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4-6-2014

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Gender Differentiation and Gender Hierarchy in C. S. Lewis

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
The Department of Literature and Philosophy

By
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Under the mentorship of Dr. Hemchand Gossai

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the evidence of sexism in the literary works of C. S. Lewis. Lewis's relationships with women in his personal life were often estranged, and his works frequently display a predominant view of women as inferior. Each of Lewis's major fictional works shows evidence of sexism, though such evidence lessens in frequency and prominence with each subsequent work. Lewis's opinion and portrayal of women did change with his marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham, though his fiction never achieved a complete lack of prejudice against women.

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April 2014
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Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my mentor, Dr. Hemchand Gossai, for exploring this topic with me and patiently editing and guiding me through each draft of my thesis; he encouraged me through every step of this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Pellegrino and Dr. Marc Cyr for their assistance with some of the technical issues regarding the formatting of my paper. My gratitude to Dr. Rebecca Ziegler, librarian liaison, for her information regarding research methods. Finally, I would like to thank the University Honors Program for giving me the opportunity, encouragement and motivation to test my skills and reach higher potential that I might not have otherwise been able to do.

Gender Differentiation and Gender Hierarchy in C. S. Lewis

Introduction

C. S. Lewis has been acknowledged worldwide as a great scholar, an apologist of the Christian faith, and a creative thinker. Born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898, Lewis was baptized as an infant in the Church of Ireland, but departed from his Christian faith during his adolescence. According to his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis's view of the world in general was colored by pessimism, and he maintained a materialist outlook for several years. At the same time, he cherished a deep love for Romantic literature, particularly Norse mythology, and struggled to reconcile his materialism with his Romantic tendencies: "The two hemispheres of my mind were in the sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other glib and shallow 'rationalism.' Nearly all that I loved I believed to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless" (170). Beyond his personal abandonment of the Christian faith, he remained a steadfast critic of Christianity until 1929, at which point, under the influence of J. R. R. Tolkien and several other friends, he returned to the Anglican Communion (Benbow).

Following his conversion, Lewis went on to write numerous works, including books, essays, and poetry. While Lewis's works do not all focus specifically on Christian themes, he is best known for his attention to Christ and Christianity, including his philosophical and theological works such as *Mere Christianity*, *The Four Loves*, and *The Problem of Pain*. Lewis has also been widely acclaimed for his fictional work, most notably his series of children stories, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as *The Space*

Trilogy and *Till We Have Faces*. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages, have sold millions of copies, and are still widely read today (Crum).

Despite Lewis's widespread popularity, there are certain themes in his writing that have been challenged and created controversy over time. In the majority of his works, Lewis maintains that men are superior to women, defending "an essentialist and hierarchical view of gender relations" (Van Leeuwen 392). Moreover, women in Lewis's stories are generally expected to submit to their role as wives, or else give up their own femininity in order to partake in more "masculine" tasks, such as battle.

Lewis was the cornerstone of an academic club known as the *Inklings* (Fredrick and McBride *Women Among the Inklings* 2). The two most prominent members, apart from Lewis, were J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Wallace. Together, these three men discussed a wide range of topics; however, women were almost invariably excluded from the group, as relationships with women were considered to be inferior to male friendship (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 1). The *Inklings* have been frequently accused of misogyny and sexism, and their literary works have been criticized for their lack of strong female characters, as well as the masculine bigotry of their male characters (Eros 283).

In spite of such evidence of sexism in Lewis's writings, the question of gender issues in his works is frequently overlooked: most readers either condemn Lewis as a misogynist or defend him as merely a product of his time (Bartels 324). Although it has been pointed out by various scholars that the imaginative worlds of Lewis, as well as that of Tolkien and Wallace, are deficient in well-rounded female characters, little has been written on the issue (Fredrick and McBride "Battling the Woman Warrior" 30). Critics

such as Fredrick and McBride have noted that the absence of strong women in the *Inklings'* literature may be caused chiefly by the estranged or painful relationships that they had with women in their daily lives (*Women* 1). Lewis, in particular, lost his mother at a young age, and he shared close emotional ties to two dominant and strong-willed women, during different periods of his life.

In Lewis's earlier works, particularly his Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Regress*, female characters are typically shown as two-dimensional, either purely good spirits or purely evil temptresses (Fredrick and McBride "Battling" 36). His idea of women's inferiority remains in *The Space Trilogy*, where the main female characters are expected to submit to their husband's authority and sacrifice their individuality; if they do pursue a career, they must remain single and cannot simultaneously occupy professional and domestic spheres (Van Leeuwen 396). The heroines of *The Chronicles of Narnia* are rather more fairly drawn, perhaps because they are prepubescent and do not yet experience sexual desires. Even here, however, there is evidence of Lewis's preference for male warriors over female, although this attitude appears to fade as the series progresses. Finally, Lewis's last novel *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, told from the first-person perspective of a female narrator, shows a much deeper appreciation in Lewis for the female viewpoint, though the book still has some tendencies toward sexism and regards warfare as primarily a male sphere. Lewis gradually moves from overt sexism to a more relaxed attitude toward independent women, but his fiction never entirely leaves the idea of gender roles and gender differentiation. Lewis's marriage to Joy Davidman Gresham later in his life appears to have radically redefined his perspective of women, love, and marriage.

Women in Lewis's Personal Life

a. Flora Lewis

Flora Lewis was the more stable of Lewis's parents. Flora had received a Bachelor of Arts from Queen's College in Belfast, and it was she who began Lewis's education in both French and Latin (*Surprised* 4). Early in life he noticed the sharp difference between his mother's "cheerful and tranquil affection" and his father's emotional "ups and downs," and that his mother was generally happier than his father (*Surprised* 3). It was this contrast that taught Lewis to distrust his own emotions for the next sixty years, before he was transformed by his marriage (Sibley 22).

Early in 1908, Flora was diagnosed with cancer, and she died the following August. Lewis remarks in *Surprised by Joy* that afterward, "all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life" (21). As Sibley notes, Lewis evoked the pain of his mother's loss in *The Magician's Nephew*, in which Digory Kirke searches for a way to save his dying mother; her death continued to haunt him as his wife also died from cancer (26). A major impact of his mother's death was that Lewis and his brother Warnie began to "rely more and more exclusively on each other for all that made life bearable; to have confidence only in each other" (*Surprised* 19). With his brother as his only true friend after the death of his mother, and with his attendance at all-male schools, Lewis's world became increasingly male-oriented.

b. Janie Moore

Although Lewis had several female relations and acquaintances even after his mother's death, his next prominent relationship with a woman was with Janie Moore,

who was twenty-six years his senior. Lewis had shared a room with her son “Paddy” Moore during World War I, and he began visiting the Moore’s house often with Paddy (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 60). Lewis’s friendship with Paddy developed to the point that the two of them made a pledge: if Paddy died, Lewis would care for his mother, and Paddy would do the same for Lewis’s father (Sibley 41). When Paddy was declared dead, Lewis acted on this promise, and Janie Moore became, according to Fredrick and McBride, “the focal point of his private life” for the rest of her life (*Women* 61).

