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Perspectives in Strength: Four Women in the Writings of Lewis and Tolkien

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INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume I

A Collection of Essays Presented at

The First

FRANCES WHITE EWBANK COLLOQUIUM

ON

C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

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**Perspectives in Strength:
Four Women in the Writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien**

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Four Women in the Writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien**
by Angela Fortner and Peter Marshall

The female figure in mythic literature has often been a mirror of current male thought. In ancient Greece, the truly heroic women were the clever but passive types like Penelope. If you recall, she sat at home for twenty years waiting the return of her adventuring husband, Ulysses. Aggressive women were not to be trusted, and were often vilified. Remember Medea? She who brought great glory to her husband, Jason, was eventually left on the wayside, and her only recourse was infanticide, and black magic. Most often this literature was written by males who seem to have struggled with the Madonna/whore complex. That is, their female characters had to be sweet and innocent while at the same time acting out male fantasies and fears (black magic, infidelity, infanticide etc.) While this characterization of women was common in most literary genres it seems especially pronounced in mythopoetic literature. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien presented an important break with the past as they presented women who were central to the plot, coherent in character, and above all,

believable. These women were often presented in positions of power equal to that of comparable men characters and did not seem to suffer from the dualism that many male authors struggled with.

Tolkien begins his world in traditional mythopoetic style with opposing and semi-equal groups of gods and goddesses (the Valar, or the Holy Ones). These were set to earth by Eru, the One, or Iluvatar (Father of All). Iluvatar also created both elves and men. The elves were brought by the Ainur to live with them on their enchanted isle, Varda, across the western seas. However, evil had already entered the story in the form of Melkor (literally "He who arises in might"), who was later known as Morgoth. Morgoth had rebelled against Eru and desired to corrupt the elves. Accordingly, he tempted them to rebel against Ainur and return to Middle Earth where he could destroy them.

However, Morgoth's lust for the beauty of the silmarills controlled him more than his desire to control the elves. As he stole the silmarills and murdered Franor, the king of the

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Noldor, he turned the hearts of the elves forever against him. The sons of Feanor swore to let nothing and no one stand in their way of recovering the silmarills. Here is where Galadriel enters the story. For while she followed her kin into exile and war, she did not rashly swear against the Valar. Soon after the kin slaying at the heavens, while Feanor burned the ships leaving his followers stranded on the other side of the ocean, we get a good glimpse of the character of Galadriel. We are told: "The fire of their [the Noldor] hearts was young, and led by Fingolfin and his sons, and by Finrod and Galadriel, they dared to pass into the bitterest North." The narrator describes this passage as "Few of the deeds of the Noldor thereafter surpassed that desperate crossing in hardihood or woe" (*Silmarillion* 102).

The naming of Galadriel as a leader of the group was hardly unintentional. Tolkien clearly meant for us to take this woman seriously and recognize her strength. She survived a hardship that Tolkien tells us few did. It is also key to recognize that this woman was not so rash as her male kin. She did not swear an oath that systematically hunted down her brother and uncles. However, her resolve to revenge the theft of the silmarills and the death of Feanor is no less than Finwe's, her tragic uncle.

Galadriel then spent years with Melian and Thingol in Doriath. Tolkien tells us that the reason for this was "for in Doriath dwelt Celeborn, kinsman of Thingol, and there was great love between them." (*Silmarillion* 134) Here, Tolkien rounds out the character of Galadriel for us. We see that she can feel love as well as resolve and that there is a hint of the gentleness that she would someday show Bilbo and Frodo. In this same passage, Tolkien touches on something that has rarely been

addressed by male authors and that is the mentorship of one woman to another. For the text states that Galadriel "abode" with Melian, and here learned great lore and wisdom concerning Middle-earth" (*Silmarillion*, 135).

