

till we have faces summary

till we have faces summary provides an in-depth exploration of C.S. Lewis's novel "Till We Have Faces," a profound retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche. This article offers a comprehensive overview of the plot, key characters, and central themes, highlighting the novel's exploration of love, faith, and identity. It emphasizes the unique narrative style and the psychological depth Lewis brings to this classic myth, making it a significant work in modern literature. Readers will gain insight into the novel's structure, its mythological background, and the symbolic significance of its events. The article also examines the moral and philosophical questions posed by the story, making it an essential guide for students, scholars, and enthusiasts of mythological retellings. This summary serves as a valuable resource for understanding the complexities and lasting impact of "Till We Have Faces."

- Overview of "Till We Have Faces"
- Main Plot Summary
- Key Characters
- Themes and Symbolism
- Narrative Style and Structure
- Mythological Context
- Philosophical and Moral Questions

Overview of "Till We Have Faces"

"Till We Have Faces" is a novel by C.S. Lewis first published in 1956. It is a retelling of the ancient myth of Cupid and Psyche, but told from the perspective of Psyche's sister, Orual. The novel is notable for its complex portrayal of human emotions, divine interaction, and the quest for self-understanding. Lewis's approach transforms the traditional myth into a narrative that explores themes of love, jealousy, faith, and the search for truth. The novel is often praised for its literary depth and philosophical richness, making it a unique contribution to mythological literature.

Main Plot Summary

The story unfolds through the voice of Orual, the eldest daughter of the King of Glome, a fictional ancient kingdom. Orual's narrative chronicles her life from childhood through adulthood, focusing on her complex relationship with her beautiful and innocent sister, Psyche. After Psyche is taken away to live with the mysterious god of the mountain, Orual embarks on a journey of emotional turmoil and self-discovery.

Childhood and Family

Orual grows up feeling overshadowed by Psyche's beauty and favored status. Her possessive love for Psyche develops alongside feelings of jealousy and insecurity. Their father, the King, is distant and harsh, and their mother dies early, leaving Orual to take on a protective role over Psyche.

Psyche's Abduction

Following a divine command, Psyche is married to an unseen god, who lives in a palace on the mountain. Orual's inability to accept this separation leads her to question the gods and the justice of the divine will. Psyche's experiences in the palace and her trials are central to the mythological core of the story.

Orual's Journey

After Psyche's departure, Orual becomes queen and faces political challenges and personal grief. She writes a lengthy complaint against the gods, expressing her bitterness and confusion. The novel culminates in a dramatic encounter with the god, leading to Orual's ultimate understanding of love and faith.

Key Characters

The characters in "Till We Have Faces" are richly developed, each embodying different aspects of the novel's themes. The main characters include:

- **Orual:** The protagonist and narrator, whose emotional complexity drives the narrative.
- **Psyche:** Orual's younger sister, symbolic of innocence and spiritual purity.
- **The God of the Mountain:** A mysterious divine figure representing love and the divine will.
- **The King of Glome:** Orual and Psyche's father, whose harshness influences their early lives.
- **Bacchus:** A god who appears later in the story, aiding Orual's understanding.

Themes and Symbolism

"Till We Have Faces" explores numerous themes that contribute to its status as a profound literary work. Central themes include the nature of love, the quest for self-knowledge, faith and doubt, and the human relationship with the divine.

Love and Jealousy

The novel examines different forms of love, from Orual's possessive and imperfect love for Psyche to the pure, selfless love symbolized by Psyche's relationship with the god. Jealousy acts as a catalyst for many of Orual's actions, illustrating the destructive potential of misunderstood love.

Faith and Doubt

Orual's struggle with her faith in the gods reflects broader questions about belief and skepticism. Her journey from anger and accusation to acceptance and understanding highlights the complexity of spiritual faith.

Identity and Self-Understanding

The title itself suggests the theme of recognizing one's true self. Orual's "faces" symbolize the masks people wear and the process of uncovering authentic identity through suffering and revelation.

Narrative Style and Structure

The novel is narrated in the form of a long, introspective letter by Orual to the gods. This first-person perspective allows readers to deeply engage with her psychological state and evolving understanding. The non-linear structure incorporates flashbacks and reflections, enhancing the thematic depth and emotional impact.

Use of Mythological Retelling

By retelling the Cupid and Psyche myth from an alternative viewpoint, Lewis provides a fresh interpretation that challenges traditional narratives. This approach allows for complex character development and philosophical inquiry.

Psychological Realism

The narrative delves into Orual's inner turmoil and motivations, presenting a realistic portrayal of human emotions and conflicts. This psychological focus distinguishes the novel from simple myth retellings.

Mythological Context

"Till We Have Faces" is rooted in classical mythology, specifically the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius's "The Golden Ass." Lewis adapts this myth to explore themes relevant to modern readers while preserving its mythical essence.

Original Myth Overview

The original myth tells the story of Psyche, a mortal woman whose beauty incites the jealousy of Venus. Psyche's trials and eventual union with Cupid symbolize the soul's journey toward divine love and immortality.

Lewis's Adaptation

Lewis shifts the focus to Orual, the skeptical and flawed sister, thereby highlighting the human struggle with divine mysteries. This shift creates a dialogue between myth and human experience, enriching the narrative's significance.

Philosophical and Moral Questions

The novel raises profound questions about the nature of the divine, the meaning of love, and the human quest for truth. It challenges readers to consider the limitations of human understanding and the possibility of grace and redemption.

- What does it mean to love truly?
- How do jealousy and possessiveness distort love?
- Can human beings comprehend the divine?
- What role does suffering play in personal growth?
- How do appearances and perceptions hide deeper realities?