Part of Moore’s attraction to Lewis was probably of a maternal nature. He seemed to find in her a source of maternal affection that comforted him after the death of his mother (Sibley 43). However, biographers of Lewis have come to believe, based on circumstantial evidence, that Lewis’s relationship with Moore was likely of a sexual nature. In any case, Lewis lived with Moore and her daughter Maureen, who was eleven when she met Lewis, and supported them both as his own family (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 61). Lewis remained with Moore even after his conversion, though apparently any sexual element that had been in the relationship was discontinued (*Women* 63).

Although Moore was admired for her charitable hospitality, she was also known to be “narrow-minded, limited in intelligence, strong-willed, and, as she aged, mentally disturbed” (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 66). Lewis wrote in his diary of a particular instance when her domestic demands interfered with his poetry writing:

It was unfortunate that . . . “Dymer” should coincide with a burst of marmalade making and spring cleaning on D’s [Moore’s] part which led without intermission into packing.

I managed to get in a good deal of writing in the intervals of jobbing in the kitchen and doing messages in Headington. . . . I also kept my temper nearly all the time. Domestic drudgery is excellent as an alternative to idleness or to hateful thoughts—which is perhaps poor D’s reason for piling it on at this time: as an alternative to the work one is longing to do or able to do (*at that time* and heaven knows when again) it is maddening. No one’s fault: the curse of Adam. (*All My Road Before Me* 306)

Lewis’s brother Warnie was constantly irritated at Moore’s interruptions into Lewis’s work, believing that she even fabricated chores for him to do, to which Lewis submitted masochistically (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 66).

Fredrick and McBride state in *Women Among the Inklings* that Moore’s influence on Lewis’s writing was profound. She inspired many of his female ghosts in *The Great Divorce*, who display a controlling and possessive form of “love.” She also seems to have been in Lewis’s mind when he described the image of a family that emotionally freed after the death of the “loving” mother. And it is likely that Moore also inspired the patient’s fussy and demanding mother in *The Screwtape Letters* (69).

c. Joy Davidman Gresham

According to Sibley, the woman who most influenced Lewis’s later life and works first came to his attention through a letter he received in 1950. Joy Davidman Gresham, an American who was living with her estranged husband at the time, impressed

Lewis with her letter, although since the letter does not survive, it is unclear exactly what struck him about her (104). In any case, the two quickly developed a friendship as “pen pals” (105). In 1952, Gresham’s marriage was quickly unraveling, and she came to England to meet with Lewis. Lewis was so attracted by Gresham’s wit and intelligence that he even arranged for her to meet his brother as well as some of his Oxford friends, upsetting the convention at Oxford of keeping women out of intellectual circles (110).

Gresham was invited to stay at the Kilns, Lewis’s house at Oxford, over Christmas in 1952. During that time, Gresham received a letter from her husband Bill, stating that he had formed a relationship with her cousin, who had been living with them (Sibley 112). Lewis advised her to divorce, and in January 1953 Gresham returned to America and determined that divorce was in fact the best solution to her disintegrating marriage. After settling the legal matters, she returned to London with her two sons (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 74).

Lewis’s friendship with Gresham grew even deeper after her return to England; it was she who gave Lewis the idea that developed into his novel *Till We Have Faces* (Sibley 122). Gresham made frequent visits to Lewis during this time, and she apparently became possessive of Lewis, even becoming angry once upon finding the wife of Lewis’s friend, George Sayer, at his house (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 75). Then in 1956, their relationship reached a turning point when Gresham discovered that the British Home Office would not renew her visitor’s visa, and that the only expedient solution was to marry a British citizen. Lewis agreed to a civil marriage with Gresham to keep her from being deported, but he insisted that it was not a true Christian marriage in his eyes, due to her divorced status (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 76).

Gresham's financial difficulties made her uneasy about keeping her residence, and Lewis's frequent visits, often at night, caused her reputation to suffer. Then in June of 1956, Gresham was rushed to the hospital after falling and breaking her leg. Initially the diagnosis was fibrositis, but it was later discovered to be an advanced cancer that had affected multiple areas of her body. Expecting to die, Gresham wished for the Christian sacrament of marriage (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 76). Lewis eventually succeeded in procuring this sacred rite, and they were given the sacrament of marriage in March of 1957 (*Women* 79). Gresham seemed to make a miraculous recovery from her cancer, and Lewis finally came to the realization that he was in love with her (*Women* 80). Shortly thereafter he tried to reform the *Inklings*, which had disbanded when Lewis had changed colleges, with Gresham at its center. This attempt failed dismally, as the other *Inklings* saw it as hypocritical that Lewis should try to include his wife when they had traditionally left their wives at home for their meetings. The negative reaction from the *Inklings* pushed Lewis and Gresham even closer together, and for three and a half years they lived in "domestic bliss" (*Women* 81).

This bliss, unfortunately, did not last long. In May, 1960, Gresham's cancer returned. The couple remained happy together to the end, even sharing a painful but sweet journey to Greece. By June, however, her condition worsened, and she died in July, 1960 (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 83). Lewis, in his anger and grief, described his experiences after Gresham's death in *A Grief Observed*, published under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk and referring to Gresham as *H*. The book is complex, describing Lewis's feelings of conflict between his emotions and his reason and faith. He felt that he was shut out from God, and he even considered the idea that God could be evil:

What chokes every prayer and every hope is the memory of all the prayers H. and I offered and all the false hopes we had. Not hopes raised merely by our own wishful thinking; hopes encouraged, even forced upon us, by false diagnoses, by X-ray photographs, by strange remissions, by one temporary recovery that might have ranked as a miracle. Step by step we were 'led up the garden path.' Time after time, when He seemed most gracious He was really preparing the next torture. (26-27)

Yet ultimately Lewis came to the conclusion that his grief was selfish because he was crying for his loss and not hers (Sibley 167) and that God himself was the answer to suffering (164).

Within *A Grief Observed*, Lewis also calls into question his earlier views about the disparity between friendship and erotic love, as well as the superiority of men over women:

What was H. not to me? She was my daughter and my mother, my pupil and my teacher, my subject and my sovereign; and always, holding all these in solution, my trusty comrade, friend, shipmate, fellow-soldier. My mistress, but at the same time all that any man friend (and I have good ones) has ever been to me. Perhaps more. If we had never fallen in love we should have none the less always been together, and created a scandal. That's what I

meant when I once praised her for her “masculine virtues.”

