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C.S. LEWIS AND GENDER: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN EQUALITY AND
TRADITIONAL VALUES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how C.S. Lewis addressed various issues involving sex and gender. The female characters in his various works of fiction are analyzed in an effort to determine if they are subordinate to their male counterparts or turned into stereotypes. It examines Lewis's attempts to create distinctions between gender and sex and his conception of a gendered cosmic hierarchy as they appear in the Space Trilogy. It compares the value and the activities of the female and male villains and protagonists in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Finally, the thesis analyzes the correlation between the objectification of women and their lack of influence on the plot as well as a deliberate attempt to behave in a masculine fashion in order to reclaim the ability to affect change in *Till We Have Faces*.

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Introduction

In *The New York Times* article, “The Chronicles of C.S. Lewis Lead to Poets’ Corner”, Steven Erlanger states that over 100 million copies of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been sold in 40 different languages¹. Today, more than 50 years after C.S. Lewis’s death, his books are more popular than they were even during his life time. The appeal of his novels is particularly strong among the Christian community, but it extends far beyond this limited group to encompass people of all ages and from many different backgrounds. I myself remember reading the *Chronicles* every summer as a child. Their appeal for me was partly the lovingly crafted world with talking beasts, mythical classic creatures, and stories of daring adventure and partly the presence of engaging female characters in nearly equal numbers as the boy characters. I remember being particularly struck by the strong willed and intelligent Aravis in *The Horse and His Boy*. My childhood memories of Lewis were dreamy and enchanting, so it came as a shock when I realized upon reexamining him with adult eyes, that Lewis’s works rely heavily on tradition ideas of woman which can be considered not only outdated but sexist in our modern age.

This shock is why even 50 years later, Lewis’s works are worth reviewing in light of today’s standards. While Lewis grew up at the turn of the 20th century when views of women were in flux, it doesn’t mean that his work should be exempt from modern ethics. After all, his works are still being read as zealously today as they were when he wrote them, and his ideas and theories have pull on our allegedly postmodern era. Moreover, his own work shows that Lewis was attempting to integrate the new views of women as equals of men into the traditional

¹ Article originally published on November 20, 2013. It appeared in print on the 23rd on page C1.

notions of sex and gender with which he grew up. Around the time that Lewis was forming his ideas about the world, women were beginning to seek suffrage, and they were gaining freedom of movement brought on by the creation of the bicycle, public transportation, and later the automobile. More women were writing and taking jobs outside the home. Yet the idea of the angel of the house, the perfect home maker, persisted. Lewis's novels show some of the struggle between his Christian ideals, his traditional views of women in an era of significant change, and his own understanding that women were people, just like men, who were subject to all the flaws and follies of any other human being.

As such it is not surprising that many of Lewis's female characters did catch my interest as a child because they were each complex individuals. Lewis was an adept at crafting women who were strong or intelligent despite their faults. They, much like their male counterparts, had depths, and Lewis was willing to make his male and female characters face harsh realities about their spiritual existence. It is the spiritual journeys, however, which can often lead to one of the main problems I noticed as I reexamined Lewis. His women began to be sidelined midway through the stories as the tales being told about the men took precedence. Lewis undermines many of his best developed women by excluding them from the story in both the *Chronicles* and his other works such as in *The Space Trilogy* and *Till We Have Faces*.

As I began to explore more novels beyond Lewis's *Chronicles*, such as *The Space Trilogy*, I began to discover some of Lewis's ideas regarding gender. The *Trilogy* in particular introduces Lewis's conception of a gendered cosmic hierarchy. In the second novel, *Perelandra*, Lewis separates sex from gender introducing the idea that gender is a basic defining truth of the universe. In the third book, *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis expounds on this idea and posits that there is a cosmic hierarchy in which the masculine is superior to the feminine.

In *Till We Have Faces* the issues with Femininity arise as the main female character attempts to strip away her womanhood. The novel, which Lewis considered his best work, is written from the perspective of a complex female character, yet she is deliberately attempting to become masculine as a way to gain power in her own world. In contrast, her two sisters are oppressed and objectified to such an extent that they can never gain influence on the events of the novel.

C.S. Lewis's novels were written at a time when great changes were taking place in the world around him. His stories show his imagination, his view of Christianity, and the complexity of his thoughts on every subject from marriage to redemption. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, they represent a complex view of the issues surrounding women and gender and the struggle of balancing his traditional view of women with the calls for equality attached to the new values developing in the early 20th century.

The Space Trilogy

The last two books of the Space Trilogy introduce readers to strong female characters and Lewis's ideas concerning the separation of gender and sex². The first book in the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, follows the kidnapped protagonist, Elwin Ransom, on a trip to Mars (Malacandra). Ransom hunts with the native people and meets the planet's ruler, Malacandra Oyarsa, who questions him about his kidnappers' intentions on Mars. The book places an emphasis on traditionally masculine qualities, and this may be why it has no female characters of note. Since Lewis is attempting to extol masculine virtues such as courage in the face of fear and self-sacrifice, it would make sense that he would apply these ideas to male characters. However, this creates a simplified vision of women and men when Lewis is well aware that both males and females can show a complex range of virtues. Either way, the lack of female characters means that the first book has little to discuss regarding the treatment of women characters. It is most important as it introduces Ransom for his more active role in the later novels. The following books include prominent well developed female characters and act as a platform for the development of Lewis's conception of the gender of cosmic hierarchy, a belief that the gender hierarchy was woven into the cosmos itself.

Unlike *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra* is set on Venus and focuses on feminine qualities. In fact, the planet itself is described in very feminine terms: "The very names of green and gold, which he used perforce in describing the scene, are too harsh for the *tenderness*, the

² The Space Trilogy consists of three books: *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). The books are set on Mars, Venus, and Earth respectively.

muted iridescence, of that *warm, maternal, delicately gorgeous* world. It was *mild* to look upon as evening, warm like summer noon, *gentle* and winning like early dawn. It was altogether *pleasurable*” (32, *italics added for emphasis*). The heavy reliance on traditional views of femininity and the ensuing descriptions of invading, alien masculinity bring to mind disturbing images of the rape of an innocent new world and is reminiscent of the sexist imagery of the colonial era which would often employ feminine descriptions to discuss the male conquest of new lands.

The story itself is a retelling of Adam and Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden as it appears in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Ransom is the main character and he is sent by the eldila³, the angelic servants of Maleldil, to prevent a second fall of man. On Perelandra Ransom meets the Eve of this new paradise, Tinidril⁴, who has been inexplicably separated from her husband Tor. Ransom attempts to aide her in resisting temptation, which comes in the form of Weston, a scientist (and Ransom’s kidnapper in the previous novel) who is gradually being consumed by a demonic force. The story ends when Ransom, relying on God’s power to guide his actions, confronts and overcomes Weston, who has become the satanic Unman. For Ransom this confrontation acts as an event of spiritual awakening as he attempts to understand and do Maleldil’s will.

