Place as Plot: A Comparison of the Use of Place in C. S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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PLACE AS PLOT: A COMPARISON OF THE USE OF PLACE IN C. S. LEWIS' *TILL WE HAVE FACES* AND JOHN MILTON’S *PARADISE LOST*

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
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English

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C. S. Lewis’ fiction constantly relies on the depiction of physical place as a key device in addressing largely metaphysical issues and he does so in a way that goes beyond merely creative descriptions of scenery. What makes his use of place descriptions so unique and significant is the function of place as a key component in his theodicy for a post-Christian world. I especially compare Lewis’ approach to theodicy in *Till We Have Faces* with Milton’s approach to theodicy in *Paradise Lost*. My motive for this comparison comes largely from reading Lewis’ *A Preface to Paradise Lost* coupled with the fact that in his post-conversion fiction Lewis shared with Milton a passion for theodicy and made significant use of place as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the Creature and the Creator via the middle realm of Nature.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife, Becky, for her patience and encouragement as I worked through the MA in English program and especially as I worked through this thesis. Your friendship has been my balm throughout.
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Introduction

While C. S. Lewis is best-known for his Narnia stories, he is less known for his fiction written with adults in mind, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the Space Trilogy, *The Great Divorce*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and his own personal favorite: *Till We Have Faces*. His reputation as a literary scholar *par excellence* is another aspect of his multifaceted *oeuvre* that those who know him primarily for his Narnia stories tend to be unaware of. Yet in all of his fiction his three primary interests: medieval literature, fairy tales/mythology, and Christian apologetics, weave a fascinating web of antecedents, referents, and deep insights into the human condition and provide a Christian perspective on that condition. The passion for Christian apologetics seen in all of his writing (aside, perhaps, from his works of literary criticism, which differ in purpose from apologetics) amounts to an ongoing theodicy that seeks—in a wide variety of topical contexts—to reaffirm the relevance of faith in God, especially as seen in the person of Christ through a Christian worldview. The sincerity, passion, wit, and depth of Lewis' apologetics is undeniable. And yet, as clearly Christian as his works are, his final novel, *Till We Have Faces*, strikes a marked contrast to his previous fictional works in the extent to which it does *not* appear to be a Christian work. In this book he is retelling a classical myth—the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius' Latin novel, *The Golden Ass*. While his use of myth is nothing new to those who have read the Narnia books, the Narnia stories generally draw a more direct comparison between type and referent—Aslan serving as a type of Christ is perhaps the most obvious. Yet in *Till We Have Faces* the context is not an imaginary world that incorporates elements of myth, but this world as seen through the lens of pagan Greek mythology. Hence, rather than the obvious reappropriation of pagan mythological elements in a clearly Christian allegorical fairy-story, he has maintained the essential story of a pagan myth and simply retold it
from the first-person vantage point of a different character, as opposed to the omniscient narrator of Apuleius’ version. Yet by the end of the book it becomes clear that Lewis is indeed practicing a sort of theodicy that results in a powerful assessment of the relationship between the sovereignty of an infinite God and the free will of finite human beings. Furthermore, he provides hints at the end whereby the Incarnation of Christ is hinted at as a future event, emphasizing Lewis’ belief that the pagan religions of the world represent in an immature form of what Christianity via the Incarnation represents in its mature form. Rather than binary opposites, Lewis sees Christianity as the terminal point in an historic continuum of religious experience, as he sees the Incarnation as the fulfillment of the sehnsucht pervading all religions. As he relates his conversion in Surprised by Joy, Lewis notes that, regarding the Christian faith among the religions and philosophies of the world, “Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not ‘a religion,’ nor ‘a philosophy.’ It is the summing up and actuality of them all” (236). This relationship suggests a comparison with Milton’s masterpiece, Paradise Lost, also a theodicy that seeks to reconcile these two issues while attempting to justify the ways of God to man.

Such a comparison is warranted by several factors: first, Lewis’ landmark work of literary criticism on Milton entitled A Preface to Paradise Lost effectively countered some more questionable aspects of modern assessments of Milton’s masterpiece. Second, both authors were attempting to justify the ways of God to Man in the face of accusations that the presence of evil in the world suggests that God cannot exist, for how can a just, holy, and omnipotent God allow evil to exist and persist in his creation?

In his theodicy, Milton sensibly goes back to the entrance of sin into the world by retelling the story of the fall of Adam and Eve into original sin directly from the Genesis
account, while doing so with abundant artistic license. Lewis, however, approaches theodicy from the vantage point of a human subject living long after the time of the fall and thereby provides his readers with a protagonist with whom they can more readily identify. By legitimizing to some extent Orual’s reasons for accusing the gods Lewis seeks common ground with the objections of modern atheists that he knew as well as with his own objections to the Christian God that he held prior to his conversion. Also, Lewis primarily uses subtle inferences to indicate his objective and leaves it to the reader to make the intended connections. It becomes clear that Lewis is less concerned about the external, societal conceptions of justice (as in Apuleius’ tale) and more concerned with how the marginalized individual deals with suffering. By situating his theodicy in a pagan mythological context, he is also resituating our meditation on religious ideas in the realm of Natural Law. Orual is not a recipient of the Gospels, but grows into an intuitive realization—aided in part through her visions—of the right of the gods to be trusted and believed in, and the hubris of her own accusations against them. Lewis, then, is going beyond Milton to the very issue that Milton takes for granted: the sovereignty of God. Also, while Milton makes great pains to attack Catholicism at numerous points, reflecting the degree to which such religious controversies were more central to his culture than ours, Lewis is not concerned with theological debates between the different branches of Christianity so much as with the total rejection of the idea of the supernatural that permeates our modern, post-Christian culture. To address the modern prevailing philosophy of materialism he seeks, in a way, to bring his post-Christian readers back to a pre-Christian, pagan consciousness that at least had the value of a belief in the gods. This contrast between the essentially Christian episteme that Milton addressed and the post-Christian one addressed by Lewis clarifies the difference of their approaches. In Milton’s world a general Christian worldview was at the center of culture; hence
battles between Protestants and Catholics (or Protestants and other Protestants, for that matter) were often intermixed with battles between political factions: politics and religion were largely inseparable, as we still see, for example, in the Islamic cultures of the Middle East. In the modern western culture addressed by Lewis, however, religion had already been largely marginalized as a result of the growth of scientific knowledge felt by many to disprove the existence of God, and therefore to postulate the ultimate irrelevance of religion. In such a culture, the key concerns of society no longer centered on theological debates and their political implications but on secular issues such as human rights, freedom, democracy, tolerance, and so on. While modern people of religious faith may see the relevance of religious convictions to all of these issues—and would thus be more like much of Milton’s readership—this was not an available starting point for Lewis who, as a recovering materialist, realized that many people of the twentieth century (as heirs of the Enlightenment) regard reason as the best starting point for addressing the pressing issues of society, not religious texts. By starting with a pagan myth (easily interpreted by the modern reader as a “classical literature”) Lewis began his theodicy from a starting point that was still respected by at least the culturally literate of western society. While the authority of the Bible had been replaced by logic and science, mythology was still respected as a literary foundation for western culture. Into this myth, then, Lewis breathed hints of the pre-Enlightenment episteme of belief in the supernatural rejected by modern culture, and in so doing questioned the assumptions of modernism while exhibiting a marked degree of respect for the concerns of modern society that have led it to reject religion. In the sections that follow I will compare Paradise Lost with Till We Have Faces regarding their use of place as a

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1 Consider such examples form the early modern period as the defection of Henry VIII from the Catholic church and the political ramifications of that, or the Puritan government of Cromwell that Milton served.

While it is easy to take the descriptions of place in a story for granted, it may often be very significant to grasping the underlying meaning of the story. For example, Milton’s descriptions of Eden contrasted with his descriptions of Hell suggest both Milton’s ecological concerns (a growing controversy even back then) and his views on the relationship between Mankind and nature. Likewise, Lewis’ descriptions of Glome at various points in the novel suggest certain key ideas that he wants us to get about both the metaphysical climate in Glome and what humanity’s use of nature says about its beliefs about the creator of nature. I will specifically look at the symbolic function of the City, the Temples, and the location of Orual’s appearance before the gods as key topographical elements in the story. My analysis of the phenomenological significance of these places will be influenced in part by Gaston Bachelard’s treatment of place in The Poetics of Space as well as by Eric Auerbach’s treatment of representation in Mimesis. Since this study seeks to compare Milton’s approach to theodicy with Lewis’, it will also consider how he uses the representation of place to develop an argument for the need for belief in the supernatural while also acknowledging the difference between belief as “faith” and belief as “knowledge.” The theme of Natural Law, which Lewis referred to as Tao in The Abolition of Man, also bears discussion as a crucial component of Lewis’ theodicy.

Preliminary considerations

The role of mythology

One element used extensively by both authors is mythology. Milton uses mythology as an aesthetic model, and his respect and admiration for the classics is obvious in his constant reference to them. Likewise, he certainly intends his work to embody for the Christian,
Anglophone world the same fundamental values as Homer’s works did for the Greeks. But his incorporation of mythology in *Paradise Lost* is largely done through epic similes that use mythological elements as an inferior comparison to biblical counterparts that he is always sure to state are “far better.” A good example of this occurs after Milton’s description of Paradise, where he writes:

...Not that fair field
Of Enna where Proserpine gath’ring flower’s,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world, nor that sweet grove
Of Daphne by Orontes and th’ inspired
Castalian spring might with this paradise
Of Eden strive, nor that Nyseian isle
Girt with the river Triton where old Cham
(Whom Gentiles Ammon call and Libyan Jove)
Hid Amalthéa and her florid son,
Young Bacchus, from his stepdame Rhea’s eye,
Now where Abássin kings their issue guard,
Mount Amara, though this by some supposed
True Paradise, under the Ethiop line
By Nilus’ head, enclosed with shining rock
A whole day’s journey high... (ll. 268–284)
While Milton seems enamored enough with pagan mythology to feel compelled constantly to bring it up, he generally uses it as a contrastive foil for his biblically informed presentation of the Fall. This reflects his desire both to build a sense of epic history into his work and to avoid offending his fellow Puritans by his enthusiasm for the (pagan) classics.

Lewis, however, gives no clear indication of his work being in any way “Christian” until the very end, by which point it becomes clear (especially when contrasted with Apuleius’ version) that he indeed has brought in a Christian worldview, albeit in a very subtle manner. He handles this classic myth reverently and in many respects injects levels of depth uncharacteristic of Apuleius’ rendering. Interestingly, in this retelling of a pagan myth, Lewis does not “Christianize” or “allegorize” the story on Christian terms, but keeps it set in a pre-Christian pagan culture on the outskirts of the ancient Greek Empire—a much different approach than his merging of mythological and Christian allegorical elements in the Narnia Chronicles. Unlike Milton, he does not use pagan mythology as a foil, but allows it to stand on its own terms as a precursor to the emergence of the Gospel through the Incarnation. This reflects Lewis’ belief (influenced heavily by Tolkien) that mythology paved the way for the “true myth” represented in the Incarnation.

Charlie Starr traces Lewis’ ideas about the use of myth to the influence of Lewis’ friend, Owen Barfield. Barfield argued, in *Poetic Diction*, that the dichotomy between literal and figurative meanings is a result of the evolution of consciousness from perceiving reality as “once self-evident, and therefore not conceptually experienced… [which can now] only be reached by an effort of the individual mind—that is what is contained in a true poetic metaphor, and every metaphor is true” (qtd. in Starr 7). This suggests that the associations that enable metaphors to exist (and Barfield later gives examples, e.g. death/sleep - winter, or birth/waking - summer)
were originally not demarcated as separate things—i.e. a signifier (the literal meaning) and a
signified (the metaphorical meaning)—but were at the same time one and the same. Thus death,
sleep, and winter are all the same: the cessation of life, either apparently or really. Starr’s
summary is useful here: “...myth as a mode of language communicates holistic meaning to our
immediate perceptions. It bypasses the abstracting reason and linear (time-bound) language
(which is to say it bypasses the cognitive space between sign and signified) and enters
immediately, intuitively into our understanding so that it is not an abstraction containing
meaning, but rather is an immediate, experiential reality” (168). Lewis appropriates this
perspective into his own thinking with some modification regarding the nature of causation.
While Barfield locates causation in cognitive evolution, Lewis resituates causation in the fall.
“His theory is of a gradual de-evolution of human knowing, an epistemological decay,” which
means that rather than being a sign of human consciousness emerging through the process of
cognitive evolution from the one-dimensional “consciousness” of animals, it is instead a
degenerative process whereby meaning becomes further and further separated from term,
signified from sign, until meaning is either transcendentally unknowable or simply nonexistent.