But she soon put a stop to that by asking how I’d liked to be praised for my feminine ones. (59)

Lewis came to the realization that a personal, intimate love transcends the barriers between friendship and erotic love, as well as the distinctions between gender, in such a way that these distinctions were not only overcome but eliminated in his relationship with Gresham (Schudder & Bishop 78).

Lewis’s Views on Gender Roles and Gender Hierarchy

Lewis’s perspective on gender in some ways reflected his time and environment, and it was during his lifetime that the role of women in English society began to change. Many women who had filled traditionally male roles during World War I disliked having to return to their domestic roles after the war, and Lewis would have returned from the war to “a very different social climate” than the one he had left (Bartels 326). Ribe details Lewis’s opinion of “the proper spheres” for men and women, describing it as “decidedly traditional and unmodern”:

The proper sphere of the man’s activity is, for Lewis, intellectual and political; his is the realm of abstract thought and the exercise of power. Such a life tends to face not inward towards the self and its intimate relationships, but outward towards abstract concepts and the world of human affairs. . . . A major part of a woman’s role is, for Lewis, the nurturing of children and the preservation of the

values of the home against the often amoral world outside.

A woman's nature is thus directed inward, not outward towards the world. (3-4)

Therefore, for Lewis, men look outside themselves, and women look inwardly. While this does not necessarily render women inferior, it does suggest that women are less suited to the intellectual world. In this regard the positive roles of nurturing and establishing value within the home are viewed as somewhat secondary.

Lewis believed that gender was even more fundamental to creation than biological sex, and distinguished the "masculine" and "feminine" genders from the "male" and "female" sex. Gender is not merely of human origin, but rather is built into the very nature of things, and each gender has a distinct purpose. Creation is feminine to God's masculinity, implying that female nature is in fact subordinate to male (Barkman "All is Righteousness" 418). As he wrote in his essay "Priestesses in the Church?", Lewis believed that the masculine imagery of God was chosen for a divine purpose, and that to equate God with a female would be theologically dangerous: "To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential" (460). Instead, human beings were to view themselves as feminine in relation to God: "One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize for us the hidden things of God ... [Thus] only one wearing the masculine uniform can . . . represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him" (460-61). There is no question, in Lewis's mind, that there is a clear distinction between the genders and that the masculine must be the higher.

Lewis's attitude toward gender, particularly in marriage, was further elucidated in *Mere Christianity*. There he asserts that the man is the head of the household "because he always ought to be, and usually is, much more just to the outsiders" (103) Lewis maintains that the male is more naturally suited to being in charge of the household, because the female is more likely to look after those who are immediately connected with her, rather than people in general. His views on gender hierarchy, particularly in marriage, seem to grow more complex in *The Four Loves*. Lewis maintained that the difference between the sexes made friendship between them often difficult and sometimes impossible. Much of this, he admitted, had to do with social construction and differences in education (Bartels 327). However, Lewis shows no difficulty in accepting a world in which men and woman are never friends: "A world where men and women never have any common work or a common education can probably get along comfortably enough" (*Four Loves* 73). This statement demonstrates that Lewis did not see the separation of the sexes as an innately bad thing.

Regarding erotic love, Lewis goes even further in *The Four Loves* in pointing out not only the difference but the inequality of the sexes in marriage. During the sexual act, a husband and wife become "a god and goddess between whom there is no equality—whose relations are asymmetrical" (104). He also related the nature of the Christian hierarchy of husband over wife, and argued that Milton and other Christian writers had written about the husband's authority "with a complacency to make the blood run cold" (105). Lewis emphasized the suffering aspect of headship far more than its glory (Barkman "All is Righteousness" 424). After citing Paul's injunction to husbands to lay down their lives for their wives, Lewis writes in *The Four Loves*: "This headship, then, is

most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion” (105). Lewis was not worried about the idea of men abusing this authority over their wives; he was more concerned with wives usurping it and contending with husbands who are spiritually inferior (106).

In *A Grief Observed*, Lewis’s views on femininity demonstrate a deeper complexity. In it, Lewis gives an even-handed and biblical evaluation of the virtues and frailties of both sexes (Van Leeuwen 413). He writes:

There is, hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them. It is arrogance in us [men] to call frankness, fairness, and chivalry “masculine” when we see them in a woman; it is arrogance in them [women], to describe a man’s sensitiveness or tact or tenderness as “feminine”. But also what poor, warped fragments of humanity most mere men and most mere women must be to make the implications of that arrogance possible. Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. “In the image of God He created them.” Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes. (40-41)

Barkman asserts that, in this passage, Lewis is not denying the difference between the sexes nor the role of head on the part of the husband, but that the passage is “a celebration of his deceased wife” and what they gained through each other as human beings (“We Must Go Back” 451). Yet the passage seems to be doing even more. If it is

“arrogance” to describe certain virtues as masculine or feminine, then perhaps the difference between the two is not as strong as Lewis’s earlier writings conveyed. Moreover, Lewis’s reference to Gresham as both “my subject and my sovereign” (*Grief* 59) suggests that the headship of the husband did not play such a vital role in his marriage as his philosophy might have indicated, and that Lewis did not seem to have any theological problem with the matter.

Women in the Early Works of Lewis

In Lewis’s earliest works, such as his poem “Dymer” and his allegory *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, women are divided into two categories: disembodied good spirits and evil temptresses (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 36). In “Dymer,” the titular character spends a night with a mysterious woman who is never described in detail, and who disappears the next day. In an attempt to recover her, he is thwarted by what appears to be an old woman, an “old, old, matriarchal dreadfulness” (“Dymer” 3.156). When at last he is reunited with his lover, he does not seek a physical union but instead engages in a Platonic conversation with her, no longer concerned with whether she has a body at all. In fact, Fredrick and McBride claim that her gender is only the result of Dymer’s will: “The female figure in ‘Dymer’ begins as a mystery and ends as an abstraction” (*Women* 131). There are no realistic, complex female characters in the story of “Dymer.”

The same holds true of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* where Lewis personifies Reason as “a woman in the flower of her age: she was so tall that she seemed to him a Titaness, a sun-bright virgin clad in complete steel, with a sword naked in her hand” (46), although John, the protagonist, never gives an explanation as to why he assumes she is a virgin

(Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 36). The description is reminiscent of Athena, the warrior-like goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology. After this initial description, however, both John and the narrator seem to forget Reason’s gender, allowing her to become “an abstraction with gender arbitrarily attached” (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 131). Lewis could not depict a woman in a combative role without stripping her of all bodily reference (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 37).