In “Surprised by the Feminine: A Rereading of Gender Discourse in C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra*”, Monika Hilder points out that Ransom’s submission to God’s influence and his admission of his own weakness in the face of greater cosmic forces are what make him the hero

³ The eldila are cosmic, formless beings. They are servants of Maleldil, which is the Trilogy’s name for God. Oyarsa and Perelandra are tutelary angels who preside over their respective planets. Maleldil is an even higher force on the cosmic hierarchy.

⁴ Tinidril is a name which is introduced to the reader toward the end of the book. Before her name is revealed, she is called the Green Lady and the Queen.

of the novel (72). Hilder posits that the struggle between Weston and Ransom represents the struggle between classical heroism and spiritual heroism. She defines the two types of heroism:

Classical heroism, embodying the traditionally viewed “masculine” values of reason autonomy, activity, aggression, and pride, and the lesser understood, often subjugated, spiritual heroism, embodying the traditionally viewed “feminine” values of imagination, interdependence, passivity, care, and humility.
(70)

Weston’s pride and aggression mark him as the classical hero who is strong and virile (71). Hilder states that his later deterioration into the merciless Unman is Lewis’s method of showing disfavor for the classical hero (71). In contrast, Ransom is humble and states outright that he lacks the physical strength to fight Weston/Unman (72). It is in his dependence on and submission to the will of Maleldil which help him to find the courage and strength to destroy the Unman and protect Perelandra (73). Hilder argues that Lewis employs the less than traditional spiritual hero to elevate traditionally feminine characteristics and subvert common patriarchal views of heroism.

While Hilder’s argument is well supported, the breakdown in the two types of heroism and the fact that respect for feminine values is not the same as respect for females lead to deterioration of her theory. Hilder herself points out that Weston and Ransom take on characteristics of the opposite form of heroism as they approach the final battle (72-73). Weston submits to the satanic force that is driving his campaign, and in doing so, he becomes an even greater evil who is submissive to a higher force much like a feminine spiritual hero (71). Furthermore, while Hilder argues that Ransom receives courage to take action by submitting his body as a mere vessel for Maleldil to use, he still makes the decision to do what he believes is Maleldil’s will and to destroy the temptation that Weston represents (73). By turning a spiritual hero into a classical hero and vice versa, Hilder’s argument is invalidated, since it is difficult to

claim that Lewis is valuing one form of heroism over another. Both types of heroism have their place in the story and lead to Ransom's eventual triumph; there is no elevation of one form of heroism. Beyond the complication of the heroic roles, this theory does not account for actual treatment of female characters. It reveals that Lewis may have held traits that were traditionally defined as feminine in higher regard, but it does not mean that Lewis associates these traits with women. His female characters are not automatically defined by these qualities, and their treatment is completely separate from the value of these characteristics.

Fortunately, Lewis was able to create a very compelling female character, Tinidril. Tinidril, or the new Eve of Perelandra, is always presented as innocent but hardly stupid. She learns quickly and is never so proud that she is unable to admit that an idea is new to her: "I have been so young till this moment that all my life now seems to have been a kind of sleep. I have thought that I was being carried, and behold, I was walking." (59). Tinidril is gaining a sense of her own autonomy and ability to make decisions. This incident shows Tinidril's ability to grasp abstract concepts and her enthusiasm for learning about ideas she has never considered. Along with her insatiable desire to know more, Tinidril shows a great desire to always do as Maleldil wishes and demonstrates a strong sense of morality. In her first encounter with the tempting force within Weston, Tinidril refuses to consider breaking Maleldil's rules: "I have said already that we are forbidden to dwell on the Fixed Land. Why do you not either talk of something else or stop talking." (89). Tinidril is clearly frustrated at this very first instance when the Unman is trying to convince her that Maleldil's rules are meant to be broken, and she is very firm in her desire to do as Maleldil has commanded. She is morally upright and is able to resist temptation while it is before her. She is a strong character and Lewis appears to show her a great deal of respect.

Unfortunately, all of the wonderful strength and complexity of Tinidril's character is lost behind Ransom's decision to intervene. As noted earlier, Hilder states that this decision was a sign of Ransom's spiritual heroism, but Lewis's attempt to show the spiritual growth of his male character leads to a disregard for Tinidril's strength. It has been noted that Tinidril wishes to do as Maleldil desires and resists temptation, but the final decision to determine the outcome of the novel is taken out of her hands by a man, as if she were too fragile to persevere and make the decision herself: "'I was right,' [Ransom] thought, 'it couldn't have gone on. It was time to stop it.'" (129). The problem with Ransom's argument is that he is trying use reason to justify his decision to intervene. If his decision were completely just, would he need to justify it? The reality is that he negates all of Tinidril's work to understand her world and resist temptation. Moreover, when he neglects to acknowledge all her efforts, Tinidril is turned into an object over which two male characters are fighting to gain control. Unlike the original Genesis story, Tinidril loses all real influence on the outcome of events as her actions (or lack thereof) cause no change in the plot. Ransom's decision to step in removes the power from Tinidril's hands and its appears of morality makes the decision seem like it comes directly from God, an edict to save the damsel in distress.

The two ways that Tor and Tinidril are educated further undercuts the latter. Specifically, Tinidril must be taught by men while Tor is taught by Maleldil directly. In the beginning of his relationship with Tinidril, Ransom is a man educating a woman: "'I see it now,' she said presently. 'It is very strange to say one is young at the moment one is speaking. But tomorrow I shall be older. And then I shall say I was young today. You are quite right. This is great wisdom you are bringing, O Piebald Man.'" (Perelandra 52). This is the first example of Tinidril acknowledging that Ransom is educating her, and as mentioned earlier, it shows how

quickly Tinidril learns. She states that he must be from a “wise world” (52). Tinidril’s education is not problematic in and of itself as it represents a growth from child-like wonder, acceptance, and naivety to a more complex understanding of the world. It only becomes an issue when compared with how her male counterpart, Tor, is taught: ““For many hours [Tor] learned new things about Maleldil and about His Father and the Third One. We knew little of this while we were young. But after that He showed [him] in a darkness what was happening to the Queen.”” (180). Tor receives his education directly from Maleldil. Lewis chose to make the female, Tinidril, face temptation while the man was safely educated far from the conflict. If Lewis had chosen to reverse Tor’s and Tinidril’s roles, the problems within the story would not be gender based. However, Tor is given a “private” education by Maleldil and rulership of the world with no real strife on his part: ““you [Tinidril] suffered and strove and I [Tor] have a world for my reward.”” (180). The two systems which are helping Tor and Tinidril to grow are unbalanced and the rewards they receive are just as unfairly distributed. Lewis could have chosen to make the two characters equal, either learning directly from Maleldil or from the invading forces, but he wrote the novel so that the different forms of educations lead to an overt power difference as Tor takes command of Perelandra. While it later becomes clear that Tor is receiving the gift of rulership from both Maleldil and Tinidril, his suggestion that since Tinidril willingly relinquishes the crown, his rulership is fair is illogical (180). Why should the king have the gift of leadership over the planet and why should Tinidril want to relinquish it? It is a small indication that the social values of Lewis’s own time have snuck into this novel and made it seem as if the natural order is male leadership. After all, there is no logical reason behind the decision to give Tor the position as ruler.