*Narrative voice*

Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* using the voice of an omniscient narrator—in other words,
himself, from a 17th-century Christian vantage point, looking back at the Creation and the Fall
with a close eye on Genesis. Milton passes moral judgment on good and bad characters and takes
a clear perspective about who is on which side. Even in his depiction of Satan—as a tragically
heroic character, but nonetheless clearly not the protagonist in the sense of being the “good
guy”—he clearly paints the characters in black and white. Lewis’ theodicy, however, is written
from the first-person narrative voice of Orual, who is at the end of her life looking back, and
decides to write her memoirs in the form of a complaint against the gods. The story is divided into two books: the first, longer book is Orual’s case against the gods, and the tone of it stands starkly against the approach Lewis typically uses. Indeed, it almost reads as an anti-Christian treatise...yet when we remember who wrote it and whose perspective he is telling the story from, we wait expectantly for the narrative turn. That turn comes in Book Two. Orual, a few days after completing the first section, realizes that she is not getting it quite right. “The past which I wrote down was not the past that I thought I had (all these years) been remembering” (Till we have faces: a myth retold 253). As the story continues, she comes to realize the extent to which her own hubris has been the real problem. Thus by retelling her story, she is brought face-to-face with the flaws in her own anger toward the gods. In this respect, the story is more a spiritual journey than a tragic narrative, as Paradise Lost in some ways is.

The Nature of the Fall

Milton focuses on the hubris of Adam and Eve’s sin and the justice of God in punishing them, yet he fails to resolve the nature of the fall. For instance, Eve’s sin is being deceived by Satan into breaking God’s command, yet Milton is often seen as presenting Eve as a naïve woman with no agency who must receive any communication from God through Adam and who seems to be merely tricked into sinning by her own ignorance. Such an interpretation fails to grasp Milton’s concern for reflecting the biblical idea of a benevolent hierarchy in the created order in which each being has its role and is most happy when it properly carries out that role. While Eve is certainly in a hierarchical relationship of “subjection” to Adam, Milton does not seem to be suggesting that this is in any way oppressive or demeaning. Even Milton’s repeatedly having Eve receive communication from God through Adam simply reinforces the idea of a benevolent hierarchy while also making full use of the social aspects of Adam and Eve’s
relationship as the means through which to communicate to her. So while Milton certainly opposed *human* (i.e. man-made) hierarchies such as the British monarchy, this is largely grounded in his belief that such hierarchies—being of human rather than divine origin—were prone to corruption and oppression. That original hierarchy created by God to define the roles of all living things in the created order is the true and good original compared with which contemporary human governments are not much more than a necessary evil. Furthermore, Eve has plenty of “agency,” as seen in the tremendous freedom she enjoys in the Garden as well as her exercising that freedom according to her own free will. If she had no agency, she would not be able to violate God’s prohibition by eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The primary argument of Satan’s temptation of Eve is the very idea that the hierarchy God had ordained robs her of agency (although neither Milton nor Lewis use that term).

Both Milton and Lewis, then, question the idea that the absence of complete autonomous self-government is inherently bad. Prohibition implies the presence and necessity of hierarchy to establish boundaries. Furthermore, the simplicity of God’s prohibition seems so obvious that some would argue that it is unlikely that Adam and Eve would have made such a step as to disobey God, except that they were ignorant of the nature of the consequences—a possibility that Milton allows. It is assumed by those who make such an argument that their ignorance of the full ramifications of their disobedience renders the consequences they received as an over-reach of cosmic justice. Yet Milton seems to be making the point that trust must precede understanding, which reflects the Christian idea of faith as the embodiment of things not seen. Lewis arrives at a similar point in *Till We Have Faces* by locating Orual’s case against the gods in her refusal to accept what little revelation of themselves they had given her. As with Milton’s depiction of Eve, Orual explores the apparent injustice of the ways of the divine with humanity and concludes in
addressing the god with the words, “I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are
yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away” (308). When the god of the mountain
gives her a brief view of his castle, she dismisses it, refusing to back down from her plan to
convince Psyche to bring a lantern to bed with her. Likewise, Psyche does not acquiesce to
Orual’s demand to disobey her husband’s command out of naïve ignorance, but out of her love
for her sister. Her subsequent expulsion from his castle and valley—and the ensuing physical
destruction of the forest in which the castle had been—make a stark parallel to the biblical
account of Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden. The sin was rebellion
manifesting itself in seeking to attain a higher status in the hierarchy of creation than God
intended them to have. Eve’s rebellion—as Satan’s—is therefore not some innocent curiosity
and exhibits a different perspective on the nature of the Fall as well as the nature of the
relationship of the supernatural to the natural. Lewis presents Orual as bringing her case against
the gods because of their refusal to acquiesce to her demand for a response from them—for
tangible proof of their existence and of their goodness. They had already provided that through
the god of the mountain’s brief revelation of his castle to Orual before she suggested Psyche
break her vow, and then briefly appearing to her afterward. If she had accepted these clear
revelations, she would have been moved to repentance—but instead she indulges her pride—she
is afraid of losing her sister to the god, so the real issue is covetous pride. The “surgery” of
which Orual speaks at the beginning of Book Two is the gradual removal of that pride from her
heart through the trials she endures later in life. As with The Pilgrim’s Regress, the main
character of Till We Have Faces in many respects represents Everyman—all who have ever
wanted to accuse God for what they feel is his unjust treatment of them or others in this mortal
life. The fact that Orual is stepping out to write down her complaint against the gods is her first
step towards recovery. Part of that process is coming to the point where she realizes that it is hopelessly unrealistic to expect the gods to respond to our demands, as if we have authority over them: she has to accept the hierarchy of created things—that humans are not the lords of the gods. Then she comes to realize that the gods knew what they were doing; the fact that it seemed as if they were doing nothing ignores all that they were doing (e.g. the different quests that Psyche was sent on, in which Orual is enabled to help her—Orual experiences these as dreams, but they are in some respects magically accomplished by the gods). In the end, she acknowledges her hubris and confesses that the gods are just, even if she does not understand their ways. She also acknowledges a greater one coming (anticipating the Incarnation) that will begin the reconciliation between God and Man.

By using myth in this way Lewis seeks to accomplish what Milton set out to accomplish, but on far different terms. Milton’s theodicy is marked by an overconfident belief that theological truths can be irrefutably argued through Reason. Lewis, on the other hand, takes a totally different approach that is grounded more in a realization of the limits of Reason than Milton’s. Lewis, after all, is addressing a postmodern world that questions whether reality itself can be known objectively through Reason, whereas Milton addressed a world that generally accepted a Christian worldview (at least in terms of cosmology and origins). So Milton’s thoroughly Christian milieu contrasts starkly with the postmodern, post-Christian culture that Lewis addresses, which needs, above all, to be convinced first that the supernatural even exists. Hence, he focuses his theodicy on objections to the faith common among his 20th-century critics. And while both Lewis and Milton approach their theodicies through imaginative writing, the nature of both the form and the subject matter of their stories highlights the difference of approach. Milton retells the Creation story, simply embellishing it through the form of the poetic
epic. Lewis, however, eliminates almost every hint of his theodicy being Christian, using a pagan myth as his subject matter. By using myth rather than polemic, he gives us an extended parable through which to imagine and engage the issues at the heart of his theodicy. The final statements by Orual anticipate what we in retrospect know to be the Incarnation but it is not spelled out, only strongly implied. As Starr points out, “Myth draws the imagination toward concrete knowing here in the valley of abstraction. It is able to do what truth and reason cannot do in our fallen world” (169). Readers who have read Apuleius’ version of the Cupid and Psyche story can see the rather significant contrasts between that and Lewis’ representation of the characters and places—his significant alteration of the story amplifies what he is really up to: writing a theodicy for a jaded, post-Christian culture that has largely rejected any serious belief in the supernatural.

The Curative Power of Memory

Since this study is especially concerned with representations of place, it is important to understand what makes place such an important factor to consider. The power of place lies in the ways that place influences those who inhabit it. That influence is seen in memory, the mental images and impressions resulting from experiences and states of being associated with that place. These phenomena of experience, captured by memory, inform the thoughts and reflections of the individual throughout life, having a significant influence on the emotions, thoughts, and decisions of the individual. Of course, that influence is modulated by the personality traits of the individual. For example, Psyche and Orual grow up in the same environment, but their perceptions of it are quite different, due to differences in personality and circumstances—the most emphasized being the contrast between Orual’s ugliness and Psyche’s beauty. Psyche also exhibits a strong spirit of acceptance of circumstances, while Orual seems constantly to be fighting against her circumstances, demonstrating that the disposition of the individual toward
place is a key aspect of the influence of place on the individual. Since *Till We Have Faces* is a memoir, the relationship between memory—specifically, Orual's memory—and place is very significant to the story. A consideration of how the key places in the novel affect Orual emotionally and psychologically suggests how they condition her perception of and attitude towards the divine, which is the central concern of the novel. Along with that, we should also be thinking about the fact that since the novel is narrated in the first person, there is the possibility of the narrator exhibiting bias. How reliable—the reader might ask—is Orual's testimony? Lewis is clearly aware of this aspect of the story and uses it masterfully by having Orual write a second part, which she begins by noting:

Not many days have passed since I wrote those words *no answer*, but I must unroll my book again. It would be better to rewrite it from the beginning, but I think there’s no time for that…. Since I cannot mend the book, I must add to it. To leave it as it was would be to die perjured; I know so much more than I did about the woman who wrote it. What began the change was the very writing itself… Memory, once waked, will play the tyrant… The past which I wrote down was not the past that I thought I had (all these years) been remembering… The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the gods’ surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound. (253–254)

The vividness with which she recalled the events of the past is a result of the power that those events and the places in which they occurred had on her. Note that once she starts recalling the past, she realizes that the story of her past that unfolds differs markedly from the memories she had of the past before she began to write. How she dealt with the events of the past conditioned
her memory of them until she sat down to actually retell in a book what had led her to her current state of opposition to the gods. Later, after reading her book to the gods multiple times, she says, “the voice I read it in was strange to my ears. There was given to me a certainty that this, at last, was my real voice…. At last the judge spoke. ‘Are you answered?’ he said. ‘Yes,’ said I” (292–293). The retelling of the past enables us to hear with our own ears what once had been only in our minds: somehow, in the retelling, the past sounds different—we hear our own thoughts as if they are the words of others and through renewed scrutiny are thereby able to see them for what they in fact are. But Orual is recalling not only events that happened, but significant characteristics of the places in which they happened. The question facing us is, how was Orual shaped by these places? Both her domestic situation and aspects of the city in which she lived shaped her perception of things, her understanding of them, and her responses to them.