Here we wonder at the intent of Tolkien. What was the importance of including the tutelage of Galadriel by Melian? There are two things we can glean from this almost incidental account. For one we can see the character of Tolkien. We see that this was a man who was above his generation and beyond his literary genre. He was trying to understand and validate the female experience. Secondly, we understand the character of Galadriel as she was in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. We now begin to understand how she seemed so wise to us as we read of her reign in the woods of Lothlorien.

When Frodo Baggins and the rest of the "Fellowship of the Ring" reach Lothlorien, late in the volume by the same name, Galadriel is presented as a wise, reserved and powerful woman. We hear from her own mouth that it is she that has stood at the fore-front of the battle against Sauron. She tells us "It was I who first summoned the white Council. And if my designs had not gone amiss, it would have been governed by Gandalf the Grey, and the mayhap things would have gone otherwise" (*TFOTR* 462). However, during their stay in Lothlorien, Frodo makes an interesting discovery.

It is revealed to us that Galadriel possesses one of the three untainted eleven rings of power. She possesses *Nenya*, the ring of water, whose stone was adamant. The symbolism here was vital, for water is the giver and sustainer of life. Galadriel was shown in the height of feminine mystique. She possessed the ring that symbolized life and growth. It was the secret to the preservation

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of fair Lothlorien and it was the cornerstone of protection in that corner of the world.

Yet for Tolkien, water was not always soft and refreshing. He often used it to set boundaries between land protected and the outside world. He did this at Rivendell and again with Lothlorien. Perhaps the greatest use of water as a protection was the western sea separating Varda from the rest of Middle Earth. Finally, we also see that water could be used as a weapon. This was demonstrated by the battle for the ford of Rivendell in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Here, Elrond causes the water to rise and destroy the Ring Wraiths.

Definitely the choice to bestow Nenyà upon Galadriel was a deliberate one. The ring further rounds out the character of Galadriel and gives her the responsibility to nurture and destroy, to give and sustain life while enabling her to take life when the cause called for it.

Another woman that shines in Tolkien's work is Eowyn, princess of Rohan. Eowyn we first meet in *The Two Towers*. Here we learn little except of her determination. However, in *The Return of The King*, Eowyn fulfills a job that no man is able to do. She slays the witch King.

When the King Of Rohan, Theoden, is summoned to the aid of Denthor, Lord of Gondor, he takes with him Merry, Frodo's hobbit companion. As he and Merry ride out behind the King, he notices a rider among the company that was "less in height and girth than most. He caught the glint of clear grey eyes; and then he shivered, for it came suddenly to him that it was the face of one without hope who goes in search of death" (*TROTK* 76). We later discover that this soldier, who called "himself" Dernhelm, was none other than Eowyn.

At the battle of the citadel of Gondor, the Lord of the Nazgul himself was commanding

the forces of Sauron. In his mortal life the Witch King had possessed one of the nine rings of power given to mortal men; Sauron had twisted his soul and destroyed his body to make the Lord of the Nazgul the most dreadful weapon in Sauron's arsenal. It had been foretold that no man could kill him and as he rode to battle astride a great "winged serpent: all assembled were aware of this doom. The Lord of the Nazgul had swept down upon Theoden and dealt him a mortal blow. But, as the servant of Sauron was about to destroy him, a voice spoke, 'Begone foul dwimmerlaik, lord of carrion! Leave the dead in peace!'" (*TROK* 116).

It was Dernhelm, and as the Lord of the Nazgul challenged him he answered in a "clear voice that was like the ring of steel," and gave forth his own challenge:

But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Eowyn I am, Eomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you if you touch him (*TROTK* 116).

Eowyn killed first the great winged steed that the dark king rode upon, but in the fall she herself was knocked to the ground. Here we have a great picture of strength and vulnerability: The courage to do what few men would, and to do what ultimately no man could, but beaten down and facing her own destruction. In this case, Merry saves her by distracting and attacking the Lord of the Nazgul himself. The distraction allows Eowyn to drive her sword home, but then she falls in a swoon.