On the other hand, women who are evil in *The Pilgrim’s Regress* are depicted in more physical terms, such as the naked “brown girl” who represents lust to John: “And John rose and caught her, all in haste, and committed fornication with her in the wood” (Lewis 16). Unlike Reason, who is referred to only by name after her first appearance, Lewis’s repeated reference to this character as the “brown girl” draws attention to her physical appearance, emphasizing her capacity to tempt John. Even then, while she is depicted physically, Lewis gives no more detailed description of her apart from her youth and the color of her skin. Fredrick and McBride speculate as to why Lewis chooses to depict lust as a woman, since “lust” is not necessarily exclusive to sexual temptation, and so could be represented by “a well-stocked larder” rather than a girl. They suggest that this may result from the female’s association with reproduction and offspring (*Women* 132). A more credible answer is that the “brown girl” represents Lewis’s own sexual temptations as an adolescent, as he described in *Surprised by Joy*: “It was quite easy to think that one desired those forests for the sake of their female inhabitants, the garden of Hesperus for the sake of his daughters, Hylas’s river for the river nymphs” (169). Whatever Lewis’s exact motivation was, it seems apparent that any woman who is

described as physically beautiful is a temptation, and a woman must be stripped of all physical description before she can represent anything good.

Fredrick and McBride point out in *Women Among the Inklings* that Lewis's poem "The Queen of Drum" depicts his first prominent female protagonist (130). Unlike Lewis's earlier depictions of women, who are more representations of abstract ideas than people, the Queen of Drum is the first female character in Lewis's works to think logically, experience suffering, and even choose her own fate (134). However, while the Queen displays strength and resourcefulness, she is still somewhat hampered by gender stereotypes (135). When she tries to defend her night-time wanderings to the Council, she is at first daring and strong-willed, rebuking them as hypocrites. However, when they do not respond, she has an emotional breakdown and cannot continue:

Then twice she made endeavor,
Grasped the great moment's virtue: gone forever:
Struggling to speak. Then (curses on the frame
Of women!) her breast shook, and scalding came
Tears of deep rage. Bit thro' the lip, clench hand,
—All's vain. ("Queen" 1.306-11)

Lewis particularly draws attention to her emotional state as a reflection of femininity when he "curses" about the "frame / Of women" (1.309-10). The implication is that a male speaker would not have been so susceptible to his feelings.

What is more, the poem equates heaven with the Queen's oppressive life in Drum: "Heed not the road upon the right—'twill lead you / To heaven's height and the yoke whence I have freed you" (5.203-04). When the Queen is commanded by a God-like

character to return homeward, she refuses and chooses to enter fairy land. Hence heaven is equated with the Queen's home and her position as wife, which she has left. The poem ends somewhat ambiguously:

Nothing now will she ever want again
But to glide out of all the world of men,
Nor will she turn to right or left her head,
But go straight on. She has tasted elven bread.
And so, the story tells, she passed away
Out of the world: but if she dreams to-day
In fairy land, or if she wakes in Hell,
(The chance being one in ten) it doesn't tell.

(5.287-94)

Thus the Queen's choice of fairy land may or may not end in her gaining her heart's desire. Either she is wandering in Faerie, or she is in Hell. What is clear, however, is that she has ultimately rejected heaven. This fact appears to be another example of gender bias: Lewis's male protagonist in *The Pilgrim's Regress* succeeds in finding heaven, while his female heroine in "The Queen of Drum" is denied it (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 135).

The Space Trilogy

Out of the Silent Planet, the first installment of Lewis's science-fiction trilogy, does not contain any central or significant female characters. By contrast, the plot of *Perelandra*, the second novel, revolves around the fate of Tinidril, the Queen of Venus.

She is described physically, as a naked woman with green skin, and has a friendly and cheerful personality. However, Tinidril unquestioningly accepts the gender hierarchy that is built into her world. After obedience to Maleldil (“God” in Lewis’s trilogy), her primary desire is for her husband, the King of Venus (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 142).

The relationship between Ransom, the book’s protagonist, and Tinidril is characterized primarily by chivalry. Ransom, as Maleldil’s tool, must protect Tinidril from the attacks of Weston, an agent of Satan. One of the philosophies that Weston uses in his attempt to destroy the green woman’s innocence is feminism: he describes how men like Ransom “had continuously laboured to keep woman down to mere child-bearing and to ignore the high destiny for which Maleldil had actually created for her” (*Perelandra* 132). Thus, a woman who does anything more than child-bearing is going against the role that God has assigned to her. For Tinidril, and for women in general, “children [are] fruit enough” (*Perelandra* 131), and there should be nothing for a woman to want beyond her family (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 143).

As the novel comes to the end, Ransom meets with the Oyarsa, the angelic rulers of Venus and Mars. Malacandra, the Oyarsa of Mars, represents masculinity, while Perelandra, the ruler of Venus, represents femininity. At this point in the novel, the narrator embarks on a lengthy passage describing the essential nature of gender: “Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex” (*Perelandra* 200). That is, gender is decided from the very nature of creation itself, and cannot be transcended. He then notes the differences between the masculine figure and the feminine:

The two white creatures were sexless. But he of Malacandra was masculine (not male); she of Perelandra was feminine (not female). Malacandra seemed to him to have the look of one standing armed, at the ramparts of his own remote archaic world, in ceaseless vigilance, his eyes ever roaming the earth-ward horizon whence his danger came long ago. . . . But the eyes of Perelandra opened, as it were, inward, as if they were the curtained gateway to a world of waves and murmurings and wandering airs, of life that rocked in winds and splashed on mossy stones and descended as the dew and arose in thin-spun delicacy of mist. (200-01)

These descriptions show a very stereotypical view of gender roles. Mars, as the emblem of masculinity, is warrior-like and focuses his attention outward; Venus, the emblem of femininity, is “introspective, mysterious, and nurturing” (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 144). And since these traits are supposed to be essential qualities of masculine and feminine, they can never be surpassed or changed. The hierarchy of men over women is again stressed after the King and Queen of Venus are given power over the planet by the Oyarsa: “The eyes of the Queen looked upon him with love and recognition, but it was not of the Queen that he thought most. It was hard to think of anything but the King” (*Perelandra* 205). Only the King, the male partner of the two, can be regarded as an image of God; the female partner must be secondary.