In discussing place, Bachelard frequently uses the motif of “daydreams” to carry the weight of the much more general idea of “imagination.” He says, eloquently, that “to inhabit oneirically the house we were born in means more than to inhabit it in the memory; it means living in this house that is gone, the way we used to dream in it” (Bachelard 16). The dialectic he uses is one of place and thought. As children, we may find our places to be boring or uninspiring, and our childhood proclivity to imagination becomes a constant recourse in our times of free play. As we mature, we have left to us the memory of the emotional impression that such a state of unrestrained imaginative freedom had—the wonder, the boundless possibilities, the sheer joy—and the memory of the places of our childhood in which we often exercised ourselves in the play of imagination becomes associated with the wide-eyed wonder of childhood. Bachelard continues with a bold statement followed by an anecdote from one of the great French masters of imagination:
It is a good thing, it is even salutary, for a child to have periods of boredom, for him to learn how the dialectics of exaggerated play and causeless, pure boredom. Alexander Dumas tells in his *Mémoires* that, as a child, he was bored, bored to tears. When his mother found him like that, weeping from sheer boredom, she said: “And what is Dumas crying about?” “Dumas is crying because Dumas has tears,” replied the six-year-old child…. But how well it exemplifies absolute boredom, the boredom that is not the equivalent of the absence of playmates. There are children who will leave a game to go and be bored in a corner of the garret. How often have I wished for the attic of my boredom when the complications of life made me lose the very germ of all freedom! (16-17)

Boredom moves us to either despair or dream—or perhaps to find dreams through the pathway of despair, a path that seems final and absolute in its dissolution, yet magically dissipates in time through the inner workings of the ever-creative mind, whose design moves it towards dreaming and creating and is not satisfied either with mindless entertainment prolonged or with the absolute solitude of boredom. Seen this way, boredom is not an obstacle to avoid, but, perhaps, a friend to welcome, a catalyst for the creativity of the inner soul to come out and play. This creativity transforms the mundane into the extraordinary, the marvelous, and leaves behind not merely the memory of old, run-down places, but the many times those places became the springboards of imagination.

When Orual recalls—among memories of her childhood environment—the cold, frozen urine of the farm animals on the ground outside her childhood dwelling and how they would slide across it for fun, Lewis is juxtaposing the kind of creative, oneiric reflection that Bachelard discusses so eloquently with the harsh tone of jaded adulthood. The depiction of this scene is
both joyous, because of the imaginative play of the children—transforming something that is perhaps at the far extremities of the mundane into an opportunity for fun—and tragic, because of the harshness of the tone of the narrator, who recalls not just the playing but the dirty, harsh environment in which it occurred. Her recollection of the event and her childhood perception of it contrasts with the cynicism of her older self, who reflects on the scene with perhaps a hint of fatalistic irony: what she as a child took as joyous fun she now sees as tinged with the harshness, as if to imply that as a child she was in a way lying to herself by trying to turn what was intrinsically unpleasant into something pleasant. Weary of the battles and estrangements of life, she feels incapable of dreaming, of recreating (in a manner) the world through the imagination. This harsh perspective on her life lays the foundation for her objection to the gods’ apparent non-involvement with humanity. Orual does not seem to relive many joys associated with the places of her childhood (which was contingent on her imagination, not her surroundings) but to disparage them. She has lost the oniric vision of childhood, and in her mature knowledge she sees the world for what it is rather than what—in her mind—it could be made to be. While the journey into adulthood is a journey from naïve innocence to mature knowledge, the tragedy in Orual's case is that she does not integrate aspects of childhood innocence into adulthood. She has lost the hope that is born in the kind of imagination that a child has, a hope that bears faint reflections of faith—the “essence of things not seen.” Like Dumas, her soul cries, and her explanation for it is as shallow as Dumas’. In the same way that Bachelard says that he often longs for that childish boredom because of its ability to function as a catalyst for the imagination, so Orual needs to see adversity as a catalyst rather than a cause for complaint.

As with Lewis' other stories, the story unfolds—among other things—a portrait of adulthood as losing its childlikeness, whether that be a childlike faith or childlike wonder in
general. Through the process of recounting her past as the events of that past relate to her complaint against the gods, she is forced to contemplate anew the logical nature of her complaint, and concludes that she ultimately has falsely accused them. She says, “The change which the writing wrought in me (and of which I did not write) was only a beginning—only to prepare me for the gods’ surgery. They used my own pen to probe my wound” (253–4). By writing her memories, she enacts them in her mind—she relives them from a more mature perspective educated by suffering and opposition. As the child, Orual, once transformed a grim winter environment into a place of joyful playing through imagination and creativity, so now the adult Orual must—through the more mature “imagination” of faith revisit the past and transform the memories of suffering into catalysts for her own transformation.
Chapter 1: Nature as Text

Milton: Eden

While Bachelard applies phenomenological considerations of place primarily to architecture, I will be applying his approach to the representation of place and person in Paradise Lost and Till We Have Faces. Both stories deal with place in significant ways that reflect their concerns as theodical works. In addressing matters of faith, Milton and Lewis both deal with the interaction between the mortal/natural and immortal/supernatural realms, and in both authors’ works a fundamental concern is the breakdown of that interaction resulting in not only an estrangement between natural and supernatural beings but also between the places or realms in which those beings live. Since a theodicy by definition seeks to define the relationship between these two realms, the ways that they are depicted are significant markers for interpretation in light of the views of the authors and the prevailing beliefs of their readers. For example, the fact that one story depicts the fall of Adam and Eve into sin while the other depicts a mythical tragicomedy set on the outskirts of the ancient Greek empire hints at the differing worldviews of western culture at their respective periods in history.

Milton’s use of place centers around the contrast between the organic beauty of the Edenic environment and the mechanized and military focus of the “civilization” erected by Satan’s followers in Hell. It would be easy yet inaccurate to say that this contrast is one of organic/inorganic, although that is a part of it. The civilization depicted in the kingdom of Heaven is, at heart, one of peace and palatial splendor. This heavenly environment, though, unlike the empire being constructed in Hell, in no sense eliminates or exploits nature—the key contrast between Heaven and Hell, as Milton depicts them, is the extent to which they fulfill their divinely intended functions. Both Heaven and Eden depict order and sustainability; that is, both
function as welcome environments for all aspects of life—resting, working, etc. Hell, however, is bent on only one function: opposing the kingdom of Heaven through any means possible. This preoccupation with a single function—warfare against Heaven—contrasts starkly with the pristine, peaceful environment within which God places Adam and Eve. Likewise, Hell contrasts with Heaven in that Heaven’s environment is more an augmentation to nature rather than the manipulation and exploitation of it it typified by the efforts of Satan and his followers. *Paradise Lost* is, after all, in part about the interconnection of nature as *place* with its inhabitants, so it is only natural that the disruption of the relationship between the first humans and God would also be reflected by disruptions in the natural order through the fall. The unspoiled state of Eden becomes a metaphor for the unspoiled state of mankind before the fall—a state that can only be recovered through the redemptive work of Christ. God is not only at work to redeem humanity, but to also redeem all of nature. The biblical prophecies of a new heaven and a new earth reinforce the completeness of the restoration that seems to be in view as an outworking of that redemption.

Back-to-nature movements such as those that emerged in the 20th century reflected this need for rethinking the man-nature relationship and were a natural reaction to the ecological abuses of the Industrial Age. But Milton lived well before that period—why would he be reflecting any significant degree of concern for the environment?

Milton’s ecological concerns reflect an epistemological shift during the Renaissance (and especially the late Renaissance) that can be seen in the pastoralism of this period. Robert Watson notes that the pastoralism of much of the literature of the late Renaissance reflected a “broad primitivism” that at least anticipated modern environmentalist sentiment in its preoccupation
with “recover[ing] simple experience out in the fields or the wilderness, to re-immere oneself in the natural order” and was motivated largely by:

...a craving for unmediated knowledge in any form. As the persistent references to the Garden of Eden suggest, the movement back to nature was partly a code for a drive back toward some posited original certainty—a drive baffled by paradox and by history, leaving the pastoralist merely posing with his back to nature. (3)

Watson connects the pursuit of “original certainty” and “unmediated knowledge” with the rise of Protestant power, which was largely fueled by the Reformation concept of *sola scriptura* and the pursuit of a pristine state of the church and of the Bible, as well as developments like “urbanization, capitalism, [and] new technologies” (5). Milton’s criticism of the monarchical hierarchy and even his insistence on producing a systematic theology—*De Doctrina Christiana*—expressly on the claim that he was basing his theology *exclusively* on the “Sacred Scriptures” reflect this impulse toward the return of human experience to the prelapsarian state of Adam and Eve. It should not be surprising, then, that Milton also held some “back to nature” attitudes regarding the environment, and that he expresses them in *Paradise Lost*.

This impulse is seen when God admonishes Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Milton has Raphael relate God’s warning to Adam with the following words:

...but of the tree

Which tasted works knowledge of good and evil

Thou may’st not. In the day thou eat’st, thou diest:

Death is the penalty imposed. Beware!

And govern well thy appetite lest Sin
Surprise thee and her black attendant Death. (VII.542-47)

Two things stand out here. First, Raphael warns Adam to watch his “appetite.” The issue of appetite is central in addressing environmental concerns, because debates over the use of the environment tend to be about the balancing of appetite (for resources, for more production, etc.) with responsibility. Second, Raphael warns that if they yield to their appetites then Sin and Death will “surprise” them. While eating the fruit does not cause immediate death, there is a bit of surprise over the outworking of the curse of death in the separation from Paradise and the warning that they will have to work hard to get the earth to produce food—nature will resist their efforts to produce the basic resources they need to survive. The place that has provided for and nurtured them will now turn against them. Their identity with place had shifted from a symbiotic relationship of benevolent caretaker over a hospitable land to one of desperate provider in a hostile land. This blurring of their identity regarding place had occurred because they had become in some respects “divorced” from the purpose for which they were placed in Paradise: the state of “death” had begun to work in the natural order as they began to experience discontinuity with the natural order. In depicting the interplay of the supernatural and the natural, Milton depicts the idea that both levels of existence are significantly intertwined. The way that nature functions in Paradise Lost, then, reflects Milton’s own concerns about ecology in the face of environmental controversies in his era that laid the foundation for modern day environmental activism. Hiltner quotes Sir William Cecil, who wrote in 1596 that “London and all other towns near the sea...are mostly driven to burn coal...for most of the woods are consumed” (2). This rampant deforestation was not only necessitated by the need to build houses and ships, but also provided the energy necessary for the emergence of several proto-industries: Hiltner mentions copper smelting and glassmaking. Hiltner notes that deforestation was also a result of moves
away from subsistence gardening to larger scale farming of non-indigenous species as well as the draining of wetlands to accommodate the overgrazing of animals that provided meat, tallow, and wool. Hiltner mentions, as an example of public debate over deforestation, that “in 1653 Sylvanus Taylor baldly stated that deforestation had become a central issue for all of England, that ‘all men’s eyes were upon the forests’” (2).

It would, of course, be anachronistic to imply that the environmental concerns in Milton’s era were of the same nature and magnitude as modern environmentalism. Neither Milton nor others who expressed concern over controversies such as the almost total eradication of the Forest of Dean were hippies or New Age tree-huggers. Nonetheless, although this was not the Industrial Age proper, trends in the areas mentioned above involved a certain degree of environmental exploitation that anticipates the more extreme examples of environmental exploitation seen during and after the Industrial Age. Likewise, reactions to those problems bore epistemological similarities (as Watson discusses at length) to the thinking of modern environmentalism. In both cases, the need for humanity to rediscover its relationship to the natural order is paramount.