As Eowyn lay dying of the wounds she received, Gandalf delivers a stirring and strikingly modern speech on behalf of Eowyn.

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My friend you had horses, and deeds of arms, and the free fields; but she, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least to match yours. Yet she was doomed to wait on an old man, whom she loved as a father, and watch him falling into a mean dishonored dotage; and her part seemed to her more ignoble than that of the staff he leaned on. . . . But who knows what she spoke to the darkness alone, in the bitter watches of the night, when all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in? (*TROT* 143)

In the end, Eowyn wedded Faramir of Gondor, and so we see that not only is she a strong capable woman, but a woman capable of great depth and love as well as fierce courage.

Lewis's Jane and Orual

The dichotomy of woman has been the subject of debate for as long as there has been a woman to talk about. The beautiful but dangerous woman has been a motif in literature since Helen launched her thousand ships. From Aphrodite to Juliet to Scarlet O'Hara, woman has manipulated, nurtured, wooed, and fought her way into history. Her strength is legendary. She is loved by the poet, but a source of chagrin to the brute who would rule her.

Unfortunately by the 1950s the image of woman as a powerful force was watered down and turned into more of a Donna Reed than a Helen of Troy—that smiling household deity adorned with her single strand of pearls and

more worried about dusting her coffee table than changing the world. But the post-war woman was about to get a helping hand from a confirmed bachelor living in Oxford, England. C.S. Lewis must have had the soul of a poet. His unique views of women fill his works of fiction and offer an insight rarely seen in post-modern fiction. In *That Hideous Strength* and *Till We Have Faces*, Lewis shows not the modern woman screaming for equality, nor the watered-down woman unable to leave her mark on the world, but two compelling women who know they are strong and know they have a job to do, but see no need to stand around talking about it. Both Jane and Orual, though very different, face the same challenges as they use their strength for the good of their worlds while also finding balance and obedience as they serve.

That Hideous Strength: Jane's Battle

The lovely Jane Studdock, bored housewife and disillusioned doctoral student, at first glance does not seem like heroine material. She is frustrated with herself for giving up her freedom and getting married because "...marriage had proved to be the door out of a world of work and comradeship and laughter and innumerable things to do, into something like solitary confinement" (*THS* 13). She is angry at her husband Mark for never being home to relieve the tedium, and she is saddened by her lack of interest in things which she once enjoyed, like her doctoral thesis on John Donne.

She had always intended to continue her own career as a scholar after she married, that was one of the reasons why they were to have no children, at any rate for a long time yet . . . She still believed that if she got out her

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notebooks and editions and really sat down at the job, she could force herself back into her lost enthusiasm for the subject (14).

The thesis, however, never does get done as Jane suddenly finds herself in the middle of a war she doesn't understand, playing a part she never imagined she could. Before the visions had disturbed Jane, she had "detested . . . the fluttering tearful 'little woman' of sentimental fiction running for comfort to male arms" (46). Dreaming of headless bodies and dead men awakening changes all that. Jane is fearful, and in her search for comfort she finds the Pendragon. When they meet, not only are all of Jane's ideas of womanhood changed, but "her world [i]s unmade; anything might happen now" (143). Thus begins a transformation. Through her fear and struggles Jane realizes that her strength is within her and is independent of outside circumstances. With the help of Pendragon, Fairy Hardcastle, and Jane's husband Mark, her metamorphosis from a self-centered woman trying to be powerful to a dynamic woman of mental prowess, physical fortitude, and courageous character is complete.

Jane is essentially a modern-day seer. Her dreams allow her behind-the-scenes glimpses of the battle which is waging around her. Her powers, of course, make her very attractive to both sides of the warring factions. The knowledge which comes to Jane in her dreams makes her extremely powerful. Her information can be used to win the war.

At first Jane doesn't want to have anything to do with the odd people she encounters through her dreams. She is suspicious of them, and even angry that she is being used as a conduit for information they want. Everything about her supernatural abilities

goes against Jane's sensible, ordinary view of life, but she cannot help but discuss it with her good friends the Dimbles. They immediately send her to the Director's house in St. Anne's-on-the-Hill to talk to a Miss Ironwood.