The theme of the subservient wife is carried into the third installment, *That Hideous Strength*. Jane Studdock, the primary female character, is an English scholar who is trying to write a dissertation and is dissatisfied with her marriage to her husband Mark. Jane is disappointed that their friendship seems to have died within their marriage: “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” (13). Jane and Mark’s friendship is sacrificed in their marriage, because friendship implies equality between friends, while marriage, in Lewis’s view, necessitates that the husband’s needs must come before the wife’s. Therefore, Jane’s actual problem is that she cannot adapt to her natural role as a wife; her scholarly ambitions are not suited to her new position in life (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 144).

Jane is contrasted in the story with the matronly Mrs. Dimble, who portrays Lewis’s ideal of the cheerfully subservient wife. Mrs. Dimble does not mind when her husband pays her no attention because she expects it of him, and, while she has no children, she acts as a mother to his students, thus fulfilling her maternal nature. In contrast, Fairy Hardcastle, the sadistic head of the N.I.C.E. police force, has cast off all notion of femininity while remaining female (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 145). She wears a short skirt and has a large chest, but she holds an unlit cheroot in her mouth and walks and sits with her legs indecently apart. Mark describes her as “rankly, even insolently, sexed and yet wholly unattractive” (*Hideous* 68). As Fredrick and McBride put it, Jane is caught in a dichotomy between these two extremes, with no other alternative. Either she must accept her role as the obedient female partner in her marriage, or she must reject her femininity entirely (*Women* 145).

Ransom, who acts as God's representative on earth in *That Hideous Strength*, describes to Jane the nature of her problem:

If it were a virginal rejection of the male, He [Maleldil] would allow it. Such souls can by-pass the male and go on to meet something far more masculine, higher up, to which they must make a yet deeper surrender. But your trouble has been what old poets called Daungier. We call it Pride. You are offended by the masculine itself: the loud, irruptive, possessive thing—the gold lion, the bearded bull—which breaks through hedges and scatters the little kingdom of your primness. . . . The male you could have escaped, for it exists only on the biological level. But the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it. (315-16)

It is granted that Ransom is actually referring to Jane's pride in her relationship with God, more so than her husband. But Jane, since she is married, cannot escape the role of the male in her life because it represents the masculine. For Jane to obtain salvation, she must submit to the masculine, and, as a corollary, to the male: her husband (Bartels 333).

Ransom asserts that Jane's unhappiness resides in her rejection of Mark's authority over her: "you do not fail in obedience through lack of love, but have lost love because you never attempted obedience" (*Hideous* 147). He states clearly that marriages must be unequal partnerships: "obedience—humility—is an erotic necessity. You are

putting equality just where it ought not to be” (148). If Ransom is the mediator of Lewis’s beliefs in this story (and since he is portrayed as God’s representative, there is reason to believe he is), then it is clear that Lewis did not believe in equality in marital relationships. Marriage must result in one partner, the male, being primary over the other, the female.

Lewis attempts to illustrate the hierarchy of marriage with a rather stark analogy. As Ransom finishes his Eucharistic meal, he blows a whistle that summons three mice to remove the bread crumbs, and then blows it again to send them away. He then explains to Jane: “Humans want crumbs removed; mice are anxious to remove them. It ought never to have been a cause of war. But you see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill – specially between man and woman where the roles are always changing” (*Hideous* 149). Ribe describes this as “not one of his [Lewis’s] more felicitous metaphors” (9). Bartels calls the analogy “degrading” and contends that women are not like mice: they cannot survive on only crumbs, and they do not feed off of leftover crumbs left by men (332). Perhaps Bartels is hasty in assuming that the mice refer only to women: as Ransom points out, “the roles are always changing” between men and women. There are times when the men depend on what the women give them. But the comparison is still between the masculine, as the giver, and the feminine, as the receiver. Only in obedience, to God and to her husband, can Jane find her happiness.

Jane, to attain salvation and salvage her marriage, must come to the realization that she cannot be both a scholar and a wife, but must choose one or the other (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 146). Her academic pursuits, in her case, are bad in themselves because they interfere with her duty to be a house-maker and a mother (Bartels 333).

After she accepts Christianity, Jane is told by Ransom: “You will have no more dreams. Have children instead” (*Hideous* 382). While this seems to be referring to the visionary dreams that Jane has throughout the novel, it raises the question as to whether Jane must give up all personal dreams for the sake of her marriage. Her scholarly dreams are inappropriate because she is married and must therefore restrict herself to the domestic sphere (Bartels 334).

On the other hand, Lewis did not hold the view that women could never become scholars. In fact, he includes such a character in *That Hideous Strength*: Dr. Grace Ironwood, who sees Jane after she begins complaining of her dreams. The pertinent difference between Jane and Dr. Ironwood, however, is that the latter is unmarried. She has no domestic duties, no husband to submit herself to and no children to raise, and so she is free to pursue her academic career. It is too late for Jane to try to emulate Dr. Ironwood, since she is already a wife. She cannot have “the best of both worlds” (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 396). Thus, for Lewis, being truly feminine and scholarly are mutually exclusive.

The Chronicles of Narnia

In his stories for children, Lewis takes a somewhat different approach to his female characters. The heroines of *The Chronicles of Narnia*—Lucy, Susan, Aravis, Jill, and Polly—are all portrayed realistically as individuals, rather than as character types (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 37). Lucy Pevensie is the central character in three of the seven novels, and makes less prominent appearances in two others. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, after becoming Queen of Narnia, she is known as “the Valiant”

(201) and repeatedly displays a brave and adventurous spirit. In fact, as pointed out in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy is given a special standing in Narnia: she sees Aslan, the Great Lion and the image of Christ, more often than any other character, male or female (118).

Despite this distinction, Lucy is still differentiated as a girl. When she rides with the warriors to the battle of Anvard in *The Horse and His Boy*, Prince Corin remarks that she is “as good as a man, or at least as good as a boy” (196). In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when Father Christmas tells Lucy that she is not to be in the battle against the White Witch, he responds to her protest: “battles are ugly when women fight” (119). Prowess in battle is always regarded as a male characteristic, even if it is shared by a female. Lewis subtly stereotypes Lucy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* when she is tempted to recite a spell “to make beautiful her that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals” (163). The fact that Lewis writes the word “her” into the spell’s description suggests that vanity of appearance is typically a female trait, not a male one.

In contrast to Lucy is her older sister Susan. Susan is considered to be the practical one of the group; for instance, she suggests to her siblings in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that they take coats out of the wardrobe so they will not be cold in wintry Narnia (60). Susan may be sensible, but she is also rather “tame” compared with her sister and much more prone to following gender conventions. She is described in *The Horse and His Boy* as “an excellent archer,” but she is more like “an ordinary grown-up lady” and does not participate in battles (196). However, Lewis does show some disparagement toward gender stereotypes when he “puts sexist remarks in the mouths of fools” (Ford 279): Prince Rabidash, the antagonist of *The Horse and His Boy* who tries to

forcibly marry Susan, declares that “women are “as changeable as weathercocks” (125). But he also strengthens Susan’s attachment to gender roles in the same book when he has her break down and cry while she, Edmund, and their servants contemplate how to escape Tashbaan (75).