Hiltner introduces the preface to his book, Milton and Ecology, with the following question:

Why consider the role of place in Milton’s poetry? A few years ago… I found myself returning again and again to the same question: what happens when culture is privileged over place? No mere academic question, as the last acres of the place my family had farmed for generations had given way to bulldozers the year before, I found myself feeling that I had somehow lost my place in the world. What was most startling about this development was the total disregard for the
The connection between history, family, personal identity, and place suggests the undeniable significance of place—objectively seen as three-dimensional locale that can be utilized for multitudinous purposes—for experience, memory, and history. When places of significance are destroyed, the memories associated with those places—indeed, the very histories collected therein—are likewise destroyed, with no other thought than some future advantage gained through the demolition of the past. Hiltner perceptively contrasts the term “place”—a locale considered along with its subjective experiences, memories, and histories—with “space,” that same locale seen only in light of how it can be developed to serve some utilitarian purpose. The conflict between seeing places as just “places” or as “spaces” is central to issues pertaining to ecology, and through Milton’s use of place in *Paradise Lost*, we can see the interconnectedness between nature and supernatural, between the created “place” with its created caretakers and the creator, who in creating made places for specific purposes. Whether a place is used for its inherent purpose as intended by its creator or exploited for the alternative schemes and plans of mankind is a central motif in Milton’s use of place. Milton makes clear that Man has been invested by God with the purpose of managing the natural environment in which he was placed. Milton wants us to consider how Man’s uses of the places given him as “caretaker” are indicators of whether or not he seeks to align his purposes with the creator. Milton’s treatment of place, then, is not the kind of deification of nature exemplified by tree-hugging hippies but rather an outgrowth of his belief that while God created the earth for Man, He also—in a different sense—created Man for the earth, to care for it, nurture it, and even to enhance it.
Hiltner notes that “in Milton’s poetry this mystical bodily connection we share with the Earth runs as deep as our bond to Heaven rises above it” (8). When the archangel, Michael, appears to Adam and Eve in book eleven to expel them from the garden as part of their punishment for violating God’s law, Eve’s response shows the extent to which the shock of this expulsion exceeded the shock of the general curse of death, because it was immediate and involved a radical shift in place from the comforts of the Garden to a place that would in many ways oppose their efforts to subdue it:

O! unexpected stroke worse than of death!
Must I thus leave thee, Paradise? Thus leave
Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,
Fit haunt of gods, where I had hope to spend
Quiet though sad the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both?
....How shall we breath in other air
Less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits? (XI.268-73; 284-5)

“Fit haunt of gods” captures the dread she feels at realizing a certain degree of division between the earthly and heavenly realms, a cessation of frequent communion with God and with His servants, the angels. She is beginning to sense the working out of the principle of death, which is the idea of separation of body from spirit, of humanity from God, of humans from each other, and of humans from nature, as seen in the introduction of the dynamics of what Darwin called “natural selection” into nature. The profound realization of the experiential implications of the term “death” intensifies her general sadness into an intense dread. She admits to hoping that she would be able to spend the rest of her postlapsarian life in this idyllic environment, “fallen” yet
still in a certain amount of communion with heavenly beings and surrounded by a pristine natural order. Her closing question, “How shall we breathe in other air / Less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits?” echoes Milton’s concerns for the pollution of the air in his own day, which resulted from the emergence of these early proto-industries and was dependent on the destruction of whole forests for energy. While mining and agriculture are hardly new industries at this point in history, the difference with these endeavors in Milton’s era was the unprecedented magnitude of production being carried out along with the resulting exploitation.

This raises the question of intent. Certainly Milton is primarily concerned with “justifying the ways of God to Man” and therefore of depicting Man’s fall from grace. But the underlying concern for Milton is not just “the Fall of Mankind”—he certainly would have chosen a different title if that were the case. Rather, he wants his readers to see that the Fall is not exclusively about original sin and the breaking of mankind’s fellowship with God, but results also in the fall of the whole natural order from its pristine state. The loss of paradise is as much the loss of unbroken communion with God as it is the loss of the pristine environment God has made for them. The two are inseparable, and realizing that compels us to realize that the restoration of the one is also entwined with the restoration the other. In modern terms, it is a warning of humanity’s penchant for self-destruction through its impulse to “subdue” without wisdom, to exploit without compassion, with only “progress” and “growth” as the ultimate goal. Humanity has lost its pristine habitat and nature itself—as the place in which that habitat existed—has lost the qualities of that habitat. As Romans 8:22 states, “…we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (King James Version). In the case of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, neither the text of Milton nor the text of Genesis states that the Tree was inherently evil, only that Adam and Eve had been forbidden to eat of it.
There were plenty of other sources of food available, so the breaking of that prohibition was not an act of need but an act of questioning God’s boundaries regarding their relationship to the tree. Since God created all things to fulfill distinct roles in a complex natural environment, His prohibition of eating from the one tree was as much a test of their relationship of unwavering trust toward Him as it was a test of the sustainability of that natural order as a complete ecosystem. In other words, it was a test of their relationship to the place that He had made for them and in which He had placed them. The resulting death that God’s prohibition forewarned them of turns out to be not only eventual physical death but also a breakdown of their relationship with God and of their relationship with Nature. They can no longer commune directly with Him because of their sin and their caretaking would become more a matter of survival and would require much more strenuous labor as a result of changes in the natural order such as the growth of weeds that would oppose their efforts to grow food. Milton’s focus on place is not merely an arbitrary narrative element, but a well-calculated motif that connects the fate of humanity and the fate of nature: they are mutually dependent, yet often can become enemies. As Delores LaChappelle explains, “the quality of a culture depends on the depth of the relationship of the human beings to their place” [emphasis hers] (qtd. in Hiltner 12). From here, as the biblical narrative of Genesis continues, matters of place and displacement become central to the unfolding story. From the decimation of the natural order in the Fall, to the dislocation of the human race into multiple races through the judgment at the tower of Babel, to God’s calling of Abraham to leave a major city and establish a theocracy in Palestine, displacement functions as both a judgment and (in the case of Abraham) a means of the partial restoration of God’s kingdom on earth. Thus Milton leaves us not only to ponder the spiritual state of postlapsarian humanity but also humanity’s relationship to and use of Nature.
Lewis: River, Tree, Valley

Because Lewis sets his theodicy in a much later period of history than Milton, nature plays a different function than it did in Paradise Lost. Rather than only two humans living in an idyllic natural environment, Lewis’ characters live in a remote kingdom on the outskirts of the Greek Empire. Though small, the kingdom of Glome could be seen as a type for humanity in general in that its citizens live each year dependent on the success of their crops. This reflects a strong connection to nature, but in some ways it is a hostile dependence: the earth has to be worked hard by the farmers and may still refuse to cooperate, as seen in droughts and other natural calamities that thwart the effort to raise food. Lewis is dealing with the postlapsarian world and the outworkings of the curse given in Genesis, whereas in Paradise Lost those hostile natural conditions are always kept just a little in the future. For the people of Glome, the only way they know how to insure the success of their crops is to appeal to their goddess, Ungit, to give them the rain they need. If they do not receive the cooperation of nature, they assume that they have anger Ungit, who, as a result of some unclear offense, has refused to force nature’s cooperation by sending rain. The river separates them from Ungit’s temple, which causes the river to be one of three natural environments that take on a special significance in the story. The other two are the tree to which Psyche is chained as a sacrifice to the Shadowbrute, and the valley in which the god of the mountain makes his abode.

The River

The river seems to represent division, especially the division of the human from the divine; but it is also the entity that binds them together. Ungit controls the river and can withhold its resources if the people lose favor with her. The river, then, is that which links the two together: they need water; Ungit needs worshippers. Beyond that, the river is more integral to the
ecological balance of Glome than might be realized during prosperous times. Early on in the book, after Psyche has unintentionally captured the imagination and affection of the people, there is a plague accompanied by drought. Orual notes that “the Shennit was now no more than a trickle between one puddle and another amid dry mud-flats; it was the corpse of a river and stank” (40). The decline of the river is perhaps the most obvious sign of drought because of its location to the city. The death of its fish deprives the people of one possible source of food and the drought that the drying river gives notice of results in the loss of crops. Orual notes as well the loss of birds, cattle, and bees, as well as the appearance of lions who take away the remaining sheep. The drying up of the river is symbolic for the drying up of the hopes of the people as all their resources disappear in spite of their rigorous fulfillment of the demands of the priests of Ungit for sacrifices and other rituals. Later, the King is visited by the Priest, who claims that the drought is one of a series of six “woes that have come upon [them]” (45). He further explains that Ungit’s “anger never comes upon us without cause, and it never ceases without expiation. . . . We must find the Accursed. And she (or he) must die by the rite of the Great Offering” (45–46). This connection between the behavior of nature toward the people and the behavior of the people toward the gods reflects the belief of the people in the interconnectedness of nature, humanity, and the divine. The dilemma that Lewis gives us is that nature’s aberrant behavior is presumed to be directly linked to the displeasure of Ungit, so the Priest concludes that they need to make a human sacrifice. There is no recourse to rationally addressing the crisis: everything is presumed to be supernatural in origin and the river is at the heart of this tense relationship between nature, humans, and the gods.

In Chapter 20, after Orual has ascended to the throne over Glome, she institutes numerous improvements, including making the river usable for trade and building cisterns to
store water in case of drought. Such utilitarian activities not only contrast sharply with the self-serving rule of her father, but they also exhibit the rationalism and materialism that Orual has learned from the Fox. As such, they represent part of her assertion of herself as part of her struggle against the gods. By giving her a milieu in which she is in control rather than being at the mercy of the forces of nature, Lewis puts her in a situation of opportunity to act on her opposition to the gods by demonstrating through her improvements that they are not dependent upon Ungit to provide their material needs by blessing their trade and their agricultural activities. Both acts, as Doris Myers (105) notes, are ultimately steps in weakening the hold of Ungit over the people: if they can control the resources of the river, they can avert crises such as droughts and famines. In Chapter Two of Book II Orual has a vision in which she meets her father, the King, who has long since died:

“Who is Ungit?” asked the King.

“I am Ungit.” My voice came wailing out of me and I found that I was in the cool daylight and in my own chamber. So it had been what we call a dream.... Without question it was true. It was I who was Ungit. That ruinous face was mine. I was that...all-devouring womblike, yet barren, thing. Glome was a web—I the swollen spider, squat at its center, gorged with men’s stolen lives. (276)

Her identification with Ungit reflects her own realization that much of what she had done in the past—especially her insistence that Psyche disobey her husband and the adverse effects of her companionship with Bardia on Bardia’s wife—was motivated by her self-centered will, as opposed to her self-deception that she did these things for the good of the other. Realizing how much her selfish will has hurt others, she attempts to kill herself with her sword. Not having the strength to do so, she decides to drown herself in the river, which would not have been possible
except that her efforts to deepen the river have made drowning a possibility that heretofore had not existed. Thus her industry has ironically provided her a convenient means of death. The language by which she reflects on her prodigious activities of this period is very reminiscent of the musings of the writer of Ecclesiastes: “I did and I did and I did—and what does it matter what I did?” (236). No longer merely a thing that gives life, the river has become able to take life through her alteration of its natural design. She has pushed away the old episteme of religion and faith and replaced it with the materialist utilitarianism of industry, yet she has found her accomplishments to be meaningless in light of the state of her soul. But the words of the god of the mountain further clarify her vision, causing her to realize the vanity of her attempted suicide:

A voice came from beyond the river: “Do not do it.”

Instantly—I had been freezing cold till now—a wave of fire passed over me, even down to my numb feet. It was the voice of a god.... No one who hears a god’s voice takes it for a mortal’s.

“Lord, who are you?” said I.

“Do not do it,” said the god. “You cannot escape Ungit by going to the dead lands, for she is there also. Die before you die. There is no chance after.”

(270)

It is fitting, of course, that the voice comes from across the river. Rivers often symbolize death, as in the Christian metaphor of crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, used by Bunyan when Christian has to cross a river in order to enter the Celestial City. The Jordan River symbolizes the passage of death through which the faithful pass from this mortal life of suffering, sorrow, and sin into the “Promised Land” of God’s presence. What Orual had done through “development” for the civic good now has the potential of death: her efforts to act
transformatively upon this place also introduces new possibilities for self-destruction. The voice of the god, coming from the other side—the side of Ungit’s temple and the god’s home further on—speaks to her, commanding her not to do it. His command to “Die before you die” embodies the need to die to herself, to her own self-centered sense of importance, to take on the mantle of unqualified love for others rather than being obsessed about her own personal satisfaction. By attempting to escape Ungit—that is, to escape the presence of the qualities that she hated so much about Ungit in herself—she would only be bringing those qualities into the underworld with her: her suicide would have failed to bring her any peace.