There is another disturbing incident which springs from the two different ways the characters are taught. The king is describing how they will build a temple to Maleldil, and this exchange follows:

“What are images?” said Tinidril.

“Splendor of Deep Heaven!” cried the King with a great laugh. “It seems there are too many new words in the air. I had thought these things were coming out of your mind into mine, and lo! You have not thought them at all. Yet I think Maleldil passed them to me through you, none the less. I will show you images, I will show you houses.” (181).

Tor’s laughter in response to Tinidril’s question feels almost cruel. It mocks her lack of knowledge when she has had no opportunity to learn. Moreover, much like the gift of sovereignty over the planet, Tor is receiving a gift through Tinidril; he even states that the knowledge is coming to him through her (181). The knowledge passes through Tinidril without altering her. She is a conduit through which information passes, and this turns her into a means of elevating the male while there is no comparable advancement of the woman.

In this novel, Lewis introduces his theories concerning the separation of sex and gender which will later become important as he expands them into his conception of a gendered cosmic hierarchy. However, the ideas begin to take form in this novel as Lewis attempts to clarify the difference between gender and sex:

Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. Masculine is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, male and female of organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine. Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity. (172).

In the first sentence it is possible to see how Lewis divides sex from gender. Gender is “a more fundamental reality”, existing on a level deeper than sex, so it should be given more weight in any field where it has influence. This differentiation does not completely separate sex from the

consequences of gender as Lewis acknowledges that “female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender”. While there may be other “things” that have feminine gender, the female sex is still one of those items, so it has feminine characteristics. This idea becomes particularly problematic later in the Trilogy as the separation of sex and gender becomes part of Lewis’s concept of a gendered cosmic hierarchy, which conceives of the masculine as always superior to the feminine. The problem begins with Lewis’s attempt to create a sympathetic idea by apparently dividing sex from gender, but this idea is expanding the power and influence of gender within the world, giving it influence over objects as well by acknowledging that gender can apply to mountains and trees (171). Moreover, while Lewis states that the male sex is not a weaker version of masculinity, he does claim that male and female are “reflections” of their respective genders. The sexes are still linked to their respective genders because they reflect a greater cosmological organization. While the different physical manifestations of sex “exhibit” and “confuse and misrepresent” the true differences between the genders, sex is still linked to gender despite Lewis’s attempts to separate the two.

That Hideous Strength, the final novel in the trilogy, further expands on these ideas developing them into a concept of gendered hierarchy. This novel includes several well-developed and strong female characters similar to *Perelandra*. *That Hideous Strength* is set on Earth and follows a married couple, Mark and Jane Studdock. Though newlyweds, Mark and Jane’s relationship is troubled as Jane feels unfulfilled and ignored, and Mark is focused on his career. Lewis uses their relationship to make points about marriage and ends the book by “fixing” the relationship between Mark and Jane. Beyond this couple, the book is about two competing factions. The ironically named N.I.C.E. is an institute which consists almost exclusively of men. It is overtly attempting to apply practical science and reason to social issues,

but its true insidious purpose is to find a way to disrupt the natural breeding cycles of humanity and create artificial eternal life. It is a distinctly masculine society. In contrast is the community at St. Anne's, which represents a more natural and fertile group led by Ransom. It consists of more women than men and has a more spiritual nature. Even the name is indicative of the fertility of the group as it comes from Mary's mother, the patron saint of women in labor (Holweck). Furthermore, as Anne is the mother of the "Holy Mother of God" it is as if her name implies that she issues forth holiness in much the same way that this group does. By putting these two forces in opposition, it is as if Lewis puts femininity and spirituality in competition with masculinity and scientific reason. This conflict leads both Jane and Mark to spiritual awakenings during the course of the novel.

Jane Studdock's character is well developed and strong willed. She is originally a representation of a "modern woman" in her opinions about marriage, yet she also shows a duality as she is a rather traditional wife. As the book opens, Jane has just taken care of her wifely duties to maintain the home, and she muses on what marriage has actually brought to her life: "In reality, marriage had proved to be the door out of a world of work and comradeship and laughter and innumerable things to do, into something like solitary confinement" (*That Hideous Strength* 11-12). The comparison of marriage to a prison that is both lonely and dull shows how traditional female roles within society were unsatisfying. It is a statement which shows that Lewis is very aware of how the world's views of women are changing in his own time. In examining what Jane believes she has lost the reader sees that Jane is a character seeking equality in "comradeship" and "work". She is a modern woman who wants to be active in her world. There are other examples of modern feminist thought within Jane's character. She indicates that she does not intend to give up her own intellectual pursuits due to her marriage:

“She had always intended to continue her own career as a scholar after she was married: that was one of the reasons why they were to have no children, at any rate for a long time yet” (12). Jane is strong and refuses to compromise her goals in life in order to accommodate a new husband. However, Jane is more than just a modern woman. She is also loyal and brave in her own right. When she is captured and tortured by the N.I.C.E., she does not reveal that she knows where the people at St. Anne’s are (152-153). Despite her admirable strength, Jane’s own strength often gets lost behind Lewis’s attempts to break down her modern sensibilities of which this book is never truly supportive. In fact, when Merlin⁵ sees Jane for the first time he is appalled because she has deliberately made herself barren (276). Merlin is a character who fixes the imbalances that the N.I.C.E. has caused, and from his point of view Jane’s reluctance to have children is unnatural. The “natural” balance is restored at the end of the novel when Mark and Jane reunite. They meet in a guest house which has held Venus (who represents fertility) and go to a new marriage bed, indicating that the unnatural infertility is at an end (377). Jane’s character becomes a representation of modern woman which Lewis breaks down in order to return her to more traditional roles of wife and mother.

Furthermore, Jane’s special ability to see the future in her dreams has the effect of commodifying her. During the course of the story, Jane is pursued by both parties who wish to gain her trust because she has the special ability to see visions as she sleeps. Instead of turning her into a very powerful character with the ability to influence the story, this capacity turns Jane

⁵ *That Hideous Strength* is centered on the conflict between the N.I.C.E. and the people at St. Anne’s. Both groups are searching for Merlin, who has been sleeping underground for many years, in the belief that his presence will alter the course of the conflict. He is the Merlin of Arthurian legend and represents a mystical druidic force. In the end of the novel he aides the group from St. Anne’s to right the cosmic balance that has been disturbed by the N.I.C.E. and its unnatural attempts to supercede the natural cycle of organic life. Merlin represents a cosmic balance and a more mystical power in comparison with the N.I.C.E.’s reliance on technology.

into an item to be won. At the N.I.C.E. Fairy Hardcastle⁶ says: ““We’ve got to get the girl, haven’t we?”” (158). This statement reduces Jane from a woman to a child with no authority to make decisions about who she will serve. It represents the corruption of the N.I.C.E. by showing how their members view humans, particularly women, as objects, and as the N.I.C.E. is a masculine force it conceptualizes women as inferior to the masculine goals of the group.