Of the children who enter Narnia throughout the series, only Susan does not return to Narnia in *The Last Battle*. The other characters—Peter, Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, Jill, Digory, and Polly—all assert that she is “no longer a friend of Narnia” (169). Jill goes on to say that Susan is now only concerned with womanish things: “nylons and lipstick and invitations” (169). Fredrick and McBride suggest in *Women Among the Inklings* that Susan’s absence implies that women are more likely to fall into temptation and stray from salvation than men, and they claim that Lewis could have just as easily left out one of the male characters (149). This latter claim, however, is not compelling. Lewis could not have left out Edmund or Eustace, since these two characters undergo vivid salvation experiences in the previous books. Nor would Peter have been an appropriate character to leave behind, since he is the High King of Narnia and, in that sense, representative of Aslan and Christ. Digory would have also been difficult to remove: not only was he the central character of one of the earlier books, he was also the Professor whose wardrobe led the children into Narnia in the first place, and who assured the Pevensie children that they would return. That leaves only Polly, another female, as an alternative to Susan. But Susan’s absence is more understandable than Polly’s would be: she is often referred to derogatively by the other characters as too “grown-up.” She is the last of the children to feel the magic pull into Narnia in *Prince Caspian*, as well as the last to see Aslan, and she spends much of the time complaining (Ford 302). While the

symptoms of her fall from grace are feminine in nature, the fall itself is less dependent on gender and more on her inordinate desire to be accepted socially (Bartels 325).

Aravis's character in *The Horse and His Boy* takes Lewis further away from gender stereotypes. She flees Calormene, where women are essentially the property of men (Ford 279), for the free country of Narnia. At her first appearance, Aravis wears her brother's armor and is mistaken for a Calormene warrior. Lewis repeatedly calls attention to her quick mind and admirable character. When Shasta is whisked away by the Narnian lords in *The Horse and His Boy*, she "never [loses] her head even for a moment" (101); when Shasta believes that Aravis has left Tashbaan without him, the narrator interrupts the story to assert that Shasta is "quite wrong" about her and that she is "as true as steel" (91). Indeed, her character traits suit her for being a fine warrior. Even her interests connect her with the role of a warrior: she is concerned with "bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming" (106). These activities were considered to be boys' things during Lewis's time period and very unlike the interests of a stereotypical, docile female (Ford 279).

Lewis's relaxation against gender stereotypes in *The Horse and His Boy* has its limits, however. She cannot participate in the battle at Anvard, as she is injured beforehand. Granted that Lucy joins the battle, her role in it is never described in detail: one never actually *sees* a female in combat. When Lucy and Aravis first meet, Lucy takes her to see her new apartments at Anvard, and the two walk off together to discuss Aravis's room and clothes, "and all the sort of things girls do talk about on such an occasion" (229). This somewhat undermines Lewis's more equal view of women in the

story: it is more likely that the two women would discuss battles and journeys, since that is what they have most recently experienced in common (Ford 280).

Serving as a direct foil to Aravis in *The Horse and His Boy* is her friend Lasaraleen, who helps Aravis escape Tashbaan. Lasaraleen's personality and pastimes are more stereotypical for a female than her friend's. She giggles incessantly, repeatedly calls attention to herself, and is always "interested in clothes and parties and gossip" (106). She cannot understand Aravis's desire to escape a forced marriage, since her potential husband is extremely wealthy and powerful. Though Lasaraleen is portrayed as incredibly silly, she does have good characteristics: it is she who initiates a plan to help Aravis escape, and she gives her friend "affectionate embraces" as they say goodbye (133). Although it could be argued that Lasaraleen's flaws are the result of wealth and being extremely spoiled, this does not seem a likely answer, given that she and Aravis come from the same social background. It would seem that Lewis wanted to include a character that was as negatively feminine as possible, in order to highlight the more admirable, masculine qualities in Aravis.

Another female character in Narnia who displays warrior-like qualities is Jill Pole, the heroine of *The Silver Chair* who also plays a major role in *The Last Battle*. She is "the most real of all the girls in the *Chronicles*, and her actions are both brave and fearful" (Ford 280). While preparing for her adventure in *The Silver Chair*, Jill thoughtfully decides to bring along a knife "which might come in useful" (49). When Jill, Eustace, Puddleglum, and Prince Rilian leave the Prince's room after killing the Queen of the Underworld, the three males exit with drawn swords "and Jill with drawn knife" (201): she is ready to participate in a fight if need be, although she never actually does. In fact,

she does not join with the others in killing the Queen but instead sits down quietly, urging herself to keep calm: “I do hope I don’t faint—or blubber—or do anything idiotic” (193-94). Although this is a very real reaction, it is rather disappointing, particularly after Jill has demonstrated bravery throughout the book (Ford 280).

Jill’s position as a fighter becomes more apparent in *The Last Battle*. King Tirian outfits Jill in armor as he does himself and Eustace, if only for the sake of disguise. He even once refers to her as “comrade” (67), indicating that he regards her as his fellow warrior. She is also described as being fairly skilled with a bow: “though not up to Narnian standards, she was really not too bad” (71). She is the first female to practice hunting in the *Chronicles* (Ford 281), and she also has excellent tracking skills, a trait which directly diverges from Lewis’s comment through Edmund in *Prince Caspian*: “That’s the worst of girls. . . . They never carry a map in their heads” (125). Although Lucy is able to give an immediate and clever retort to this—“That’s because our heads have something inside them”—it is still a relief to see Lewis recant this statement through Jill’s marked competence. In fact, in *The Silver Chair*, Eustace echoes Edmund, mocking Jill when she cannot tell which direction is East: “It’s an extraordinary thing about girls that they never know the points of the compass” (8). However, the comment seems to be intended as satire on Lewis’s part, since Eustace does not know which way is East either (Ford 280). Moreover, Lewis admits in *The Silver Chair* that Eustace is right about Jill not knowing her compass points, but he qualifies the sexist nature of Eustace’s remark: “I don’t know about girls in general” (28). This shows, as Ford puts it, “a nice sensitivity toward his girl readers,” something that was absent in his earlier books (280).