The river, then, seems to embody several things: the life-giving power of nature, the difference between mortality and divinity, and even death; and by dividing the City from the Temple of Ungit, it suggests the transcendence of deity and the inevitable limits to mankind’s ability to know the divine empirically except when bidden to. Lewis’ representation of Glome reflects the state of the human condition in general. By focusing his retelling of an old myth on the perspective of the “ugly” sister rather than on Psyche, Lewis refocuses the reader’s attention on a perception of reality consistent with much modern art, which often exhibits a concern about the crises of human experience rather than the postulation of solutions to the human condition. Similarly, Lewis’ representation of the religious aspect of Glome, using the river as a symbolic line of demarcation between the mortal and the divine, provides insights on the evolution of the ancient religions, as well as the problems inherent in modern manifestations of religion in western society. In some respects, the river might be seen in a similar light as the gates of the Garden of Eve in Paradise Lost in that both separate the realm of mortal life with its apparent absence of the divine from the realm in which the gods are thought to dwell and where they can be approached.
The Tree

Another place central to *Till We Have Faces* is the tree to which Psyche is later chained as a sacrifice to the Shadowbrute. This contrasts starkly with Psyche’s initial entrance into the story, which is marked by constant references to the favor she was constantly given for her beauty and charm. The goddess-like adoration Psyche receives a little later as a result of her apparent ability to heal people dying of a rampant plague turns to anger when some of the people she “healed” end up dying. Of course, it was not her idea to give the impression that she was able to heal people; rather, that impression grew out of a result of the love the people had for her and the mistaken association between her presence and the recovery of some of the plague victims. Nonetheless, the crowd swiftly changes course from praising her as a goddess to wanting her dead. The parallel between this and the passion week of Christ are unmistakable: he too was heralded at the beginning of the week and a few days lately the masses were calling for his death. In Psyche’s case, her sacrificial death was called for by the priest, who claims that Ungit requires a human sacrifice, a virgin. Again, the Gospel parallel is striking in that the need is asserted for a pure sacrificial human victim. Psyche is the natural choice for that role, and her father sees in it the opportunity to gain the people’s favor through making such a noble sacrifice. The victim is to be brought up to a sacred tree and chained to it, and then the “Shadowbrute” will come and “devour” her. In the course of explaining all of this, the priest uses abundant language that supports the idea that this “devouring” is also a “consummation” of a marriage, and it is unclear which metaphor lies closer to the reality she is about to experience.

Behind this basic story line is the connection with the gospel story: not only the turning of the crowds against Christ, but also the motif of a sacrificial tree, the interweaving of the ideas of sacrificial death and some sort of elevation of nature, and even in the gospel there is language
about the Church—who is redeemed through Christ’s sacrifice—being the “Bride of Christ.”

Lewis uses this association of an atoning sacrifice with a sacred place in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by having Aslan slain on an ancient stone table. Of course, analogies can be pushed too far, yet the association of place with sacrificial death and redemption seems to be strong: sacred places are places in which the natural and supernatural realms meet and do “business”. Psyche is left to die, and the “Shadowbrute”—actually Cupid—falls in love with her and releases her from the chains, making her his wife. All of this is unknown to the people: once they leave Psyche, they figure that she will die. Even the priest is unsure, as his assurance of the need for a sacrifice is more an intuition than a clear directive, and the nature of the sacrifice—and of the “Shadowbrute” himself—is equally ambiguous. The confidence of the priest illustrates the subjective side of religion and pictures what is sometimes called “blind faith”—trusting in something for which one has no empirical evidence.

Later, Orual decides to ascend the Mountain and go to the Tree to find Psyche’s bones so that she can burn them out of respect. She enlists the help of Bardia, one of her father’s guards. As they ascend the mountain, Orual notes that it is “far greater yet also far further off than I expected, seen with the sun hanging a hand-breadth above its topmost crags, [it] did not look like a solid thing” (95). The otherworldly nature of the Mountain as the border of the valley of the god is evident here. While the lack of solidity that Orual imagined in the Mountain may have in part been due to the effects of the angle of the sun, there is still an unearthly quality at whose significance Lewis is hinting. Orual expects to find the remains of Psyche’s body, and is still unsure of the true nature of the god of the mountain, other than the popular idea of a “Shadowbrute.” When, hours later, they top the last foothill before the Mountain, they see “against the sky, on the saddle...a single leafless tree” (98). Arriving finally at the tree, they note
that there are no bones, jewelry, clothes, or other remains—Bardia concludes that the Shadowbrute has carried her off, which is confirmed by the ruby that they find a little later as they approach the forest.

The Tree, as described so far, serves two purposes. There is the pragmatic function: it is a convenient structure on which to tie a sacrificial victim about to be consumed by a Shadowbrute. But even at that, it is in a way an extension of the temple. Whereas the temple is more of a symbolic place of sacrifice, the Tree is where the most severe sacrifices are brought to be received directly by a god—and it is also a completely organic environment, unlike the temple. Bardia notes later, regarding the “saddle” of the ridge that the Tree rests atop, “At the Offering, even the priests come no further than the Tree. We are very near the bad part of the Mountain—I mean the holy part. Beyond the tree, it’s all gods’ country, they say” (100). So there is also a symbolic function: it marks the border between the realm of men and the realm of the gods. Bardia instinctively refers to the gods’ side of the mountain as “the bad part of the mountain,” letting slip a view of the gods that seems common: they are bad because they are unpredictable and mysterious. While this attitude may seem to be merely a result of superstition, it also exhibits a cautious blending of both reverence and genuine fear about things divine—a perspective repeatedly debunked by the Fox, with his confident rationalism, throughout the novel. Like the river, the tree divides two realms, two places: one of mortals, the other of the gods. Also, like the river, the tree is a source of sustenance, a natural resource that provides resources for numerous uses: firewood, construction, art, and possibly even food (if it bears fruits or nuts). Its singularity highlights its special function. It represents the ultimate attempt of mortals to address divinity, namely, through sacrifice. Similarly, the parallel imagery with the Cross of Christ represents an ultimate attempt to bridge the mortal and the divine, and so Lewis wants us to ponder the
contrast between seeing these places as divisions and seeing them as bridges. Like the river Shennit, which divides the City from the Temple and must be crossed by the people as they make their ritualistic supplication to deity, the tree—or rather the chaining of Psyche to the tree—functions as a sort of bridge that bring Psyche from the realm of humanity to the realm of the god, as his bride. It is the means—though to people it represents death—by which she is elevated from her mortal status to that of a god’s bride. Divisions—barriers—then, can become venues for transformation.

The Valley

Central to Lewis’ treatment of place in *Till We Have Faces* is the representation of the transcendence of the gods through the transcendence of the places in which the world of men intersects with the world of the gods. Through the temples and even the sacrificial Tree Lewis depicts humanity’s irrepressible need to approach divinity, to appeal to the supernatural for aid and favor. A temple has an image that is revered in place of the actual, observable presence of the god whereas the tree to which Psyche is chained lies on the actual border between the realms of the man and god, so Lewis seeks to bring us closer and closer to an encounter with the divine.

While Lewis and Apuleius both have an oracle consigning Psyche to a funeral marriage, the means by which they arrive at the palace is very different. Apuleius has Psyche carried to the god’s palace by Zephyr. The palace, while remote, is still essentially in the same world as the town in which the people live. Lewis, however, renders the palace invisible, essentially existing on a different plane. The god of the mountain allows Psyche to experience it, whereas he does not allow Orual and Bardia to see it when they come to the area later to find Psyche’s remains. After Psyche appears to them, Orual goes with her and they talk. Psyche hands Orual some berries, calling them “food fit for the gods,” and then Psyche cups her hands under a fountain of
water and holds her hands forward to Orual to drink, saying “‘Have you ever tasted a nobler wine...or in a fairer cup?’” (104). Orual thinks Psyche is playing, as she would do when she was younger. Later, Psyche invites Orual into the god’s palace:

“Let us go in. And don’t be afraid whatever you see or hear.”

“Is it far?” said I.

She gave me a quick, astonishing look. “Far to where?” she said.

“To the palace, to this god’s House.”

....

“Orual,” she said, beginning to tremble, “what do you mean?”

I too became frightened, though I had yet no notion of the truth. “Mean?” said I. “Where is the palace? How far have we to go to reach it?”

She gave one loud cry. Then, with white face, staring hard into my eyes, she said, “But this is it, Orual! It is here! You are standing on the stairs of the great gate.” (115-16)

Unlike Apuleius’ account, which depicts Psyche’s sisters as being astonished at the wealth Psyche now enjoys, Lewis depicts Orual as astonished at Psyche’s belief that they are at the “stairs of the great gate,” while to Orual they are simply standing in the forest. The shift from material possessions as a focus to the matter of one’s perception of reality is a startling difference between the two versions of this story and reflects the reality that Apuleius and Lewis are working from two very different realms of concern. Apuleius’ gods are in effect an extension of the mortal world whereas Lewis emphasizes the utter transcendence of the gods and their incomprehensibility to the mortal mind. In so doing, Lewis is wrestling with the concerns of a post-Christian—we might say post-theistic—era that not only has rejected the existence of God
but also argues that if he did exist, he would have to be evil for allowing evil to persist in the
world unchecked. So, while in some respects Lewis is dealing with the classic theodicy, he is
extending the scope of his theodicy to deal with the transcendent unknowableness of the divine.
Schakel notes this difference when he says the following:

> Lewis found in Apuleius a tale which, although called a myth, was not mythical—it lacks the mystery and power characteristic of true myth. Apuleius drew on folk motifs and archetypes which could have been—which even cried out to be—turned into myth, but he failed to imbue them with the imaginative and numinous qualities essential to myth. (61)

Lewis especially builds the sense of the numinous that Schakel mentions through building a
dominant impression that God cannot be known by human intellectual initiative, but only by His
revelation of Himself through various means. Lewis depicts this dependence of humans on the
initiative of the supernatural Other as the initiator of divine revelation reflects the idea that the
supernatural inevitably eludes empirical investigation. We only see God if He chooses to make
Himself visible. Thus in the task of addressing a theodicy to a post-Christian, postmodern culture
Lewis seeks to grapple not only with the classic issue of the existence of evil but also with the
matter of whether or not we should really expect God to reveal Himself in whatever ways we
desire. Theodicy is ultimately limited by the fact that one’s perception of reality is limited by the
scope of one’s experiences of reality, which in turn are constricted by the cognitive categories
one has as a result of the surrounding cultural context. In contrast to Milton’s presupposition of
the existence of God, Lewis must begin with a presupposition of the existence of clues to the
existence of God, clues that can be discerned by implication from the observation of nature. The
added fact that Cupid did give Orual the benefit of a brief glimpse of his castle demonstrates the
brief bursts of insight that can turn one’s awareness of the profound beauty of nature into an epiphany of recognition of the nature of its creator. Ultimately, theodicy bows before revelation. While both Milton and Lewis sought in their works to use rational arguments to justify God’s ways, in *Till We Have Faces* Lewis seems less concerned with establishing rational reasons to believe in God and more concerned with exposing the underlying issue behind the conflict between faith and faithlessness, which may have less to do with “intellectual reservations” than with a personal aversion to deity. Orual refers to the effect of her account of why she is so bitter against the gods as the “gods’ surgery” (254). Later, she contemplates what the Fox had often told her was the “joy of words”:

> When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you’ll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces? (294)

Through language we have the opportunity and privilege to express ourselves, and writers often talk of stories unfolding as they write rather than the trajectory of plot and representation being planned prior to the writing. Through the writing process the writer is faced with implications and nuances of meaning and intent that they had not considered before beginning the process. Orual, is saying something similar about her own process of writing out her complaint to the gods and then having actually read it out loud to them. The process of rereading her words caused her to see aspects of her complaint that she had not considered before: her objections, which had seemed so sensible during the events of her life that caused her to become jaded
against the gods, and which she sought so hard to explicate in her memoirs, now appeared for
what they were—a testimony to her own hubris. Until she realized the pretensions of her
complaint, there was no good reason for them to reveal themselves to her.

*Tao: Nature and Natural Law*

The role of nature in demonstrating what rational argumentation may fail to prove
highlights the importance of rediscovering the interconnectedness between humanity and nature.
Milton and Lewis, as Christian apologists, are working from the perspective that nature reflects
God’s glory—his “handiwork.” Yet opposition to God is founded on a sense of God’s absence,
which implies a failure to discern from nature the indicators of a divine origin for the natural
realm, and therefore a diminished awe at what one observes in nature.