Beyond Jane’s objectification, her dream vision ability has very little actual influence in determining how the story unfolds. Jane dreams that Merlin has awakened and is leaving the cave in which he is hidden. She is then given the quest to look for the awakened Merlin (225). This is seemingly an honor or at least an opportunity for Jane to have some influence on the outcome of the story; however, she and the men who go with her to look for Merlin never find him. Merlin later appears right on the doorstep of St. Anne’s, making the search party useless and Jane’s ability pointless. Jane never changes the plot in any part of the book. Without her the story still concludes with Merlin taking action to dismantle the N.I.C.E. on his own without the aide of Jane’s ability or any other feminine interference.

While Jane is a pointless character with respect to advancing the plot, Lewis employs Jane as an example of a poor wife and as a way for him to discuss his ideas about marriage. In her first meeting with the Director, Jane is told that she cannot join the Director’s group because her husband is part of the N.I.C.E. (142). This leads to a long discussion of what makes a marriage successful, and the Director concludes that ““you do not fail in obedience through lack of love, but have lost love because you have never attempted obedience.”” (145). This statement assumes that Jane must submit to Mark, that she should be the obedient partner in their relationship. It places the blame for the failure of the relationship solely on Jane by assuming that

⁶ Hardcastle is an interesting female character. She is in charge of the N.I.C.E.’s police force and often behaves like a man with sadistic tendencies. She will be more thoroughly discussed in a later section.

if she had attempted to be obedient, there would not be a rift between her and Mark. However, it appears that both partners have neglected the relationship, so to blame Jane is unfair. Even if we accept Lewis's argument that a marriage should consist of two people becoming one and that one partner must have more influence on the decision making process, it begs the question: why must that partner be the male? Candice Frederick and Sam McBride comment that in *Mere Christianity* Lewis argues that the wife's desire to be the natural and fierce protector of her family leads to an inability to deal fairly with outsiders, and that the husband is meant to "protect other people from the intense family patriotism of the wife" (82)⁷. However, as Frederick and McBride note reality often does not match theory and so Lewis's ideas regarding the more dominant member of a marriage represent more of the values and ideas the time period of the nineteen forties in which Lewis lived than actual logic (Frederick 82)⁸. However, by making the argument seem rational, Lewis's traditional ideas seem to undermine true logic and actually ask the reader to consider that women should be submissive to their husbands.

In this novel, there is also the sadistic man woman Fairy Hardcastle, who was introduced earlier. As her name implies, she is a woman who shows a great many "hard" characteristics. She is originally described as "rankly, even insolently sexed, and at the same time wholly unattractive" (67). Hardcastle, a leader in the N.I.C.E., is a woman in a man's world who behaves like a man; she tells "smoking rooms stories" and is very aggressive, often even sadistic (67). Her desire to become a man is represented as unnatural, and Mark even acknowledges that she causes him to shudder. Fairy Hardcastle represents the wrongness of the N.I.C.E., showing

⁷ *Mere Christianity* (102) as cited in Frederick and McBride.

⁸ Frederick and McBride also note that Lewis's own life did not support this theory. His mother was the more stable member of his parent's marriage. Moreover, Lewis himself shared his life with two very strong willed women who ran their relationships with him.

how it corrupts the classic woman, but she also illustrates that masculinity in a woman is detestable as it causes her to deteriorate into a horrible monster.

Lewis is just as critical of his male characters in this novel. Mark, like Jane, undergoes his own spiritual transformation. He begins the novel as a man who always seeks the approval of others and wants to be “in the ‘inner circle’”. During his adventure with the N.I.C.E. he comes to realize that the price he pays for being part of a group can often be very high. As he approaches the end of the book he begins to form his own clear moral code: “He might lose the straight fight. But at least it was now his side against theirs” (264-265). Mark is developing a conscience and it aides him as he attempts to resist the conditioning designed to kill his sense of the “Straight” or “Normal” path (307). This transformation is what allows Mark to escape the N.I.C.E. and reunite with his wife in a more spiritually profound way. Lewis is hard on all his characters regardless of sex; all his protagonists experience some form of spiritual transformation because spirituality is a quality toward which Lewis believes everyone can strive.

This novel also develops distinction between gender and sex, which were originally introduced in *Perelandra*, into his conception of a gendered hierarchy. In *That Hideous Strength*, gender becomes a part of the cosmic hierarchy.⁹ The Director, Ransom, notes: ““There is no escape. If it were a virginal rejection of the male, He [Maleldil] would allow it. Such souls can bypass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make yet deeper surrender.”” (312). The Director’s words here indicate that there is the same separation between gender and sex that was present in the last novel. Gender is still a deeply

⁹ Lewis was heavily influenced by *Paradise Lost* and wrote an introduction to it around the same time that he was writing *Perelandra*. Some of his thoughts on the spiritual hierarchy can be found there: “The Hierarchal conception... Everything except God has some natural superior... The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors. When it fails... we have disease or monstrosity in the scheme of things...” (C.S. Lewis, “A Preface to ‘*Paradise Lost*’”, p. 73-74)

rooted cosmic truth of the universe. Moreover, his words indicate that the male sex is not a force to which the female must submit as it is acceptable for the “virginal” to “reject” the “male”. However, these words do show how the concept is functioning. The term “masculine” is used not just for members of a certain sex, but here it is a synonym for a higher member of the hierarchy. For example, God transcends sex but is still masculine. This conception is not meant to be a sexist idea. Even the director notes: ““What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.”” (313). This statement indicates that God, who is the driving power behind all Lewis’s stories, is the highest power over everyone, and in making this distinction Lewis identifies a level of equality between the sexes in the face of higher forces. However, as noted in the section addressing this topic in *Perelandra*, Lewis does not completely separate sex from gender. Rather, sex is reflective of gender, so the female sex is feminine. Therefore, if the masculine must always be the more dominant force, then the feminine, of which the female sex is always a reflection, must be ruled by the male, which is a reflection of the masculine. The concept becomes a way for Lewis to turn social biases and sexism into a cosmic law while seeming to offer a separation between sex and the gender of the cosmic hierarchy.

The Space Trilogy introduces several strong female characters who show intelligence and strength. However, Lewis often undermines these female characters by taking away their ability to influence the actual plot of the story and making them mere witnesses to the actions of the male characters. The Space Trilogy also attempts to develop a conception of a gender hierarchy which seems to treat all genders equally, but the inability to completely separate gender and sex and the very origin of the conception itself leads to the incorporation of social biases that cast women as always inferior to men. The trilogy is a mix of strong female characters and an almost insidious sexism.

The Chronicles of Narnia

The Chronicles of Narnia, unlike Lewis's other novels, is a children's book series.¹⁰

These books recount the different spiritual journeys that the various characters experience as they grow up. Each individual story has a different example of growth, and Lewis is very partial to stories of redemption. Many of the stories follow the Pevensie children: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* they fight the White Witch to free the land and reclaim it for Aslan (God). In *Prince Caspian* they return to Narnia to help the rightful heir take the throne. Their cousin, Eustace, and his friend, Polly, rescue Caspian's heir in *The Silver Chair*. *The Horse and His Boy* is an almost unrelated tale about a young man escaping slavery by going to Narnia. These stories have many well-developed female characters. Both they and the boy characters show flaws as well as admirable qualities.