Jill is the first female character in Narnia whose part in battle is described in full. Lewis details her perspective in *The Last Battle* as the final combat begins, describing each of her shots and their exact target. Not only does she participate, but Lewis asserts that she has made a difference in the fight: “Jill was astonished at how unprepared the Calormenes seemed to be. She did not realize that this was the result of her work and the Eagle’s” (155). Very far from keeping women from battle, in this book Lewis even allows for a female to have military significance. One aspect of Jill’s fighting style, however, differentiates her from the male characters: she always has a different weapon. In *The Silver Chair*, Eustace, Puddleglum, and Rilian each have swords, but Jill must “be content with her knife” (78). When Aslan has Caspian, Eustace, and Jill punish the gang at their school, the boys use the flats of their swords, but Jill is given a unique weapon: a riding crop. In *The Last Battle*, Jill always fights as an archer, and Lewis remarks in the narration that Jill “[doesn’t] know very much about swordsmanship” (155). It seems that, while Lewis allows for a female to fight, the art of sword-fighting is always reserved for males. Lewis also stereotypes Jill slightly in *The Last Battle* when he has her cry twice, both when the horses are shot to death, and when Eustace is thrown into the stable to what she believes is his death. Even in battle, Jill is shown to be a sensitive female who cannot quite control her emotions.

Another of Lewis’s characters, Polly Plummer, is “not the conventional turn-of-the-century girl” (Ford 280-81). In *The Magician’s Nephew*, she is very independent-minded, using an empty tunnel in her attic as a kind of “smuggler’s cave” and is noted to have an occasional bottle of ginger-beer by herself (7). Lewis makes another challenge at gender stereotypes for her sake when she and Digory argue over ringing the mysterious

bell they find in Charn. When Polly declares herself against it, Digory says in anger that girls “never want to know anything but gossip and rot about people getting engaged” (57). Considering that the result of Digory’s action is the awakening of the Witch, his remark seems to have been meant as satirical. Lewis appears to be acknowledging that women have more varied interests in conversation than simply gossip and romance.

There is one particular scene in *The Magician’s Nephew* in which Lewis draws a clear distinction between Digory and Polly as boy and girl. As the two children prepare to ride Fledge to retrieve the magic apple for Aslan, King Frank helps them both up onto the horse: “that is, he gave Digory a rough heave and set Polly as gently and daintily on the horse’s back as if she were made of china and might break” (173). Lewis seems to be more concerned with demonstrating the King’s courtesy than anything else, and as this book was completed after *The Horse and His Boy*, Lewis clearly knew that a girl could mount a horse without being gentle. Still, the remark does draw a line between the children’s genders, and it is a distinction that highlights women’s supposed delicacy and frailty, whether Lewis intended it that way or not.

Notably, most of Lewis’s female characters, and certainly the most prominent ones, are children. The only clear examples of *women* fighting in combat are the antagonists: the White Witch and the Queen of the Underworld, although both women primarily rely on magic rather than weapons (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 38). The White Witch is briefly depicted fighting Peter with her stone knife. She is described in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as a capable warrior: “Lucy could hardly make out what was happening: she only saw the stone knife and Peter’s sword flashing so quickly that they looked like three knives and three swords” (193-94), although she is

still fighting with a knife and not a sword. The Queen of the Underworld, on the other hand, does not even fight as a woman in *The Silver Chair*: she changes into a deadly serpent that attacks Prince Rilian. The Prince even remarks, after the Queen's death, that he is glad she changed form: "It would not have suited well either with my heart or with my honor to have slain a woman" (194). Even for his antagonists, Lewis marks a difference between male and female and contends that the two should be treated differently, rather than as equals.

Lewis comments on the absurdity of men being ruled by their wives in *The Silver Chair*. Prince Rilian, while under enchantment, is entirely devoted to the wicked Queen. Jill informs him, "Where I come from . . . they don't think much of men who are bossed about by their wives" (166). Eustace remarks disparagingly to himself: "He's a great baby, really: tied to that woman's apron strings; he's a sap" (167). The Prince's relationship with the Queen is unnatural, not only because he is under a spell, but because he is being controlled by a woman, something which no respectable man is to endure. Lewis's prejudices against gender equality are indeed relaxed in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but they are not eliminated.

Till We Have Faces

Lewis's last novel, *Till We Have Faces* (hereafter *TWHF*), is often considered by many of his literary critics to be his best work (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 149). The book displays, according to Fredrick and McBride, the most "sympathetic, understanding, realistic, and detailed portrait of a woman" in all of Lewis's works ("Battling" 38). This is perhaps the result of Joy Davidman Gresham's involvement with the book: she helped

Lewis “brainstorm” for the idea and then read and critiqued the first chapter (Fredrick and McBride *Women* 150).

Orual, the princess and later queen of the mythical land of Glome, is the center point for Lewis’s novel. She is the feminine combination of warrior and Greek philosopher (Fife 154), both areas of life which were traditionally denied to women. Unlike Lewis’s earlier depictions of women, especially in *Perelandra*, Orual is not mysterious to the reader, particularly as the narrative of her story is told through her perspective in the first person. She is introspective, examining her deepest motives and flaws, and develops as a character. Fredrick and McBride claim that Orual is “the most satisfying of Lewis’s female characters” as she is portrayed as a real human being, with strengths and weaknesses, rather than as a two-dimensional character type. Moreover, this is true of several other female characters in the story: Orual’s sisters are contrasted with both her and each other in looks, personality, and motivations (*Women* 151). This in itself indicates that this book is a departure from Lewis’s earlier works in terms of his portrayal and character development of women.

Orual’s description of her childhood in *TWHF* shows the horror that she faced in being discriminated against for her gender. At the birth of Orual’s sister Psyche, her father erupts in anger: “‘Girls, girls, girls!’ he bellowed. ‘And now one girl more. Is there no end to it? Is there a plague of girls in heaven that the gods send me this flood of them? You—you—’ He caught me by the hair, shook me to and fro, and flung me from him so that I fell in a heap” (14). Orual’s eventual position as Queen of Glome defies her father’s chauvinism: she is an able ruler and warrior, despite the prejudices against her gender. His abuse of her demonstrates the evil consequence of sexist extremism: he is so

determined that boys are more valuable than girls that he devalues his daughter's humanity.

Orual is later trained in the art of swordsmanship, the first and only of Lewis's female characters to master this particular style of fighting. What is more, she not only is taught the art of using the sword, but is admitted to having a natural talent for it. After Orual's first, amateurish attempt to fight, Bardia, chief of the palace soldiers, tells her, "There are none of the recruits would do so well at a first attempt" (*TWHF* 57). Through Orual's training, Lewis shows that women can be naturally suited to the role of warrior, and that the stereotypical picture of a woman hating warfare is more a product of social norms than of nature.