*Till We Have Faces* is by turns a theodicy and a confession. Beginning as an accusation
against the gods for their unjust dealings with humanity, providing proof from the difficult
experiences of her life (especially the case of Psyche), it evolves into a theodicy as Orual realizes
that what she perceives as injustice is actually the result of her finite perspective. The gods exist
on a different plane than humans (not unlike the *eldila* of the *Space Trilogy*), and thus have
reasons for their actions that humans could not have any way to anticipate. The issue of
perception is critical both in the development of Orual’s case against the gods and in her final
realization that she was wrong. Thus the last chapter is, in effect, her confession. The role of
place in this book has a lot to say about the limits of reason. The Fox assumes a role of superior
reason in his criticism of belief in the gods as being “the lies of poets,” but the failure in his self­
confident rationalism is that he is limited by his own perception. He hardly has exhaustive
knowledge to say that the gods indeed do not exist—he bases his beliefs on observation alone.
Orual’s doubts about the gods are reinforced by the mystery of the Ungit worship and the
willingness of the people (especially the priest) to sacrifice Psyche, fueled by a variety of superstitious beliefs about Ungit. The opposition of the temple to the city (both being at equal distances from opposite sides of the river) in some respects embodies the dichotomy between human experience and the supernatural. Yet that dichotomy is resolved by the god’s brief revelation of himself to Orual, which she nonetheless refuses to accept as proof that she was wrong. The association of untamed nature with the god of the mountain is seen in Psyche’s being chained to a ceremonial tree at the border of the valley of the god. Likewise, the castle in which he lives is invisible to all but those to whom he reveals it. Thus, when Psyche brings Orual there, Orual refuses to see the water as wine or the untamed forest as a “castle”—she thinks Psyche is delusional. However, in reality, Psyche’s perception has been elevated beyond the limits of her spatial norm—the god has enabled her to see things at his plane of existence. While Orual’s inability to see things the way Psyche does is attributable to the fact that the god had not yet enabled her to see things that way, it may ultimately be attributable to her internal resistance to the idea—her fear of the Shadowbrute, her jealousy for Psyche, and even her jaded attitude toward the gods. Rather than seeing the beauty of nature as a clue to the higher beauty of the divine, she insists on seeing it only for what she thinks it is. This refusal to follow the hints to the existence of the divine in the natural world is central to her opposition to the gods that increases as the story unfolds.

Seeing the natural world as a glimpse of the divine is a central concern in Lewis’ treatment of place throughout the novel. Orual’s utilitarian view of nature especially comes out in her efforts to reshape nature when she is Queen, for example, in the enhancements made to the river Shennit, mentioned previously. This utilitarianism is an attempt to shield herself from any suggestions of any connection between the natural and the supernatural. Yet if the natural world
has a supernatural origin, it makes sense to expect the natural to reflect the supernatural in some way. At the end of the novel, Lewis develops his idea of Tao—discussed in his nonfiction prose work, *The Abolition of Man*—as this realization of the existence of the supernatural by analogy to characteristics of the natural world that suggest a divine origin. In *The Abolition of Man* Lewis applies the idea of nature as an analogue to the supernatural specifically in his discussion of the fixed knowability of human nature, seen, for example, in the presence of conscience and other higher values that seem to contradict a purely materialistic explanation of human origins. Such qualities of humanity provide the link between pre-Christian religions (not just that of the Old Testament but also all others) and Christianity, demonstrating St. Paul’s idea of “natural law” (Lewis’ “Tao”) in Romans 1:18-20, which says:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.

The biblical idea of being able to know about God through nature especially applies to the recognition that human nature is also fixed and knowable, as a result of man’s being created in God’s image. Lewis develops this theme under the term Tao (Chinese for “way”), suggesting that the relative consistency of human ideas of morality reflect the real presence of conscience in the human psyche. As developed in the *Tao Te Ching*, Tao is wisdom that can be drawn directly through observation of nature and through the emulation of its ways. A recurring theme in the *Tao Te Ching* is the contrast between the ways of nature and the ways that humans are expected
to do things (e.g. governing a nation, fighting battles, dealing with interpersonal conflicts), which seem to involve the innovations of society without consideration of the ways of nature. This belief that wisdom can be more effectively discovered through observation of nature rather than the rational analysis of the scientist suggests that civilization—for all it has accomplished—is not the locus of truth that many people conceive of it as. The idea of *Tao* echoes similar thinking in other wisdom literature, such as the Hebrew book of *Proverbs*, which commands its readers to “go to the ant” and learn certain values from their work ethic. When values are crafted through this “way,” they are being built on patterns in nature that reflect and suggest moral principles that are transcendent in nature—that is, they transcend arbitrariness and seem to be a part of the design of nature.

By critiquing modern, relativistic approaches to morality, ethics, and knowledge from the vantage point of *Tao*, Lewis, in *Abolition*, strives to reestablish the idea of a static origin for values—an origin that has some predictability and consistency. When, for example, in contrast to the idea that modern, progressive society is crafting new value systems based on modern progress—that is, values never before employed by humanity that because their novelty obviates traditional values—he posits that “the human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in” (56–57), he is attacking the evolutionary model behind the modernist assertion of emerging values that gain their identity because of their rejection of traditional values. Later, he notes that “if we are to have values at all we must accept the ultimate platitudes of Practical Reason as having absolute validity: that any attempt, having become skeptical about these, to reintroduce value lower down on some supposedly more ‘realistic’ basis is doomed” (61). While he does not delve into whether the *Tao* has a supernatural or a natural origin, he acknowledges
that the only consistent way to legitimize a total rejection of this Tao—which we could think of as a largely self-evident system of values—would be to reject values altogether. The end of a rejection of a static, transcendent (whether we see it as supernatural or not) source for values is the rejection of values altogether, the rejection of any values other than the self-interested psychological motivations that empower the animal kingdom. Thus humanity, far exceeding animals in intelligence and social complexity, reverts to the lesser species of nature: the rejection of transcendent values is no less than the rejection of our common humanity.

Chapter 2: Civilization as Response

*Milton: Lucifer’s infernal empire*

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton reflects a concern for nature similar to that reflected in Lewis’ use of the idea of Tao. This concern was not just a subjective, hazy idea, but was a direct reaction against some of the ecological abuses of Milton’s day. We have previously looked at Hiltner’s discussion of some of the environmental abuses of rampant deforestation in Milton’s era, which resulted from both the need to provid materials for house and ship building and to expand farm land at a dramatic pace. The push to expand farmland was motivated largely by a combination of the increasing population density resulting from urbanization and the desire of agriculturalists to increase their profit margin through the introduction of non-indigenous plants that could be easily grown on large plots of land, which required the appropriation of wetlands and forests to create those huge fields, both for farming and for grazing. Increases in mining for both metals and coal was also a large factor in the disruption of the natural order (2). While the relatively primitive technologies used in that era differ somewhat from some of the more powerful technologies employed in the last century or so (e.g. the use of powerful explosives in mining operations), the impact of these proto-industries on the environment was an issue even then.
The connection between urbanization and environmental exploitation was a problem long before Milton suggests the diabolic origins of environmental exploitation in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*. For example, Pliny the Elder (23 AD – 79 AD), in his *Natural History*, vehemently opposes underground mining. He describes the various benefits of mining—precious metals, "gems and pigments," and iron—and notes the motives for obtaining these materials from the earth as, respectively, the acquisition of wealth (suggesting greed), the adornment of body and home (suggesting vanity), and the acquisition of materials to build weapons for war (suggesting a lust for power and dominance). Then he notes:

We trace out all the veins of the earth, and yet, living upon it, undermined as it is beneath our feet, are astonished that it should occasionally cleave asunder or tremble: as though, forsooth, these signs could be any other than expressions of the indignation felt by our sacred parent! We penetrate into her entrails, and seek for treasures in the abodes even of the Manes, as though each spot we tread upon were not sufficiently bounteous and fertile for us! (XXXII.1)

Pliny refers to the earth as "our sacred parent" and mining as "penetrat[ion] into her entrails," suggesting comparison with rape. He also notes discontentment with what we already have been given by nature—"each spot we tread upon." Milton reflects similar sentiments as he describes Satan and his followers building a palace in Hell:

...By him first

Men also, and by his suggestion taught,

Ransacked the center and with impious hands

Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth

For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Opened into the hill a spacious wound
And digged out ribs of gold... (1.684-90)

Like Pliny, he speaks of earth as humanity's mother and identifies discontentment and greed as the fundamental vice in operation when he refers to the object of mining: "treasures better hid."

Milton takes the matter a little further than Pliny by linking these types of activities with Satan as the initial influence. Note also how Milton says that they "ransacked" the earth, equating mining for minerals and jewels with an act of violent theft using language often applied to pirates who ransack or plunder. Likewise, the word "impious," while referring directly to the (literally) impious hands of the devils who had rebelled against God, also imagines those who abuse the earth through industrial activity as being impious, that is, as blaspheming God through their abuse of nature. The phrase "Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth" also vividly casts industrial activity in a violent, almost sexual (if we equate "bowels" with "womb") sense, like rape. Seen this way, these lines take on a new degree of import as applied to Milton's concerns for environmental abuse.

Milton's sense of the relationship between character and place also reflects the centrality of place in Paradise Lost. Hiltner notes:

Milton's much-noted rejection of Cartesian mind-body (and accordingly mind-place) dualism has profound environmental import. Those ambivalent to place in Paradise Lost are always devils. Either the epic's devils see place as objectively that which can be consumed and developed, or like Satan, boast they have attained the subjectivist's dream of being a mind apart from both body and place - that "mind is its own place." In contrast, Adam and Eve are found to be thoroughly rooted in the Earth; understanding their garden place (in particular the
Bower) not as dead re-sources to be utilized, but rather as the very source which makes life in the Garden possible. (4)

Milton exhibits a firmly-held conviction in the intimate interconnectedness between Man and his environment, an interconnectedness easily forgotten in today’s urban and sub-urban habitats. This contrasts starkly with the other-worldliness seen in “certain medieval Christian thinkers [who] considered human beings as merely visitors here on earth, as essentially ‘spirits without a place’” (4).

Lewis: the City of Glome

While Lewis’ city of Glome depicts the separateness that divides mortal from immortal, in Orual we see the eventual uniting of the two. It is as she approaches death that her accusation against the gods is addressed, and this association between death and a settling of matters with the gods suggests that death itself can be a reuniting of things that were never intended to be separated. But prior to that, we are left with the city of Glome and the significance of its layout. Lewis (through Orual) describes the layout of Glome in succinct terms: “The city is built about as far back from the river as a woman can walk in the third of an hour” (4). Myers (14) estimates this as about a mile. Orual explains that the distance from the river takes into account the river’s annual flooding of its banks in the spring. Likewise, the temple of Ungit, the local deity, who corresponds somewhat to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, lies about the same distance from the river on the opposite side. Myers is correct in noting that “The geography of Orual’s small world is almost a diagram of her conflict with the gods” (Myers 14), as the symmetrical dichotomy displayed by this description suggests the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural as well as between faith and reason. Looked at upon a map that one might construct loosely from this description, they appear like numbers on opposite sides of a fraction or ratio, the world of
humans in contrast to the realm of the gods. Considering that Orual situates the city to the left of the river as a traveler approaches from the southeast, the suggestion is that the river itself travels from southeast to northwest. A line drawn from Glome through the temple of Ungit, and beyond the temple, brings one to the Grey Mountains, wherein the people of Glome believe the son of Ungit lives. They imagine him as a “beast” and refer to him as the “Shadowbrute.” This assumption about his nature as a beast is perhaps an extension of the fierce, aggressive, and ominous sense of Ungit that the people have from the austerity of the temple and the image of her. The way that the river divides Glome symmetrically also suggests that Ungit is as much in control of the life-giving potential of the river (and, by extension, of all life-giving forces, as is common in fertility religions), as the people of Glome are dependent upon it. Yet the aspect of interdependence is countered by a severe sense of separation. Glome represents, in microcosm, the feeling of the absence of God at the heart of all objections to the supernatural, whose questioning is in many respects a contemplation of the unresolved mystery of human existence, which exhibits hints of a divine origin yet fails to comprehend the nature of that relationship.
Chapter 3: The Supernatural as Subtext