One of these girls is Lucy. She is the Pevensie child who is usually viewed as the most virtuous of the four, and she is more adventurous and brave than her older sister. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* she stumbles into Narnia before her siblings and is unafraid to explore the new world. Her discovery of Narnia also reveals that Lucy is very honest, almost to a fault. She refuses to admit that she is wrong about discovering Narnia even though it starts to cause tension and fights with her siblings (27-28). The whole incident reveals one of Lucy's major faults, her temper. Later the reader discovers that Lucy is loyal to her friends. When the faun Tumnus is captured for helping her, Lucy is determined to rescue him (83). Most importantly,

¹⁰ The Chronicles include: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawntrader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1956). The books were later republished in a new order based on the chronology of the actual Narnia Universe: *The Magician's Nephew*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, *The Silver Chair*, and *The Last Battle*. The republication has caused some debate amongst scholars about which order is correct.

Lucy is a character who has a strong sense of faith which is demonstrated in other novels of the series when she always believes that Aslan will provide aid at the most it is most necessary time. She is a complex fully-formed character and not a reductive image of a girl.

Jill from *The Silver Chair* is also a well-developed female character. Jill's pride causes her to make a major mistake at the beginning of the book. In order to prove she isn't afraid, she stands too close to the edge of a cliff to show off, and Eustace, the male protagonist and Jill's friend, falls as he tries to pull her back and away from danger (15-16). Despite her pride, Jill admits her fault in Eustace's fall, revealing that she is at least honest. Later in the book, when she and Eustace discover that they have missed one of the signs they should have been looking for, Jill is willing to take all the blame (123). On top of Jill's willingness to accept fault, she also shows courage. Jill is afraid of caves and underground caverns, yet when she must, Jill goes underground to complete the quest to find Prince Rillian. Jill overcomes her fears in order to redeem herself for the fault she committed, and during the course of the quest shows an honest and brave heart.

In *The Horse and His Boy*, Aravis also must learn to give up her pride and her sense of entitlement, but she is an intelligent and strong-willed girl. Aravis does not value everyone equally in the beginning of the story. In her bid to escape, Aravis gets a maid whipped and she feels no remorse (44). Aravis also is very contemptuous of Shasta, the male protagonist whom Aravis meets while escaping, because he is a common boy while she is part of the nobility (34). Aravis's pride makes her unempathetic to all the other people around her and often selfish. She learns to overcome this flaw and value people for their virtues and not their pedigree through her acquaintance with Shasta, but she does have some inherent virtues as well. She is a strong girl who knows how to ride horses and is willing to carry a sword. Moreover, she is intelligent.

Aravis plans her escape from her father's house so perfectly that she should have several days before anyone realizes that she is not where she is supposed to be (42). Aravis learns to be more open-minded, and her ability to grow and change makes her seem like a well-developed character.

Finally, in *The Magician's Nephew*, there is Polly, a practical but adventurous young girl. Polly is a brave and enjoys exploring so much that she actually discovers a hidden tunnel in her attic (6). She even later suggests to Digory that they should explore an abandoned house by using her tunnel to get there (7-8). She's unafraid of adventure, but she is also prudent enough to make smart decisions. It is Polly who reminds Digory that they should mark the portal that they will use to return home before they try to go to another world (41). It is Polly who says they shouldn't ring the bell which awakens Jadis, an evil witch (56-57)¹¹. While Polly is not above saying "I told you so", she is willing to overlook Digory's mistakes and aide him as he attempts to get rid of Jadis. She is a loyal, practical, and brave young lady.

There are several girls in these novels who are complex individuals. They have faults balanced with admirable traits. They demonstrate that Lewis is able to create female characters who are engaging and dynamic and who behave like real people rather than female stereotypes. Furthermore, Lewis is just as critical of his male characters as he is of his female characters.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Edmund is originally portrayed as a bully and selfish. When Lucy come back from Narnia for the first time, Edmund torments her by asking if she's found other magical lands and claiming that her emotional instability is just Lucy "being a girl" (28, 32). Edmund's cruel behavior makes his statements about girls seem foolish because he

¹¹ Jadis is an evil sorceress who once ruled Charn. After destroying all other life on her planet in a petty attempt to win a war with her sister, she put herself to sleep until the day when she would be awakened and taken to a new world. She is imperious and wishes to conquer other worlds. In many ways, she is the personification of evil when she enters Narnia. She later becomes the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

has become a reductionist who employs whatever tools are available to hurt those around him.

As the story continues he allows himself to become even more corrupted. Upon entering Narnia Edmund is willing to give his siblings to the White Witch as a way to gain power (39). He is petty and wants revenge against his brother for ordering him to stop being rude. He is seduced by the Witch's offers of power and Turkish Delight, and he becomes a character who is clearly flawed. However, Lewis also gives Edward an opportunity to redeem himself.

Unfortunately, the redemption storylines can actually cause the female characters be overlooked for their male counterparts. Susana Rodrigues notes in "Boy-Girls and Girl-Beasts: The Gender Paradox in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*" that tales such as Edmund's path to reconciliation with his siblings often interrupt and overshadow the adventures that the female characters are experiencing (187). It is Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* who discovers Narnia and begins to have an adventure. However, this story is hijacked when Edmund's tale of redemption and character growth begins to overshadow Lucy's story. Both characters journey across Narnia, but it is Edmund whose trek across the nation becomes a tale of personal discovery and spiritual and moral growth. Moreover, unlike his siblings, Edmund's trip is not a pleasant one taken with a group of friends. In contrast, Lucy travels with her two older siblings and experiences no change of heart or mind from her trip. Lucy's travels across Narnia are like the movements of a pawn across a chessboard. The trip has no real importance except that it makes it possible for Lucy to witness Aslan's death and rebirth, while Edmund's travels represent his road to self-discovery. Moreover, even after Edmund rejoins his siblings, Lucy does not regain an active part in the story. Edmund, however, has a key role in the battle against the White Witch. He risks his own life in order to destroy her wand and give the Narnians a chance to retaliate (195-196). Lucy, in comparison, is only a witness as Aslan frees

the creatures who had been turned to stone by the White Witch (183-188). Lucy and Edmund are equally complex characters. Both show flaws and strengths, but Lucy's character goes to waste because Edmund's story is given more attention. Her character is stagnant and never even given an opportunity to grow. Since the plot itself ignores Lucy, the quality and care Lewis put into crafting her character is lost behind the elevation of a male oriented storyline.

A similar situation occurs with Digory and Polly in *The Magician's Nephew* and reveals the faults in Digory's character. Digory, like Polly, is an adventurous boy who is both curious and unafraid of the unknown. Unlike Polly, these traits end up causing Digory to recklessly unleash an evil witch. As Digory and Polly explore Charn¹² they discover a bell that has a message on the pedestal. It says that the reader can ring the bell and release some horrible fate or he can go mad wondering what would have happened (56). Polly sensibly says they should not ring the bell (56). Digory, on the other hand, claims that the message was enchanted and he feels that he must ring it since he already feels as if he is going mad (56-57). His desire to know what will happen is selfish and causes him to lie to himself about his true motives. It is an instance in which he falls prey to temptation and rings the bell. This event reveals a flaw in Digory's character and shows Lewis's ability to critique his male characters, but it is also the event which shifts the focus of the book. Polly and Digory's adventures become solely Digory's exploits while Polly is turned into a silent observer. Polly is no longer an active participant in the story when Digory decides to take action (Rodriguez 188). Moreover, as the story continues, Polly becomes less active. As penance for bringing the evil Jadis into Narnia, Aslan sends Digory to retrieve a special apple which will protect Narnia (168-169). Polly goes along on the journey but she does not face Jadis and her temptation as Digory does (191-193). Her adventure ends when

¹² This is the name of the city in the first world that Polly and Digory explore. It is a city that has been ruined by war and proud but cruel rulers.