By engaging with these questions, "Till We Have Faces" offers a rich tapestry of ideas that continue to resonate with readers seeking insight into human nature and spirituality.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The main theme of 'Till We Have Faces' is the exploration of identity, love, and the human understanding of the divine, focusing on the transformation of the protagonist, Orual, as she confronts her own flaws and misconceptions.

Who is the protagonist of 'Till We Have Faces' and what is her

story?

The protagonist is Orual, the Queen of Glome, who tells the story of her life, her love for her sister Psyche, and her struggle with faith and self-acceptance.

How does 'Till We Have Faces' reinterpret the myth of Cupid and Psyche?

C.S. Lewis retells the myth from the perspective of Orual, Psyche's sister, adding psychological depth and themes of jealousy, love, and spiritual growth, rather than just a simple fairy tale romance.

What is the significance of the title 'Till We Have Faces'?

The title refers to the idea that humans must confront their true selves and shed illusions to truly see and understand love and the divine—essentially, until we have 'faces,' or authentic identities, we cannot fully grasp spiritual truth.

How does Orual's character develop throughout the novel?

Orual evolves from a jealous, possessive sister to a self-aware individual who understands her own failings and the nature of divine love, culminating in her acceptance and humility.

What role does Psyche play in the novel?

Psyche represents innocence, beauty, and faith. Her mysterious disappearance and Orual's devotion to her drive much of the plot and Orual's emotional journey.

How is the god represented in 'Till We Have Faces'?

The god, known as the Fox or the unnamed deity of Glome, is portrayed as enigmatic and inscrutable, emphasizing the mystery of the divine and the limits of human understanding.

Why is 'Till We Have Faces' considered a unique work among C.S. Lewis's writings?

Unlike Lewis's other works, it is a retelling of a classical myth with a focus on psychological and spiritual depth, written for an adult audience and exploring complex themes of faith and identity.

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

The novel is written as a first-person memoir by Orual, providing an intimate and personal perspective on the events and her internal struggles.

What message does 'Till We Have Faces' convey about love and

sacrifice?

The novel suggests that true love requires selflessness and acceptance, and that personal sacrifice is often necessary for spiritual growth and understanding.

Additional Resources

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

This classic fantasy novel explores themes of sacrifice, faith, and redemption through the journey of four siblings who enter the magical land of Narnia. Like **Till We Have Faces**, it delves into the complexities of belief and the divine, blending mythology with human emotion. The story highlights personal transformation and the battle between good and evil.

2. *Mythology* by Edith Hamilton

A comprehensive collection of Greek, Roman, and Norse myths, this book provides background on many of the stories and characters that inspired **Till We Have Faces**. It offers readers insight into the original myths of gods and mortals, enriching the understanding of the novel's themes of love, jealousy, and divine interaction. Hamilton's retellings are accessible and engaging, making ancient myths relevant for modern readers.

3. *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto

This epic poem intertwines romance, adventure, and classical mythology, similar to the mythic qualities found in **Till We Have Faces**. It explores the complexities of love and identity through larger-than-life characters and fantastical events. The work's rich symbolism and exploration of human nature provide a deep literary context for those interested in myth-inspired narratives.

4. *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller

A retelling of the Trojan War from the perspective of Patroclus, this novel offers a fresh look at Greek mythology, focusing on love, friendship, and destiny. Like **Till We Have Faces**, it reinterprets classic myths with emotional depth and psychological insight. The book highlights the human side of legendary figures, making ancient stories resonate with contemporary readers.

5. *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood

Atwood's feminist retelling of Homer's **Odyssey** from Penelope's viewpoint challenges traditional narratives, much like **Till We Have Faces** reexamines myth through a female perspective. The novel delves into themes of voice, power, and perspective, offering a critical look at ancient stories and their meanings. It is a compelling exploration of identity and storytelling.

6. *Circe* by Madeline Miller

This novel centers on the mythological witch Circe, transforming her story into a tale of empowerment, transformation, and self-discovery. It parallels **Till We Have Faces** in its focus on a female protagonist grappling with divine and mortal realms. Miller's lyrical style and deep character development bring Greek myths to life in a modern, accessible way.

7. *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine* by David Leeming

An exploration of goddesses from various cultures, this book provides context for the divine feminine themes present in **Till We Have Faces**. It examines how myths shape the understanding of female power, spirituality, and identity. Readers gain a broader perspective on the roles and representations of women in mythology.

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

This work blends psychology and mythology to explore the wild woman archetype and the power of feminine intuition. Like **Till We Have Faces**, it emphasizes the importance of reclaiming the female voice and understanding inner transformation. The book offers a deep dive into storytelling as a means of personal and collective healing.

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

A retelling of Arthurian legends from the perspectives of the women involved, this novel reinterprets myth and history with a focus on female experience and spirituality. It shares with **Till We Have Faces** a commitment to giving voice to women traditionally sidelined in mythic narratives. The book explores themes of power, faith, and destiny through richly drawn characters.

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fascinate, fifty years after his death. This Companion is a comprehensive single-volume study written by an international team of scholars to survey Lewis's career as a literary historian, popular theologian, and creative writer. Twenty-one expert voices from the University of Oxford, the University of Cambridge, Princeton University, and Wheaton College, among many other places of learning, analyze Lewis's work from theological, philosophical, and literary perspectives. Some chapters consider his professional contribution to fields such as critical theory and intellectual history, while others assess his views on issues including moral knowledge, gender, prayer, war, love, suffering, and Scripture. The final chapters investigate his work as a writer of fiction and poetry. Original in its approach and unique in its scope, this Companion shows that C. S. Lewis was much more than merely the man behind Narnia.

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