Milton's representation of Satan and God through place

Satan is in some respects the chief character in *Paradise Lost* in that he is often seen as the most intricately represented character. Milton also seems to depict him in the mode of epic hero, which has given rise to an ongoing and largely unresolvable debate over whether or not he is the “hero” of the story. An example of this depiction of Satan can be seen when, after his exile from Heaven, Satan rallies his:

...What though the field be lost?
All is not lost: th’ unconquerable will
And study of revenge, immortal hate
And courage never to submit or yield—
...
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war
Irreconcilable to our grand Foe
Who now triumphs and in th’ excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heav’n. (105-108; 120-124)

Phrases like “All is not lost,” “courage never to submit or yield,” and “the tyranny of Heav’n” demonstrate that Satan is—like a true epic hero—trying to strengthen the resolve of his followers in their presumably noble (but actually ignoble) cause. Whether the government of Heaven is truly a “tyranny” is largely a matter whose resolution depends on the worldview of those debating it—a Christian critic like Lewis would acknowledge that this is simply part of Satan’s deception of his followers into believing that they are pursuing a worthwhile cause, that they
have the “right” to resist Heaven’s authority. Other critics (often referred to as “Satanists”) would object that Milton’s mode of representation is definitely that of the epic hero. A large part of this matter can be resolved when we consider the dramatic shift in worldview between Milton’s day and ours, as Lewis notes: “Men still believed that there really was such a person as Satan, and that he was a liar. The poet did not foresee that his work would one day meet the disarming simplicity of critics who take for gospel things said by the father of falsehood in public speeches to his troops” (Preface 100). While Milton may give Satan the language of an epic hero, he expects it to be understood by the reader that there is a certain pervasive irony in this because there is no way—even in Satan’s own admission—that he will ever succeed. It is a cause doomed from the beginning. Later, when Satan returns to Hell after successfully tempting Eve to sin and to lead Adam into sin, his followers respond to him with the hissing of disapproval—he may have won that battle, but God, their eternal Enemy, has already responded with a better plan to defeat the damage they caused. This contrasts significantly with Odysseus’ return at the end of the Odyssey, in which he executes vengeance on his enemies. The misperception that Satan is in any true sense “heroic” is a result of the fact that, as Lewis says, “of the major characters whom Milton attempted he is incomparably the easiest to draw.” Lewis further explains that this is so because “to project ourselves into a wicked character, we have only to stop doing something….The Satan in Milton enables him to draw the character well just as the Satan in us enables us to receive it” (101). The doctrine of original sin posits that all descendants of Adam and Eve have a proclivity toward sin and this universal human trait makes it much easier for Milton to depict Satan engagingly well than, for example, God.

Milton’s God is another subject of heated debate. While it is common to acknowledge the weaknesses in this depiction—and both critics who are favorable to the idea of God being good,
like C. S. Lewis, and ones who believe (as William Blake did) that the God of the Bible (especially the Old Testament) is evil, like William Empson, agree at least that Milton's depiction of God the Father is deficient—the greater disagreement lies in defining the cause of the deficiency. Northrup Frye notes that a large part of the error in our assessment of Milton's God is in interpreting *Paradise Lost* as a linear progression of causation beginning with God Himself. A significant area of contention is that in Book Three God argues that Adam bears the guilt for his fall, even though God himself foreknew it. Frye's argument in support of a non-fatalistic view of the cycle of events in *Paradise Lost* is informed by his belief in the "principle that liberty, for Milton, arrests the current of habit and of the cause-effect mechanism" (102). Thus, for Milton, the doctrine of predestination—developed to staggering degrees by theologians like John Calvin and his successors, who asserted an irrefutable cause-effect relationship between foreknowledge and foreordination—yielded to the interplay of free-will. In the same way that God's inability to sin (because it is against His nature) does not obviate His omnipotence, so His creation of Adam and Eve with a free will while He foreknew that they would fall into sin does not obviate Adam and Eve's responsibility and does not make God culpable in their fall. Frye explains further that "if we think of human life in time as a horizontal line, the Father is telling us that he is not to be found at the beginning of that line, as a First Cause from which everything inevitably proceeds. He is above the line, travelling along with the human life like the moon on a journey." Frye seems to be asserting a certain amount of transcendence of causation to Milton's God and later compares Milton's God to the depiction of God in Job. In both texts, the issue is not linear causation as the explanation of the origins of the crisis so much as, to borrow Frye's words, "how he [Job—and by implication Adam] can get out of it that is important, and this latter involves a direct and vertical relation between God and Job
[or Adam] in the present tense” (103). In the same way that Milton’s God seems bombastic and tyrannical to many, so also Job’s God—the God of the Old Testament—seems to those same people, and the crucial reason for that interpretation is a resistance to the idea of complete sovereignty in God as the creator of the universe. God’s role as creator implies His existence outside the space-time boundaries of that universe, so Frye is right to identify chronological perspective as a critical factor in our interpretation of both Milton’s God and the God of the Bible. Lewis also sanely comments that “Many of those who say they dislike Milton’s God only mean that they dislike God: infinite sovereignty de jure, combined with infinite power de facto, and love which, by its very nature, includes wrath also—it is not only in poetry that these things offend” (Preface 130). William Empson confirms this by his admission that “…the revival of Christianity among literary critics [he writes in 1961] has rather taken me by surprise….I think the traditional God of Christianity very wicked, and have done since I was at school, where nearly all my little playmates thought the same” (9). Of course this opposition to God “since…school” was not founded upon an expansive study of the nature of God and the controversy over His goodness, but most likely was formed quite naturally out of an inadequate understanding of the complex nature of God’s dealings with humanity as depicted in the Old Testament. 2 Both Frye and Lewis put the issue in perspective and argue for a reassessment of our expectations of God.

Perspectives such as Empson’s (and William Blake’s, for that matter) demonstrate too great an unwillingness to understand God’s ways through the lens of an understanding of His nature. But this misreading of Milton’s God is not helped by Milton’s presentation of Him. Frye suggests a favorable comparison between God’s speech in Book Three and Zeus’ speech at the

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2 Such a detailed study is out of the full range of this section, but is a central concern of this chapter in that Milton and Lewis are both trying to “justify the ways of God” to their audience.
beginning of the Odyssey (446), and Lewis notes that “Milton has failed to disentangle himself from the bad tradition (seen at its worst in Vida’s Christiad and at its best in the Gerusalemme Liberata) of trying to make Heaven too much like Olympus. It is these anthropomorphic details that make the Divine laughter sound merely spiteful and the Divine rebukes querulous; that they need not have sounded like this, Dante and the Hebrew prophets show” (Preface 131). God seems—if anything—far too attainable in terms of the language he uses and the way his decisions are stated. He sounds like a supreme ruler or statesman, and his angels sound much like assistants. In contrast to this, Lewis’ depiction of the gods is in every way and at every point totally different. If Milton makes supernatural beings too human, Lewis tries to make them totally other than that.

Lewis: Temples, final vision—representations of the gods through place

Temples, as sacred places, represent the places at which humans approach the divine and could be seen as a representation of all that humans cannot know according to purely empirical, scientific means. They are what Man does not know, but can only conceive of through intuition, faith, superstition, and imagination. In Till We Have Faces, Lewis depicts these ideas through his depiction of four sacred places. First is the temple of Ungit, as described by Orual early in the book...

Ungit

Orual describes it as being built of “great, ancient stones, twice the height of a man and four times the thickness of a man, set upright in an egg-shaped ring” (94). This description initially recalls the image of Stonehenge, and while it is different from Stonehenge in shape, the presence of a thatched roof, and the fact that it is in constant use as a temple (whereas many believe Stonehenge to have been more of an astronomical and burial structure), it shares with
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Stonehenge the quality of mystery, the numinous aura of the incomprehensible. Orual notes that the priests claim that its egg-like shape (an effect intensified by the domed, thatched roof) "resembles, or (in a mystery) that it really is, the egg from which the whole world was hatched or the womb in which the whole world once lay" (94). Orual’s description of the shape of the temple as being "like a huge slug lying on the field" (94) illustrates Orual’s materialistic view of things. While she acknowledges the priests’ perspective on these things, she finds the mystical level of meaning they attach to everything to be somewhat difficult to accept. Temples, all the same, are places where people go to meet with, consult, give obeisance to, and appease the gods. There are, in a sense, portals between the world of men and the world of the gods and it is this fact that causes Orual to approach the temple at every point with a fair amount of mingled respect and fear, and at times some repugnance. It represents all that mortal minds struggle to understand, but cannot fully because they are things outside normal experience. It is a place of shadows and mysteries. The description of Ungit perpetuates this atmosphere of darkness. Ungit is described as shapeless, faceless, covered by dried blood, and occupying a dark room. Everything about this image communicates stark otherness. There is no doubt that Ungit is unlike humans, and that her care of them is not out of love but out of distraction.

Arnom’s new Ungit

After the passing of the Old Priest, who in Orual’s mind embodied everything frightful about the worship of Ungit, his assistant, Arnom, becomes the Priest. The King has also died, leaving Orual in the throne. Orual reflects on her new role: “The duty of queenship that irked me most was going often to the house of Ungit and sacrificing. It would have been worse but that Ungit herself (or my pride made me think so) was not weakened” (233–234). Of course, from childhood, the image of the faceless Ungit covered with dried blood from the sacrifices, sitting
cold and silent in the darkened temple, was a frightful image. The confidence of the Old Priest in the reality of Ungit’s power and the debt owed her according to their traditions was, however, changing in the hands of this new priest. Orual notes that “Arnom was learning from the Fox to talk like a philosopher about the gods.” Considering that the attitude of the Fox toward the gods was one of respectful agnosticism (he had often said that the gods were the lies of poets, and that you really could not be sure of their existence nor of their ways), encouraged by skeptical philosophies popular in the culture of his homeland, it is no surprise that Arnom begins to change the temple and everything in it.

The first change Orual notices is that he has “opened new windows in the walls,” allowing light in to eliminate the darkness that had prevailed so long. It is hard not to see this as the intellectual light of Reason being allowed in where once the mystery of what the Fox would call superstition had prevailed. But is this light a remedy for Orual’s childhood dread of Ungit? Is the elimination of the mystery a solution to her unanswered questions about the gods? The light of Reason certainly sets the image of Ungit in an odd relief—it’s physical characteristics are now revealed as being just a huge, dirty rock. The interplay of shadow and dim light has been replaced with the bright light of the sun, with the superior wisdom of seeing things as they are.

The second change involves the actual image of Ungit, the huge rock upon which the blood of the sacrificial victims had always been poured and allowed to dry, forming a thick layer of intersecting brown rivulets of dried blood. Arnom has begun the practice of “scouring away the blood after each slaughter and sprinkling fresh water; it smelled cleaner and less holy” (234). The blood of the sacrifices was now being treated as filth to be washed off, rather than as something sacred, holy. The sanitizing of religion begins to make religion less real, less relevant, and little more than a social custom, a symbol devoid of any reality.
The third (and greatest, Orual tells us) change is Arnom's proposal "to set up an image of her—a woman-shaped image in the Greek fashion—in front of the old shapeless stone" (234). As with the other changes, this is something that Arnom takes initiative to do, in flagrant opposition to the traditions of the people. Through the Fox's influence he is acknowledging the more philosophically enlightened way of the Greeks to replace gradually the ways of the people, the worship of Ungit through the obeisance they made to the shapeless, sexless, blood-besotted stone that represented her. By introducing a specifically female image, Arnom is introducing the idea of a goddess who is more like them, more human in form, yet still divine in power. She is becoming less an ominous enigma and more a work of art imbued with symbolic—but perhaps not literal—meaning and power. But this change in images is not just a softening of Ungit's presence—Orual sees it is a degrading of Ungit's supernatural essence. She finds such a human depiction of Ungit to be unsettling and somehow wrong, a reaction common to those who struggle with the idea of the Incarnation out of a view that the divine and the human should always remain severely and completely separate. Perhaps Orual refuses to accept the idea of the divine seeking communion with the human because her experiences with the gods have also been in the context of a transcendent apartness.