Discussing her dream with Miss Ironwood, Jane tells her, "I'm afraid I don't believe in that sort of thing" (66). Later, when Jane realizes that she had been sent to St. Anne's to give information, she becomes haughty with Miss Ironwood saying she thought Mr. Dimple was trying to help her. Miss Ironwood replies, "He was. But he was also trying to do something more important at the same time" (67). Jane is indignant, still believing herself ill-used. She leaves St. Anne's confused and hurt. Had she listened to Ironwood she might have been spared the ordeal which ultimately takes her back to the house of the Director, but it often takes a great deal to make us see how small our world truly is. So it was with Jane. There were changes to be made before her power could be fully known even to herself. The greatest change occurs in Jane when she meets the Director, the Pendragon himself.

After leaving Miss Ironwood, Jane tries to forget about the dreams, but she cannot. They continue, and one morning Jane sees a man from her dreams on the street in Edgestow.

She had no need to think what she would do. Her body, walking quickly past, seemed of itself to have decided that it was heading for the station and thence for St. Anne's. It was something different from fear (though she was frightened, too, almost to the point of nausea) that drove her so unerringly forward. It was a total rejection, or revulsion from, this man on all levels of her being at once (137).

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It is a moment of truth for Jane. The events of the next few days change her forever. She finally understands how small her world is and how much bigger she needs to be. Arriving at St. Anne's there is obvious change. She looks around her, impressed at the size of the world from above Edgestow. "She felt she had come near to forgetting how big the sky is, how removed the horizon" (138).

Arriving at the Director's house, Jane offers information on her latest dream. Miss Ironwood decides it is time for Jane to meet the Director, and informs Jane that she will no doubt be called upon to make a final decision during her interview with him. Indeed, upon seeing the beautiful, youthful figure of the Pendragon, Jane cannot help but make decisions. "Her world was unmade" (143). Jane realizes that she wants to stay, that to ally herself with this man and with Camilla and Ironwood is the only reasonable thing to do. However, one problem arises: Jane's husband Mark is on the enemies' side, and the Pendragon wishes Jane to make at least one attempt to save her husband. He sends her home, but not without comfort, not without giving her more questions to think about. Her strength is increasing. She is becoming more and more what she was created to be, but there are more changes to come. There are tests that Jane must pass before she can make full use of her powers as a seer, as a woman, and as a wife.

Jane had no way of knowing that one of these tests would meet her almost as soon as she left the Pendragon. Her talk with him brought many things to the surface; many things Jane saw that needed to be changed, but many things, too, that were good about her that she had not known were inside her. And as she stepped off the train in Edgestow she found herself in a situation which would test

her new-found courage.

Jane's clairvoyant abilities made her as attractive to the enemy as they had to the remnant of Logres. It is, therefore, no surprise that upon leaving St. Anne's she fell into the hands of those enemies who had been studying her and searching for her longer than anyone realized.

Enter Jane's antagonist. She is Jane's antithesis in every way. While Jane is a beautiful woman with refined tastes and prophetic visions, Hardcastle is masculine, vulgar, and obtuse. Unfortunately, Hardcastle is also in position of power—the head of the institutional police. Thus when the NICE police arrest Jane on an unknown charge during the riot in Edgestow, she is taken to Hardcastle for "interrogation." Lamentably, Hardcastle's interrogation consists of asking Jane one question—where she had been on the train—and, when Jane doesn't answer, burning her with a cheroot. Like a soldier offering only name, rank, and serial number, Jane gives away nothing. Even under torture Jane is calm, almost dazed, but strong—too strong for Hardcastle. It's quite unthinkable what else might have happened had the interrogation continued, but police matters call the officers away, and Jane escapes through a series of blunders on their part. When a couple stops to offer her a ride home, Jane instinctively gives "The Manor, St. Anne's" as her home. From this time on Jane will live with the remnant of Logres under the Pendragon's roof.