Digory rings the bell, since from that point in time, the story shifts to focus on Digory's efforts to fix the wrong he has done. Digory and Polly are both strong characters, but Polly gets lost behind Digory's story.

In these two books, the female characters get overlooked when the plot shifts to focus on the male character's redemption tales, but there is not a similar shift when Lewis is addressing female stories of penance. As noted earlier, in *The Silver Chair* Jill is on a quest for forgiveness much like some of the boys. However, Jill is excluded from the quest's major events. She is told to remember four signs which will guide her on and Eustace on their quest, but she cannot help with the first sign which states that Eustace must greet an old friend (24). She has no way to actively ensure that this sign is followed. Moreover, once she and Eustace have found Rillian, the missing prince they have been sent to rescue, Jill does not actively participate in Rillian's release. Eustace and Puddleglum¹³ cut Rillian's bonds and free him from the enchanted chair which has kept him from returning home (176). Then the three males fight and slay the Lady of the Green Kirtle, the witch. During all this final action, "Jill had very wisely sat down and was keeping quiet" (193). The problem with Jill's passive role in the climactic event of this story is that it represents a subtle difference between male quests for redemption and female quests. When boys must pay for their mistakes, they are expected to actively pursue forgiveness. In comparison, the female character is not expected to perform the same way, and this fact emphasizes Lewis's tendency to turn female characters into passive members of the story. Jill's redemption does not have the same weight the forgiveness that the boy characters receive since she has done nothing to deserve it.

¹³ Puddleglum is a creature known as a Marshwiggle. He is gloomy and acts as Eustace and Jill's guide through Narnia since the two children are not familiar with the land.

In this series, the villains also offer insight into Lewis's views on male and female characters. The female villains are represented by two witches: Jadis/the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle. Jean Graham observes in "Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia" that their characters are heavily influenced by the early modern conception of Lilith and Circe (33).¹⁴ She posits that both women employ some form of seduction in order to usurp power from the male characters (33). The White Witch entralls people through food while the Lady of the Green Kirtle uses her beauty and spells in order to gain power (39). Graham even claims that the White Witch's staff is a phallic symbol (32). By comparing these witches to their prototypes, they are revealed as unnaturally aggressive for women. Their methods, particularly magic, are unnatural and their goal, to steal the throne of Narnia, is just as wrong. This fact becomes particularly troubling as there are no legitimate female leaders in the books (with the exception of Lucy and Susan, who are secondary queens under their older brother). Lewis's female villains not only represent pure evil but also female rulership. By positioning them as evil and unnatural, Lewis is able to reduce their humanity and justify their complete destruction at the ends of their respective novels.

In contrast, most of the male villains are portrayed not as insidious invading powers that need to be destroyed but as flawed humans with too much ambition. For example, in *Prince Caspian*, the main villain is King Miraz, but he is more a representation of all the Telmarines in the novel. The Telmarines, a distinctly male oriented society, use force, not magic, to conquer Narnia, and their fear of the forests and the talking beasts lead to their persecution of what the book calls the "old Narnians". They are a prideful and strong willed people, but they are not

¹⁴ According to Graham the early modern version of these women was tied to the ideas and ethos of the "woman on top". They used their power to usurp power from their male victims. The early modern time period begins around the end of the Renaissance and ends around the time of the French Revolution.

inherently evil, just intolerant and stuffy. While these are faults in their personalities, there is never the sense that their rule is unnatural. In fact, Aslan justifies their time in power by saying that they were able to rule because they came from the world of Man (231). Moreover, they are still redeemable in Aslan's eyes. He gives them the option to pass through a doorway back to their world (230). There is never the sense, however, that the Telmarines' power is insidious or wrong like witches' powers are and they do not need to be destroyed completely as the witches were.

Similarly, in *The Horse and His Boy*, Prince Rabadash, who is violent, aggressive, and impulsive, is viewed as a flawed person. He is said to be driven by his love for Susan when he launches an attack on the northern countries, but it is his pride and possessiveness which actually lead to his downfall (118). Despite his malicious and unprovoked efforts to take power over a country that is not his, Rabadash is given the opportunity to redeem himself (232-236). Aslan turns him into a donkey as punishment, but he is has the opportunity to return to his real form (236). Moreover, Rabadash still rules in Calormen when his father dies (237). He is a flawed human, unlike the witches, not an unnatural evil which is seeping into Narnia. This difference between the villains of opposite sexes makes the female villains seem like stereotypical seductresses. It is reductive, and since Lewis can write villains who are complex and have actual motivations and faults, it is an unnecessary distinction between the two sexes.

Lewis's *Chronicles* offer a wide cast of complex characters. Both his male and female protagonists are well developed and Lewis is able to be equally critical of their actions. The problems arise when the plot favors male characters over female characters. The girls get lost behind the boys, who actually get to experience the adventure. Lewis gives the development of characters equal weight regardless of sex, but he does not necessarily treat the characters of all

sexes equally. Furthermore, his ability to create characters who are real and have faults mixed with virtues makes the treatment of his female villains all the more stark. They are not fleshed out the way his male villains are and that is its own form of sexism. Most disturbing is that in the entire *Chronicles*, Lewis appears to honor his female characters while still quietly subverting them.

Till We Have Faces

Till We Have Faces (1956) is a retelling of the tale of Psyche and Cupid from the perspective of Psyche's sister, Orual.¹⁵ The basic premise of the story is that Psyche's beauty is so great that Cupid chooses to have her for his wife, but she must never look upon his face. Psyche's sister, Orual, convinces her to break this rule, and Psyche is punished afterwards for her lack of faith. Lewis's story shifts the focus of the original story, since it is told from the sister Orual's point of view. It shows Orual's spiritual awakening as she writes her complaint against the Gods for taking away her sister and later causing her to destroy her sister's happiness. This account chronicles how Orual feels abandoned by all those around her, including Psyche, whom she loves greatly, and believes that the Gods are spiteful to take Psyche away. The story is set in a world full of misogynistic values and violent behavior which heavily influence Orual's growth and lead to some of the more troubling aspects of the novel.

Till We Have Faces is Lewis's only work written in first person, and notably it is from the perspective of a woman. This decision shows that Lewis thought a woman's point of view and experiences are valuable and worth exploring¹⁶. Lewis's choice to use Orual as a first person narrator means that her biases manifest in the descriptions of the characters, particularly the

¹⁵ The first written appearance of the Cupid and Psyche myth, as Lewis writes in the note at the end of *Till We Have Faces*, appears in *Metamorphoses* by Lucius Apuleius Platonicus. Lewis notes that it was probably an existing myth that Apuleius recorded and for this reason he did not feel he was dishonoring his source material by choosing to alter some points of the original story.