While the alterations of the temple worship of Ungit toward a more Greek-influenced depiction loses the angst of the primitive Ungit, it suggests a move toward the union of the divine and the mortal. By giving Ungit a human face, she could, in theory, be approached like a revered deity rather than the equivalent of a monster. Notwithstanding the reaction of many of the people to this change in form by insisting on the older worship of the faceless Ungit, the transition prefigures a merging of the transcendent nature of the Divine with a more knowable form. Likewise, Psyche finds that rather than the son of Ungit being a beast, as the people of Glome
had come to think of him, he is actually a lover. Rather than literally consuming her as food, he takes her to be his bride. By assuming the role of lover rather than Shadowbrute, the god of the mountain prefigures the incarnation of Christ as lover along the lines of allegorical interpretations of Song of Solomon, for instance. The elevation of Psyche to a godlike status as seen in the temple that Orual later comes across also anticipates the convergence of divine and human, this time with a human becoming a goddess. In working through her memories of these events, Orual is forced to confront inherent inconsistencies behind her case against the gods.

Istra

After the fox has died, Orual finds her kingdom in a state of peace and stability, and so decides to travel outside her own kingdom to see other lands. While passing through the land of Essur, they decide to visit a hot spring. There while her people are setting up camp, Orual hears the ringing of bells from a temple and decides to go visit the temple out of curiosity. There she finds a structure “no bigger than a peasant’s hut but built of pure white stone, with fluted pillars in the Greek style. Behind it I could see a small thatched house where, no doubt, the priest lived” (240). Again, the theme of the influence of Greek styles of religious practice emerges as a signal of some sort of deterioration of an aspect of religion. Arnom’s Hellenized depiction of Ungit undercut the mysterious and transcendent nature of the gods represented by the older image of Ungit, and here the very temple, built as a miniature in the grand style of the Greek temples, reflects the encroachment of reason and “civilization” over and against the numinous sense of the divine reflected in Ungit. A common theme with both Arnom’s image and this temple is the growing presence of what might truly be considered “art” as part of worship. This brings the focus of the worship away from the god and onto the creative work of those who have built the
temple or the image. Again, Lewis is depicting the undercutting of a sense of dependence on and fealty to divinity through both Arnom’s changes to the temple of Ungit and this temple.

The inside of the temple contained “a far deeper silence and it was very cool. It was clean and empty and there were none of the common temple smells about it, so that I thought it must belong to one of those small peaceful gods who are content with flowers and fruit for sacrifice” (240). As with Arnom’s changes to Ungit’s temple, this temple is clean and does not smell of sacrifices. It is another image of the sanitization of the offensive aspects of religion, and the only thing left in this clean empty temple is the image itself on an altar. Orual describes the image as being “of a woman about two feet high carved in wood, not badly done and all the fairer (to my mind) because there was no painting or gilding but only the natural pale colour of the wood. The thing that marred it was a band or scarf of some black stuff tied round the head of the image so as to hide its face—much like my own veil, but that mine was white” (241). Several of these descriptors bear consideration. Unlike the original Ungit, which is a huge uncut stone, or the Hellenized Ungit, which is carved stone, this image is carved of wood, which Orual prefers to the painted effects of Arnom’s Ungit (of which the gilded nature is clearly fake). Also, being made from wood suggests an organic quality, a connection with nature, that is lacking in the lifelessness of stone. The veil over the face of the idol, however, seems a bit mysterious. As the priest engages Orual in conversation about the image, he explains the “sacred story” (as he calls it) represented by the image, and proceeds to tell the story of Orual and her sisters, but from Psyche’s perspective. The discerning reader will notice that he is actually recounting Apuleius’ version of the story: Lewis wants us to understand this—if we even make the connection—as the distorted version of Psyche’s story, and therefore to see his retelling from Orual’s perspective as the more accurate one. The parts of the story that Lewis actually includes in the priest’s narrative
highlight the most important points at which Lewis differs significantly in his retelling from Apuleius, and they are worth our consideration.

First, there is the reason for Cupid not allowing psyche to see him. Apuleius (and the priest in Lewis’ story) states that it was because Talapal/Ungit/Venus hated Psyche above all women because of her beauty. In Lewis’ version, it seems more as if the god of the mountain is maintaining a stance of mystery and elusiveness in keeping with his divine qualities. This highlights the most fundamental difference between Apuleius and Lewis: Apuleius depicts the gods as appearing frequently as humans and as having much the same character flaws as humans—they are, in effect, super-humans. Lewis reasserts the qualitative difference between the divine and the mortal: while man may be created in the divine image, divinity should not be recreated in man’s image. Hence the motive for the prohibition must, in Lewis’ retelling (and to be consistent with his theology), likewise be transcendent in some way. If we keep in mind that Lewis is writing a sort of indirect theodicy, the consistency of retelling the story thus becomes all the more clear.

Second, Apuleius has the sisters seeing the palace just like any other building. His view of the relationship between man and the divine is one of little difference, in which gods and men inhabit the same plane of existence but just dwell in different locales—men in the valley, the gods on the mountain, for instance. Thus whereas Apuleius has people transported to his castle through the assistance of the wind, Lewis has the castle mysteriously hidden except to those whom the god has enabled to see it. Psyche sees it readily but Orual just sees trees everywhere. The ability to see it seems also to be influenced by the degree of belief on the part of the individual. Psyche’s constant awareness of it is because of her complete acceptance of the divine
qualities of this realm to which she has been brought. She is dwelling with a god and is therefore sharing in the supernatural qualities of the place; but to Orual it is hidden.

Third, Apuleius depicts Psyche’s two sisters as petty conspirators to kill Psyche and somehow get her newly-gotten wealth. They are shallow and deceptive, and desperately driven by the jealousy of Psyche’s wealth. Apuleius also has Psyche plot to deceive both of the sisters to their own destruction, which of course she is successful at doing. Lewis maintains the shallowness of the sisters especially in the character of Redival, but recasts Orual as motivated by her obsessive love for Psyche, and thus of a desire to control her. Both Lewis and Apuleius are reflecting concerns more dear to their respective cultures and time periods. Apuleius’ focus on scheming and jealousy over wealth, answered by equally cunning trickery to their defeat, is certainly consistent with the classical emphasis on these types of values. Lewis’ adjustment of motive to obsessive love is more akin to his own concerns as a Christian apologist and to what he felt were central to the moral and spiritual problems of a post-Christian society. Orual’s path through suffering to self-awareness, which is essentially a realization of her own hubris, is a path that Lewis himself traveled *en route* from compulsory religious identification in childhood, to individualistic exploration of other worldviews in search of one that would truly satisfy his longings, to his heartfelt embrace of the gospel some years later.

The Priests

David Landrum discusses how the three priests mentioned in the novel represent three aspects of religion that are only effectively harmonized in Christianity. The first aspect is the Ritualistic aspect, represented by the Old Priest of Ungit; this aspect emphasizes mystery, the sense of the numinous. The second aspect is the Rationalistic aspect, represented by Arnom, who replaces the Old Priest and becomes heavily influenced by the rationalistic philosophy of the
Fox; this aspect emphasizes the development of a code of ethics and morality extracted through reason from the sacred stories and teachings of a religion. The third aspect is the Domesticative aspect, represented by the Priest of Istra/Psyche; this aspect emphasizes childlike faith: believing in the sacred story of one’s religion without critical assessment (65-66). Landrum’s analysis is invaluable in understanding the relevance of these three priests to Lewis’ apologetic concerns.

The subtlety of Lewis’ representation here is striking, but it should be mentioned that Lewis may also be intending the three priests to represent three stages in God’s preparation of these pre-Christian pagan’s for the gospel that would come through the Incarnation of Christ. This chronological perspective complements Landrum’s analysis while also suggesting a double purpose in Lewis’ representation of the three priests. Likewise, the progression from the mystery of Ungit to the more human-like image brought in by Arnom, to the Istra myth of the third priest reflects Lewis’ belief in the function of the Gospel as the fulfillment of the heretofore unfulfilled expectations of all religions up to the point of the Incarnation.

A clear corollary of this discussion of the religion of Glome is that the gods are “untame”: they are outside the boundaries of human understanding and expectation and are not accountable to humans, thus they work in ways that confound the expectations of mortal minds. By emphasizing the mystery and unpredictability of the gods, Lewis reflects a common theme that appears throughout his fiction: the numinous quality of the Divine. For example, Aslan, a picture of Christ, is said not to be a tame lion; likewise, the eldila of the *Space Trilogy* are virtually imperceptible to humans, suggesting the mystery that surrounds them. Similarly, the Landlord in *Pilgrim’s Regress* (a clear reference to the Divine) is likewise corporally absent from the picture.
Lewis’ depiction of the place in which the religion of Glome is centered highlights the high value of the sense of the numinous in the old animistic/polytheistic religions that predated Christianity. The religion of Ungit (a regional derivative of the cult of Aphrodite, Ungit’s Greek name) is most often represented with reference to the faceless idol, the prevalence of blood, the role (if necessary) of human sacrifice, darkness, and a belief in an intimate connection between the relationship of the people to Ungit and their prosperity and health. These elements suggest the transcendence of deity, substitutionary atonement, mystery, and a mortal-divine continuum in the universe. Transcendence both affirms the authority of the gods and causes tension on the part of the skeptic, represented by Orual. The description of the god of the mountain and the realm in which he lives elaborates further Lewis’ concern for an understanding of the importance of the numinous and transcendent nature of the Divine.
Conclusion

*Till We Have Faces* is not just a creative retelling of a classic myth. Rather, in it Lewis subtly adapts the story to function as a postmodern theodicy that seeks to resolve objections to the belief in the supernatural in general, founded on his conviction that modern western thought needed first to be brought back to a general belief in deity before any thoroughly and overtly Christian apologetic would be effective. This conviction is grounded in the rejection of what he termed the *Tao*, which refers to timeless principles that he believed have always—until modern times—governed human society in some way or another, both in the realm of religious faith and the realm of ethics and morality. This principle seems to be a variation of the idea of general revelation discussed by St. Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, which sees in *place* of Nature an analogy to the Divine. Like Milton, he is attempting a theodicy—he wants to oppose the arguments typically advanced against the existence of God. But, unlike Milton, his approach to doing this relies on first establishing grounds for the *existence* of the divine, and only then proceeds to argue for God's sovereignty as the creator. Also, whereas Milton starts with the presupposition of the authority of the Bible, Lewis only *ends* with the idea of divine sovereignty, which he contrasts with the hubris of Orual. Her accusation—once finally delivered—was its own answer. Some similarity of concern, however, is apparent in how Milton and Lewis use the representation of place to advance their theodicies. First, both believed in the idea of the inseparable interconnectedness of humanity with its natural environment. This is reinforced by the principle of *Tao*, further expounded in Romans 1, that postulates the locus of wisdom and (according to Romans) of proof for belief in God, as being nature itself. Second, Milton and Lewis both see the problems created by civilization's tendency to exploit nature rather than maintain harmony with it. Milton uses the imagery of industry and machinery to
describe the empire-building of Satan’s followers in Hell and to suggest its contradiction to God’s intentions. Lewis depicts Orual’s later rule over the kingdom of Glome as one of “progress”—yet at every point progress provides both an increased potential for self-destruction and the opportunity to declare her independence from the gods. It is then no longer truly “progress” so much as a regression into chaos. This echoes Lewis’ cautionary criticism of scientific progress seen especially in his Space Trilogy. Third, Milton and Lewis differ significantly in their representations of deity, seen especially in Milton’s representation of God as overly present in a way that seems to diminish his absolute qualities, contrasted with Lewis’ emphasis on the transcendent otherness of the divine. Whereas Milton’s depiction of God primarily suggests our obedience to God, Lewis’ depiction of the gods through his representation of the temples reveals three elements of our perception of the divine that together paint a far more complex view of the divine than what Milton gave. This more complex view is one that demands not only obedience, but wonder.
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