Just when Jane grows accustomed to the strange behavior of her new friends, and is beginning to grasp what is truly at stake, the Director calls the household together in the kitchen one cold, rainy night. Jane's own powers as seer have led up to this moment. It is she who has informed the Director that Merlin had awakened although she doesn't

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realize it herself. And if Merlin is awake it is up to the remnant of Logres to find him before anyone else does. It would be dangerous, and the group assembled in the cozy kitchen sat quietly and awaited the orders from their leader.

The first question to be settled was Merlin's possible whereabouts. The men discussed the possibility that he might still be buried. MacPhee assumes he will be needed to do some digging and is startled when the Director refuses his offer to help.

"You can't go, MacPhee," said the Director. "He'd put you to sleep in ten seconds. The others are heavily protected as you are not" (228). MacPhee having not placed himself under the protection of Maledil would have been in great danger on the mission, so for the brawn of the operation Frank Denniston is chosen.

Next, it was absolutely imperative that Dimble should go. He has knowledge of the Great Tongue. He can communicate with Merlin—at least enough to bring him back to the Director at St. Anne's. The Director then asks Dimble to practice what he is to speak when they find Merlin. Jane is shocked when he opens his mouth and speaks "words that sounded like castles . . ." (228). The Director is satisfied. Between Dimble and Denniston he is hopeful Merlin can be enticed back to St. Anne's. The only problem remains in finding him. A guide is needed, and the Director knows who will fill that position quite nicely. Though not a man, it is Jane who must be the third member of the search party. She will lead them to the place of her vision, and in so doing will show a strength beyond the barriers of gender. But for now Jane just sits quietly beside the Director as the others file out of the kitchen:

You are all right, child?" said Ransom. "I think so, Sir" said Jane. Her actual state of mind was one she could not analyze. Her expectation was strung up to the height; something that would have been terror but for the joy, and joy but for the terror, possessed her—an all-absorbing tension of excitement and obedience" (229).

Thus Jane, with her God-given talent and her willingness to place herself in obedience to the servant of Maledil, sets off with the men while the other women sit in the kitchen performing another powerful service—the petitioning of Maledil for the safety of their loved ones and for His will to be done.

The will of Maledil means victory for Logres. Merlin arrives at The Manor, plans are made to end the war, and N.I.C.E. comes to a swift and violent end. Questions remain, however, about Jane's husband Mark who had been on the wrong side of the war all along. He survives, but is faced with some of the same struggles his wife had faced and come through. It is now Mark's turn to make the long, symbolic climb up to The Manor at St. Anne's-on-the-Hill. What Mark finds at the end is a transformed wife, a woman of power. A final test remains for them both: how will they react to each other after their respective struggles?

In Jane's talks with the Pendragon she asked many questions about obedience and about what her relationship with Mark should be. In her mind marriage meant equality, not submission. She had refused to be ruled by her husband. She thought it weakness until the Pendragon told her: "You see that obedience and rule are more like a dance than a drill—especially between a man and a woman where the roles are always changing" (149).

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With Mark arriving at St. Anne's and Jane in her new role as powerful woman, she now faced her greatest test of all. Could she as a woman of authority not only take back her husband who had not her strength and who even had been on the wrong side of the war in which Jane was fighting, but also submit to him as Maledil would want her to?

Fortunately for Jane, Mark had been changed, too. His long walk to St. Anne's put many things in perspective for Mark, not the least of these being how shabbily he had treated Jane:

Inch by inch, all the lout and clown and clod-hopper in him was revealed to him in his own reluctant inspection: the coarse, male boor with horny hands and hobnailed shoes and beefsteak jaw, not rushing in—for that can be carried off—but blundering, sauntering, stumping in where great lovers, knights and poets, would have feared to tread . . . How had he dared? (381)

He decided to release Jane, but the decision was a painful one for only now did he realize that he loved her. Thus, Mark arrives at St. Anne's, but he does not go to the Manor. He is beckoned by Venus into the lodge which Jane had herself prepared for habitation earlier that day. He enters for "he did not dare disobey" (382).