¹⁶ Catherine Frederick and Sam McBride note that *Till We Have Faces* was heavily influenced by Lewis's relationship with Joy Davidman, who would become his wife. He believed that she was very intelligent and quick witted. His regard for Joy may have led to his decision to write from the perspective of a woman (75).

explanations of her sisters. Orual has a tendency to be reductive and classifies the women in her life into two types: the seductresses and the saints.

The middle sister Redival is one of the characters whom Orual reduces to a seductress until Redival is redeemed later in the book. In the beginning, Orual characterizes Redival as “feather-headed” and “wonton” (25). She is beautiful and she uses her beauty to seduce a guard, causing her father to punish her and demand that Orual guard Redival’s chastity (26). To Orual, Redival’s actions make her an evil seductress and the destroyer of the “good times” between her, Psyche, and the Fox, Orual’s male tutor (25). Orual is unable to see any humanity in her sister and when she assumes the throne, she is deliberately cruel to Redival (203). Since this book is written in first person, it is easy to sympathize with Orual and believe that Redival is truly an evil sister. However, Lewis later dispels this image of Redival in both the reader and Orual. She learns Redival was lonely, and Tarin, the guard with whom Redival was caught flirting, was trying to offer comfort to a girl who felt alienated by her father and her two sisters (255). Redival is a complex character and just another example of Lewis’s ability to create fully formed female characters who are not limited by their gender.

A similar simplification afflicts to Orual’s other sister, Psyche. She is depicted as a saintly, perfect “child”. Virginal and innocent, Orual sees Psyche as if “Virtue herself had put on a human form” (26). Psyche, at least as defined by Orual, can do no wrong; she is “merry”, “truthful”, and “obedient” (26). This is the image that Orual creates of the innocent younger sister. However, Psyche actually loses her innocence when she becomes the wife of the God of the mountain. Her marriage also leads to the end of her meek obedience to Orual (164). Moreover, she begins to show signs of a temper: ““You mistake me, Orual. If I am pale, it is with anger. There, Sister, I have conquered it. I’ll forgive you.”” (160). This statement shows that

Psyche is capable of emotions that are not angelic and demonstrates the contrast between what Orual believes Psyche to be and who she really is. Lewis creates a dissonance that reveals the greater nuances in Psyche's personality than his limited first person narrator is able to express.

Despite the way the first person narrator can degrade some of the other female characters, it also allows the reader to have a better understanding of Orual. She becomes a well-developed character with feelings that range from gentle, caring love to violent, possessive jealousy. She is complex and motivated by many different forces in her life. Her limited view of others is humanizing, and her struggles make her engaging and real. The first person narration becomes an asset in fleshing out Orual's personality in spite of the flaws revealed in the characterizations of her sisters.

As mentioned earlier, the fictive world of this book is a society that displays many misogynistic tendencies, particularly a habit of valuing women solely on the basis of their physical beauty. These misogynistic ideas are personified in the King, whom Lewis discredits as a role model by characterizing him as violent, overly aggressive, and self-serving. The King kills a favored slave boy without remorse and does not grieve that he must sacrifice his youngest daughter (15, 60). He is never meant to be admired, so grossly sexist statements, such as "If a man can teach a girl, he can teach anything" (7), should be ignored. Even so, he is Orual's father and his view that women are useless unless beautiful helps to define Orual's life and leads to her troubling development into a woman who denies her self and her gender. Moreover, the emphasis the book places on the value of physical beauty seems to be blatantly sexist. Monika Hilder, however, in "Recovering 'Femininity' in C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*" that the

physical beauty is really a metaphor for the spirituality of a character¹⁷ and cites Orual's transformation into a beautiful second Psyche at the end of the book is evidence of this fact (98-99). It may very well have been Lewis's intention to use physical beauty as a metaphor for spirituality, but his decision actually causes problems regarding Orual's gender identity.

In the beginning of the novel Orual is already a strong character. She is brave, rational, and intelligent. She loves Psyche dearly and cares for the Fox. She already displays characteristics that could be defined as masculine, such as her bravery, but she has not yet actively attempted to change herself yet. The problems with Orual's gender identity begin to arise when other characters question the value of strength and more masculine qualities when it is a girl who possesses them: "It's a thousand pities, Lady, that you weren't a man,' said Bardia. 'You've a man's reach and a quick eye.'" (65). Statements such as this one don't value certain qualities equally in both genders and allude to the sexism that overlays the entire novel. Unlike the complaints made by the King, this particular lamentation is uttered by a strong, smart, and honorable character whom Orual respects. Since it comes from a source she trusts, the questioning of her value as a woman make it easier for Orual justify denying her femininity later in the novel. While this example might just be an extension of the misogynistic world view of the novel, it colors Orual's thinking and shows how flawed world views can be held by otherwise admirable individuals.

After Orual loses Psyche, she begins to draw further away from her femininity: "my aim was to build up more and more that strength, hard, and joyless, which had come to me ... by learning, fighting, and laboring, to drive all the woman out of me" (184). This statement

¹⁷ Lewis has expressed that beauty is linked to spirituality himself in a letter to Arthur Greeves: "It follows that neither the tree, nor any other material object can be beautiful in itself: I can never see them as they are, and if I could it would give me no delight. The beauty therefore is not in matter at all, but is something purely spiritual..."

represents a shift from a woman who accepts herself and all her characteristics to a woman who is deliberately attempting to behave in a masculine way. She is actively attempting to deny her sex and is doing so by becoming stoic and participating in activities that are typically male. The changes in her personality are not represented as positive. Rather it is forceful, “driven”, and “joyless”. The fact that Lewis acknowledges that a woman could learn these activities is an indication that he believes that women are capable of learning anything. However, it is unfortunate that learning to fight and take command of her life causes Orual to sacrifice, or rather deliberately cast out, her womanhood, as if there is no way for femininity to coexist with traditionally masculine tasks. But why shouldn't Orual remain feminine while doing traditionally male tasks? By making femininity and masculine activities mutually exclusive, Lewis reveals a gender bias that could easily have been overcome if Orual had not discarded her femininity.

Furthermore, much of Orual's transformation is spurred on by her inheritance of the throne. When her father becomes ill, and it is apparent that he will die soon, the question of the heir is raised, and there is doubt that Orual is competent enough to fill the position: ““A woman cannot lead the armies of Glome in war.”” (187). This incident is directly tied to the idea that women cannot or should not lead which was mentioned earlier in relationship to *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The question of women's leadership is addressed in *Till We Have Faces* through a woman leader who is successful only because she becomes masculine. Orual herself notes that people begin to treat her like a man: “Soon Bardia was teaching me to ride on horseback as well as to fence with the sword. He used me, and talked to me, more and more like a man” (184). She is not regarded as a female leader, and the only reason Orual is such a successful ruler is that she transforms herself into a masculine ruler so successfully that even after her death, the words used to describe her are still words associated with the male. She is a “wise” and “valiant” “prince”

according to the small epitaph written after she has completed her story, not a queen and not a princess (308-9). This novel associates leadership and action with the masculine, and Orual turns herself into the ideal male in order to achieve a competent Queenship.