Still, Fredrick and McBride see Lewis as uncomfortable with the concept of a female warrior: in order to allow his female character to fight, Lewis must essentially transform her into a male (*Women* 151). Orual, their specific example, is an ugly woman and therefore qualified to participate in battle ("Battling" 39). Lewis describes Orual as "hard-featured as a man" which allows her to "fight like a man" (*TWHF* 174). Orual's ugly features allow Lewis to portray her as a warrior, as she is so unattractive no man can regard her as a female: "if you are ugly enough, all men (unless they hate you deeply) soon give up thinking of you as a woman at all" (*TWHF* 116). It would seem that, in Lewis's world, no woman can truly be a woman unless she is attractive to men.

Orual's masculinity goes beyond her facial features. After Orual's first attempt to use a sword, Bardia gives her a backhanded compliment in telling her she has "a man's reach" and that it is a shame he cannot properly teach her because of her gender: "It's a thousand pities, Lady, that you weren't a man" (*TWHF* 57). Orual even declares that she

has “man enough” about her to declare her attack against Bardia, even in her “woman’s rage” (*TWHF* 56). She declares that her work as her father’s councilor is “man’s work” (*TWHF* 176); while Orual may be able to work in intellectual matters, they are still regarded as the proper sphere for men. She even prides herself on being in Bardia’s “man’s life,” while condemning his wife as “his toy, his recreation, his leisure, his solace” (*TWHF* 204). Fighting and honor are regarded as men’s skills and possessions. Even if Orual possesses them, she is the exception, not the rule, and she is only an exception because she seems more masculine than feminine to those around her. Orual is “ultimately a woman, though a mannish one; this is to say, she is not a man, yet not quite fully a woman” (Fredrick and McBride “Battling” 40). Again in Lewis’s fiction, there is no example of a character who is both fully woman and fully warrior: there must be a rejection of one or the other.

The role of Psyche in the story further complicates matters. Her marriage to the God of the Mountain still demonstrates the superiority of masculinity over femininity. It is true, as Bartels asserts, that the contrasts “between mortal and immortal far outweigh differences between woman and man” in this story (334). Psyche explains that, when she has to remove her clothes before her spirit servants, she is ashamed, not of her femininity, but of her mortality: “This shame has nothing to do with He or She. It’s the being mortal – being, how shall I say it? . . . insufficient” (*TWHF* 102). The contrast between divine and mortal between the God and Psyche resists the social context that characterized Jane and Mark Studdock’s relationship in *That Hideous Strength*, and so evades the awkward social statements to which the other book falls prey (Bartels 335).

It is still, however, a manifestation of the “masculine” that is impossible to escape and that every human being is “feminine” in relation to, as Ransom’s character declares in *That Hideous Strength* (316). Cupid represents the masculine, Psyche the feminine, a fact made vividly apparent by their relationship as husband and wife. Psyche resists Orual in telling her: “I have a husband to guide me now” (*TWHF* 140); she has no right to resist him, as she is “only his simple Psyche” (*TWHF* 144). Bartels contends that the divine nature of the husband succeeds in keeping the relationship from being overshadowed by social constructs: it is not about a wife sacrificing her individuality to her husband, but a mortal being obedient to her god (335). However, the fact that Psyche asserts herself as married does put it into social context, divine husband or no. It is still an illustration of an unequal relationship between a man and a woman. This is demonstrated at the end of the book, when the God finally appears. Even though Psyche is now a goddess, Orual realizes that she is less important than her husband: “And yet, it was not, not now, [Psyche] that really counted. Or if she counted (and oh, gloriously she did) it was for another’s sake” (*TWHF* 268). Even when the gap of divine and human nature is crossed, the feminine spirit is still shown as being less significant than the masculine.

The presence of Ungit in *Till We Have Faces* makes the hierarchy between the genders even more apparent. Ungit is the goddess of erotic love, the mother of the God of the Mountain, and is referred to as monstrous. “All . . . are born into the house of Ungit. And all must get free from her. Or say that Ungit in each must bear Ungit’s son and die in childbed – or else change” (263). The manifestation of human evil and selfishness as a goddess does not give a good impression of the female gender. In Lewis’s fantasy, the

masculine must be desired, while the feminine, if not submissive, is demonic and must be overcome.

Conclusion

In his earlier works, Lewis displays a disparaging attitude toward women, particularly married women. Women, in Lewis's earliest fiction, exist only for the sake of his male characters and possessed little distinction as characters. They are shown to be mysterious and impossible to understand, and they are often presented as temptations for men. Even "The Queen of Drum," Lewis's first work with a notable female protagonist, is subject to stereotypes against her gender. *The Space Trilogy* is replete with statements about the fixed nature of gender and the submissive role of wives in their homes.

Over time, Lewis's opinions regarding women evolved, and his female characters were drawn more realistically. Lewis's insight into his characters reveals "a basic sympathy for the equality of women" (Ford 277), if not a complete one. The heroines in *The Chronicles of Narnia* display courage, strength, and resourcefulness, qualities that are usually reserved for men. They are also allowed to take part in battle, albeit with reservations. There is still, however, evidence of sexism throughout the series, although it is relatively subtle. Such evidence is apparent in the fact that the only females that participate in battle are children, except for the two Witches, and no female is allowed to handle a sword.

In *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis shows more sympathy for women than in any of his previous works. He allows Orual, the protagonist of the story, to learn swordsmanship, something he had never before done in his works. She is able to rise above the prejudices

against her femininity, becoming a capable ruler and warrior, roles held traditionally only by men. Yet even Orual does not entirely escape gender differentiation. Her skills are deemed worthy of a man, indicating that battle is still properly a man's place. She is regarded as a man because of her ugliness: there is no place for a beautiful woman on the battlefield. What is more, Psyche's relationship with the God of the Mountain displays the same hierarchy that was present in *The Space Trilogy*. Wives are still inferior, their wills secondary to their husbands; the only reason Orual is able to act on her own behalf is because she is not bound to a husband. A wife's place is still to obey her husband.

Therefore none of Lewis's fictional works reaches the idea of true equality between men and women. The signs of sexism in his fiction become fewer and less explicit over time, but they are never completely absent. This fact may be a source of distress to Christians who regard Lewis as a great defender of the faith, and who either have to defend or apologize for Lewis against the charge of misogyny.

Still, that does not mean that Lewis himself remained sexist to the end of his life. His marriage with Joy Davidman Gresham transformed his opinion of women, love, and marriage. His book *A Grief Observed*, detailing his anguish at her death, displays an understanding of his wife far beyond the stereotypical opinions that he imposed upon his fictional characters. Although his fiction never achieved a completely unprejudiced view of women, Lewis himself certainly seemed to reach it in his personal life. Though it took several decades and much suffering on Lewis's part, the "sword between the sexes" (*Grief* 40) was finally lifted.

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