After saying farewell to the Pendragon, Jane also turns toward the lodge. Her thoughts wander from the Director she just left to Maledil, who is taking the Director home. "Then she thought of her obedience and the setting of each foot before the other became a kind of sacrificial ceremony. And she thought of children, and of pain and death. And now she was halfway to the lodge, and thought of

Mark and of all his sufferings."

For a brief moment Jane wonders if she is doing the right thing after all, but seeing an open window and her husband's clothes scattered around the lodge in disarray, she enters and knows that she is where she belongs. It is Jane's finest hour for not until she obeys is she truly strong. For even Maledil teaches that in weakness is strength. Her courage and fortitude in other trials would have meant nothing if Jane had not submitted as Maledil and the Director had taught her.

So through the strength of a woman the world is saved. Through the triumphs of beautiful Jane Studdock, Logres not only remains intact, but can continue through Jane's heirs who will speak of her strength for many years to come.

Till We Have Faces: the Strength of the Queen

There is no more powerful woman than a Queen, especially one who rules in her own right and without a consort to help or to hinder. Orual, powerful ruler of Glome, is such a woman. She is the strength of her household and family, of her subjects and her country. Yet hers is a dangerous strength. Her power must be tested and tempered by humility before it gains its purest form. Like Jane, Orual has mental prowess and physical fortitude, but she has to learn about obedience and humility before she is truly strong, and through these conflicts Orual becomes truly great. In the end she is more of a queen than any title or kingdom could ever make her.

Orual's royal blood places her on the throne after her father's death, but she keeps her throne through her own wits and sagacity. As a child she is fortunate to have as a teacher a learned Greek who comes to her father's kingdom as a slave. For a girl in this time and

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place it is uncommon enough to be educated at all, but the education Orual receives from the Fox is extraordinary. He teaches her to speak and write in Greek, the language she later uses to accuse the gods. He teaches philosophy and poetry as well. From the Fox Orual learns about a life beyond her father's little kingdom and about the equality of people. He helps her dispel many of the foolish and often superstitious ideas of the time. Through the fox's tutelage Orual's own innate perspicacity is honed. She grows into an intelligent, serious-minded young woman who is more than qualified to succeed to the throne of Glome upon the death of her father the king. The Fox becomes one of her closest advisors whose opinion is always very important to Orual. She surrounds herself with wise counselors which in itself is wisdom and strength.

The subjects of the Queen of Glome, however, do not love her only because she is a wise and just ruler. Her first day as queen finds her on the battlefield fighting another ruler to settle a dispute in which her country has been involved. A neighboring country is experiencing civil war over the succession of their next king. One of the successors arrives in Glome pleading for sanctuary and assistance. Glome is in no position to enter into a war, but is interested in aiding the young prince who has arrived. Orual and her advisors believe Prince Trunia will be the better ruler of Phars and thus the better neighbor to Glome. A scheme must be developed that will keep Orual's impoverished country out of war yet will settle the succession problem of their neighbors and keep Orual's own throne safe. The queen knows just such a plan. Glome will offer a champion to fight Trunia's brother Argan. They will "pawn . . . Trunia's head upon the

single combat" (*Till We Have Faces* 195). If Argan wins, Trunia is turned over to his countrymen, but cannot say he was treated badly. If Glome's warrior wins, Argan dies and Trunia is the new king. The only detail to be worked out then is who the champion will be. Orual already knows. She will be the one to fight Argan.