As Orual begins to take power she finds two personalities at war within herself, further emphasizing the uneasy transformation she is experiencing. There is Orual and “the Queen”, who is more dominant:

I must now pass quickly over many years ... during which the Queen of Glome had more and more part in me and Orual has less and less. I locked Orual up or laid her asleep as best I could somewhere deep down inside me; she lay curled there. It was like being with child, but reversed; the thing I carried in me grew slowly smaller and less alive. (226)

If the Queen represents the masculine leader and Orual represents the real character and her femininity, then the interaction between these two “personalities” indicate that the feminine personality is being destroyed, and the masculine is poisonous to the welfare of the feminine. In fact, the reference to pregnancy seems to indicate that a woman taking on masculine characteristics causes her to lose her ability to reproduce and to even be destructive to life, the exact opposite of a woman’s natural state. Orual’s “reverse pregnancy” might even be symptomatic of the unnaturalness of her transformation and a warning that no matter how masculine Orual strives to be, her legitimacy as ruler will always be in question.

Lewis throws away the virtues of Orual’s originally well-developed character by indicating that she can only become stronger by embracing masculinity, thus equating strength with the male. Orual’s pursuit of growth is not sexist. Wishing to be strong as a woman is admirable. However, she denies her femininity as if it were a curse. The objectifying effect of her society’s values concerning feminine beauty may be what leads to this particular mentality. By reducing women to their physical appearance, the book takes away their ability to act as subjects. In order for Orual to gain control of her world, she must throw off her status as female

object and don the guise of masculine subject. Orual can only escape from objectivity and treatment as a possession, which is experienced by her sisters, by becoming more masculine.

The objectification of Psyche reveals the masculine dominance over the feminine. Both the King and Orual feel they can claim Psyche as their possession. When it is revealed by the priest that Psyche is to be sacrificed, the King reasons ““She’s mine; fruit of my own body. ... What did I beget her for if I can’t do what I think best with my own?”” (60). The King does not see Psyche as a person but as an object which he can use in order to save his own life and throne. This incident reveals that male characters own the female characters. It could be dismissed as the misogynistic world of the novel if it were not for the fact that later, Orual, who has already started to transform into a more masculine force, also seeks to exert power over Psyche. Orual asks the question: “What was there in her that was not my work? And now she used it to look at me as if I were base beneath all baseness” (166). Orual’s claim to Psyche’s loyalty is similar to her father’s in that she believes that she has created Psyche. The similarities between Orual’s and her father’s thoughts shows the beginning of Orual’s transformation into a masculine character. When the masculine Orual claims Psyche as her property, Lewis creates a situation where the masculine is superior to the feminine as we saw in his conception of gendered hierarchy in the Space Trilogy. This incident reveals that his ideas concerning masculine superiority still stand. While it could be argued that since Orual, a woman, is the masculine force, the book avoids being sexist, the truth is that Orual’s masculinity is never seen as natural and so this incident shows that she is usurping power within the cosmic hierarchy. Meanwhile, Psyche continues to be one of the most objectified women in the book, and her inability to switch to the role of active subject means she is unable to change the plot of the story in much the same way that other

female characters in Lewis's novels were sidelined. It is Orual, acting like a male, who decides Psyche's fate.

Redival is also turned into an object. When her father is alive she must follow his commands, and when he learns of her affair with the young guard, she is ordered to stay with her sisters and the Fox: "Redival was utterly cowed by the King's anger and obeyed him" (26). The king treats Redival as nothing more than an object to barter away in marriage. His concern is not for her well-being but for the value of his possession. His statement to the Fox even proves that he sees her body as an item: "If she loses her maidenhead before I find her a husband, you'll yell louder for it than she" (26). With a relationship based on the King's ownership of her body, Redival has no opportunity to participate in the events of the story. She is really only relevant as an outlet for Orual's contempt, and as Orual becomes queen, her masculine personality leads her to treat Redival cruelly. To Orual, Redival's hand in marriage becomes a potential bargaining chip in political negotiations. Redival even feels she must beg for her sister's forgiveness and approval in order to be safe (203). Redival, like Psyche, is unable to seize control of her world as a subject, and she is punished the one time she attempts to show autonomy. Orual's two younger sisters represent the passive, objectified feminine in the novel, but unlike Orual, they are not able to escape the system which states that the feminine must be passive while the masculine is allowed to act.

Redival and Psyche cannot influence their world because they are women and are turned into objects. Orual, in contrast, seizes the power to actively participate in the events of the novel. Unfortunately, Orual's success is achieved at the price of her femininity. She does not break the rule and prove the Lewis could allow his female characters to be active characters in his stories

because she becomes masculine. The rule that the feminine characters must be the passive objects and the masculine are the active subjects has not changed.

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis was a master of crafting realistic and well-developed characters. His women are complex individuals with strengths and weaknesses just like his men. They are so well crafted that they can beguile a reader into believing that they are valued equally with the men, since Lewis is so careful to put the same amount of care and effort into the construction of his female characters. However, he does not extend the same energy to ensure that his characters are equally represented in the plot. Lewis's female characters are often not active participants in the events of the novel. Rather they stand idly by while their male counterparts write their own stories.

Lewis also apparently tried to stay impartial as he wrote about his conception of the gender of the cosmic hierarchy. He originally attempted to create a separation between gender and sex so that sex would not interfere with his conception that the cosmic hierarchy consists of progressively more masculine levels to which the lower feminine levels were subject. While he does clarify that God is the highest masculine force in the hierarchy, he was unable to completely liberate female sex from feminine gender. Therefore, women are inferior to men on a cosmic if not social, level.

Finally, the struggle for subjectivity in *Till We Have Faces* leads one character to completely abandon her sex. Orual is a strong woman who should have been able to influence her world based on her natural talents. However, Lewis characterizes her as a successful ruler and world shaper because she throws away her femininity. In fact, the book seems to link gender

to the characters' abilities to influence their world; the females are passive objects while the males are active subjects.

For all the problems with gender and sex within Lewis's novels, it is difficult to say whether he is sexist or not. Lewis created a number of female characters who he appeared to respect and who were too well crafted to end up as disregarded as occurred in several of the stories. However, it is as if social values regarding sex and gender were so ingrained into Lewis that even as he struggled to treat his women fairly and equally as his men, he was unable to completely overcome his traditional upbringing. We see this particularly in his conception of a gendered cosmic hierarchy. He does attempt to separate women's sex from gender, but he does not go far enough. Moreover, perhaps it is not important to define Lewis himself as his intent is not as important as what a reader will take away from his work. His novels have several examples of sexist treatment of female characters or sexist theories and ideas, as this essay has explored, but does that mean we put down Lewis's books for good? The answer is more complex than a simple yes or no. It is a matter of being informed readers. People can still enjoy Lewis, but they should be aware of the hazards of his writing as well as the joys, and when the next little girl picks up *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, her parents should be ready to tell her that she can write her own story and doesn't have to sit in the wings watching the boys take center stage.

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