed not as blind acceptance but as a difficult journey toward understanding the divine. Orual's struggle with doubt and her eventual acceptance of the gods' inscrutable nature reflect Lewis's broader theological views on the nature of belief.

Identity and Self-Perception

Orual's journey is also a quest for self-knowledge. The title itself suggests the importance of seeing oneself clearly "till we have faces," or until we can confront our true selves without illusion. The novel delves into the psychological and spiritual significance of identity, self-deception, and transformation.

Literary Style and Symbolism

The style of till we have faces cs lewis is marked by its poetic prose and allegorical depth. Lewis's use of language and symbolism enhances the novel's thematic concerns and emotional impact.

Narrative Technique

The first-person confessional style creates an intimate connection between Orual and the reader. This approach allows insight into her inner turmoil and evolving perspective, making the narrative emotionally compelling and intellectually stimulating.

Symbolism and Imagery

Symbols such as masks, faces, and the mountain play pivotal roles in the novel. The motif of “faces” represents truth, identity, and revelation, while the mountain symbolizes the divine realm and the unknowable nature of the gods. These symbols enrich the narrative by providing layers of meaning that invite reflection.

Reception and Legacy of Till We Have Faces

Since its publication, *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis has been regarded as one of Lewis's most important literary achievements. It has received critical acclaim for its philosophical depth, emotional complexity, and innovative retelling of classical myth.

Critical Reception

Scholars and critics have praised the novel for its mature treatment of themes such as faith and identity. It is frequently studied in academic settings for its literary merit and theological insights. The novel's ability to engage readers on both intellectual and emotional levels continues to be a hallmark of its reception.

Impact on Literature and Culture

Till We Have Faces has influenced contemporary writers and thinkers interested in mythology, spirituality, and the human condition. Its enduring popularity attests to its relevance and power as a work that bridges ancient myth and modern existential inquiry.

1. Exploration of complex human emotions and spirituality

2. Innovative narrative perspective on a classic myth
3. Rich symbolic and thematic content
4. Contribution to Christian and philosophical literature
5. Continued academic and critical study

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Till We Have Faces' by C.S. Lewis?

The main theme of 'Till We Have Faces' is the exploration of love, faith, and the nature of the divine, particularly focusing on self-awareness and transformation through the protagonist's spiritual and emotional journey.

Who is the protagonist in 'Till We Have Faces' and what is her significance?

The protagonist is Orual, the eldest daughter of the King of Glome. Her significance lies in her complex character development as she struggles with love, jealousy, and faith, ultimately achieving a deeper understanding of herself and the gods.

How does 'Till We Have Faces' differ from other works by C.S. Lewis?

Unlike Lewis's other works, which often involve Christian allegory and fantasy, 'Till We Have Faces' is a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche from a psychological and philosophical perspective, presenting a mature and introspective narrative.

What role does myth play in 'Till We Have Faces'?

Myth serves as the foundation of the novel, retelling the ancient story of Cupid and Psyche to explore timeless human questions about love, identity, and the divine, while providing a rich cultural and symbolic backdrop.

Why is the title 'Till We Have Faces' significant?

The title signifies the idea that true love and understanding require us to confront our true selves—our 'faces'—and that only by doing so can we truly see and be seen by others, including the divine.

What is the narrative style of 'Till We Have Faces'?

The novel is told in the first-person perspective as a memoir by Orual, which allows readers to intimately experience her thoughts, emotions, and transformation throughout the story.

How does 'Till We Have Faces' explore the concept of faith?

The novel explores faith through Orual's journey from doubt and anger towards the gods to a deeper acceptance and understanding of divine love and justice, highlighting the complexities of belief and spiritual growth.

What is the significance of the gods in the story?

The gods in 'Till We Have Faces' represent higher truths and the unknowable aspects of existence. Their interactions with humans highlight themes of humility, sacrifice, and the limitations of human understanding.

How does C.S. Lewis portray love in 'Till We Have Faces'?

Love is portrayed as multifaceted—possessive, selfless, painful, and transformative. Orual's love for her sister Psyche is central to the story, showing how love can lead to both suffering and redemption.

Is 'Till We Have Faces' based on a true myth or original story?

Yes, it is based on the ancient myth of Cupid and Psyche, primarily found in Apuleius's 'The Golden Ass,' but Lewis reinterprets the story from a unique perspective, focusing on Orual's point of view.

Additional Resources

1. *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan

This young adult novel reimagines Greek mythology in a modern setting, following Percy Jackson, a demigod son of Poseidon. Like *Till We Have Faces*, it explores the interaction between gods and humans, mythology's impact on identity, and the hero's journey. The story combines adventure, humor, and mythological themes that resonate with readers interested in classical tales retold.

2. *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller

A retelling of the Iliad from the perspective of Patroclus, this novel delves into the personal and emotional lives behind Greek mythology's epic events. It shares *Till We Have Faces*' focus on humanizing mythological characters

and exploring complex relationships, especially themes of love, fate, and identity. Miller's lyrical prose offers a fresh, intimate take on well-known myths.

3. *Circe by Madeline Miller*

This novel reimagines the life of Circe, the enchantress from Homer's *Odyssey*, giving voice to a previously marginalized mythological figure. Like C.S. Lewis's work, it explores themes of transformation, power, and the struggle between divine and mortal worlds. The narrative focuses on self-discovery and the complexity of human emotions within mythic frameworks.

4. *Mythago Wood by Robert Holdstock*

A fantasy novel that explores the power of myth and the subconscious through a mysterious ancient forest where myths come to life. It shares **Till We Have Faces**' deep engagement with myth and the exploration of inner psychological landscapes. The story blends folklore, mythology, and personal journey, inviting readers to question reality and myth.

5. *East of the Sun and West of the Moon by Various Authors*

A classic collection of Norwegian fairy tales that, like **Till We Have Faces**, delves into themes of love, transformation, and sacrifice through mythic storytelling. These tales, rich with symbolic meaning, reflect the universal nature of myth and its role in understanding human experience. The stories often feature strong female protagonists and moral complexity.

6. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis*

While more overtly fantasy than myth retelling, this book shares Lewis's fascination with myth, morality, and redemption. It introduces readers to a world where mythic creatures and Christian allegory intertwine, much like the theological and mythological layers in **Till We Have Faces**. The narrative explores themes of sacrifice, faith, and transformation.

7. *The Mists of Avalon by Marion Zimmer Bradley*

A retelling of the Arthurian legends from the perspective of the female characters, this novel emphasizes myth, feminism, and the clash between old pagan beliefs and emerging Christianity. It parallels **Till We Have Faces** in its focus on female voices and reinterpretation of traditional mythic narratives. The story highlights the complexity of faith, power, and personal identity.

8. *Women Who Run With the Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

This work blends psychology, mythology, and folklore to explore the wild woman archetype and feminine strength. It complements **Till We Have Faces**' exploration of female identity and transformation through mythic symbolism. Estés's collection of stories and interpretations encourages readers to reconnect with the primal aspects of the self.

9. *Grendel by John Gardner*

A retelling of the *Beowulf* epic from the monster Grendel's perspective, this novel offers a philosophical exploration of identity, otherness, and myth. Like **Till We Have Faces**, it challenges traditional heroic narratives by

giving voice to an often vilified character. Gardner's work provokes reflection on the nature of storytelling, perception, and the human condition.

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