Orual's counselors are shocked and unwilling to consider this idea. Bardia, captain of the guards and trusted advisor to Orual exclaims, "I've played chess too long to hazard my Queen" (197). But Orual is adamant. She and Bardia have worked many long hours at making her an accomplished swordsman. Bardia himself believes that "the gods never made anyone—man or woman—with a better natural gift for it" (197). He knows Orual is a better swordsman than Argan, but it seems her gender is against her in Bardia's eyes. Orual sees it in another light—the light which shows how Argan would be certain to accept the offer to fight such a contemptible opponent as a woman. Bardia and the Fox understand the truth and the plausibility of her plan in the end, and plans go forward to organize the match. Orual has used her mental prowess to gain her way, but now there is a physical battle to be fought and she—rather unnecessarily—questions her own strength in that area. However, there is no fear in her, only reasonable questions which she knows will be answered on the day of the battle.

Even on the day of the battle Orual is composed, only anxious to get started and to be done with the whole business. Once the battle is started and she comes to the place when Bardia said she would finally feel fear, there is none. "I felt no fear because, now that we were really at it, I did not believe in the combat at all. It was so like all my sham fights

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with Bardia. . ." (219).

Perhaps no other scene in *Till We Have Faces* shows Orual in such a wonderful light. She is brave, braver than many men. She is strong, wielding a sword against a man twice her size. She is powerful, fighting for the good of her country and her people. And she is swift, killing her opponent in less than ten minutes. There was a certain ruthlessness about her which was crucial to do what she had to do: "I jumped back of course, lest his fall should bear me down with him; so my first man-killing bespattered me less than my first pig-killing" (219). However, this ruthlessness now shows how her strength would be tempered later. For though Orual is a good queen and much loved by her people there is a hardness about her, a fury for what has been taken from her, and a bitterness for what she never had. There is her charge to the gods, too, which only a woman of power and a woman with nothing to lose would dare attempt to write. She establishes herself as a dynamic figure early on, but there is more strength in Orual than acumen and the ability to wield a sword. She is the proprietor of a strength which only the refining fires of the gods can purify, and they use her own writing, her own accusations to do this.

Orual begins her book shortly after a trip abroad where she hears a story told of Istra, a new goddess who resembles Orual's own sister Psyche. Orual lost Psyche many years before as a sacrifice to appease the goddess Ungit. Hard times had fallen upon Glome and sacrificing Psyche to the gods had seemed the most likely way to alleviate the problem. Now Orual is hearing the story of Psyche told with much left out and with no justice for the goddess's sisters. Inflamed by the disservice the story does her, Orual hurries home to write her own version, to tell of her love for Psyche

and of her journey to see her on that lonely mountaintop. She writes of the god's cruelty to her for not allowing her to see the truth about Psyche and for giving her a riddle and punishing her when she guesses incorrectly.

I say the gods deal very unrightly with us. For they will neither (which would be best of all) go away and leave us to live our own short days to ourselves, nor will they show themselves openly and tell us what they would have us do. For that too would be endurable. But to hint and hover, to draw near us in dreams and oracles, or in a waking vision that vanishes as soon as is seen, to be dead silent when we question them and then glide back and whisper (words we cannot understand) in our ears . . . and to show to one what they hide from another; what is all this but cat-and-mouse play, blind man's bluff, and mere jugglery (249)?

Finally Orual demands an answer from the gods believing she might be struck mad or leprous or even turned into an animal, but at least that would be an answer. It would be proof that the gods have no answer. In this vengeful writing Orual is at her weakest. She is being ruled by her bitterness and not by her intelligence. She is the great warrior losing a battle simply because she does not understand her enemy. Her strength lies dormant as her passions dominate her actions, but even the writing of the book and her charge to the gods will work for good as Orual much later comes to understand that the gods "used my own pen to probe my wound" (254). Her wound would require the surgery of the gods, and in preparation of this, two situations work a change in the powerful queen.

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The first is a conversation with a young man who once served in the court of Orual's father, but who was castrated and sent away for dallying with the king's daughter, Orual's other sister, Redival. He returns to Glome years later as an important official working for another king. He confides to Orual that he is happy with his life and that he did not regret his flirtation with Redival. He coyly explains his behavior toward Redival. "Yes . . . a pretty girl. I took pity on her. She was lonely" (255).

Shocked, the queen demands an explanation. Redival had told this young man that she was lonely because first the Fox had come and Orual loved her less, and later when Psyche had been born Orual loved her not at all. Queen Orual is shaken. The thought that Redival had wanted her love was extraordinary. The realization that she had never thought that Redival might be hurt by her—"the pitiable and ill-used one" (256)—was humbling. "This was only the first stroke, a light one; the first snowflake of the winter that I was entering, regarded only because it tells us what's to come" (256).

The second fire in which Orual must be refined is Bardia's death and the subsequent revelations she receives through Ansit, Bardia's long-suffering wife. His death was painful enough for Orual for she had loved him in her way, but the accusations which followed meant more humiliation for the queen. Ansit accuses Orual of working Bardia to death:

Five wars, thirty-one battles, nineteen embassies, taking thought for this and thought for that, speaking a word in one ear, and another, and another, soothing this man, and scaring that and flattering a third, devising, consulting, remembering, guessing, forecasting ...

and the Pillar Room and the Pillar Room. The mines are not the only place where a man can be worked to death. (261)

It is another epiphany and another heartache for the queen whose strength is waning. However, there is strength in facing the truth and admitting wrong. Her strength wanes, but it is not extinguished. Through a series of visions Orual's renewal will come. Through her beloved sister Psyche, Orual is redeemed.

It was while Orual was obsessed with writing her charge to the gods that the first vision came. More of these strange dreams followed Bardia's death until Orual feared the gods had struck her mad. Finally in one vision she is taken before the gods to accuse them. It is here before the gods and before the dead as she reads her charges that she finally hears her own voice. She understands in a flash of divine inspiration why the gods never spoke to her before:

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 openly, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces? (294)

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In her complaint to the gods she realizes she has been answered. Again she sees she has been wrong, but does not shrink from it. She faces it boldly even telling the Fox who she sees among the dead, "I've batted on the lives of men" (296). She is being renewed. She sees the dross as the fires of the gods refine her and make her strong again. One test remains. The gods must now try her as she tried them, and Orual is not at all certain they are just. Then the Fox quietly reminds her, "What would become of us if they were (297)?"

Orual's trial before the gods consists of three painted walls depicting scenes which were very familiar to her. They were scenes of her visions, except that it was Psyche who was shown instead of her. It was Psyche who was undergoing the tests—sorting the seeds and gathering the rams' wool and stumbling through the desert wilderness.

A shocked Orual stammers, "but how could she—did she really—do such things and go such places . . . Grandfather, she was all but unscathed. She was almost happy"(300).

To which the fox replies, "Another bore nearly all the anguish" (300).

Orual is redeemed. Her strength is brought through the fires changed into a pure form of obedient love and selfless giving. She bore Psyche's anguish and, through the fires and changed into a pure form of obedient love and selfless giving. She bore Psyche's anguish, and though Psyche achieved the tasks, Orual asks for no justice. It is enough for her that she assisted Psyche. True strength and true love need no accolades. Orual is now more than a Queen. "You are also Psyche," came a great voice" (308). She is a goddess.

The stories of these four women should not be taken lightly. Lewis and Tolkien told these stories for a very good reason. While

they were pioneers in many ways, writing about subjects that their contemporaries dared not touch, they were also visionaries seeing what might become of Woman some day and wishing to ensure that a powerful legacy was not lost. So Jane dreams her dreams forever. Orual is the eternal, benevolent ruler. Galadriel is the ageless sage always standing in the gap for peace, and Eowyn continues to re-energize the troops and lead them into the ceaseless battle. These women live on though their male creators are gone.

Lewis writes in *That Hideous Strength*, "The beauty of the female is the root of joy to the female as well as to the male, and it is no accident that the goddess of Love is older and stronger than the god." These women are myth, legend, truth, and reality all at the same time. They are immortal. They are Woman.

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