



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 40
Number 2

Article 2

4-2022

“One Aims at the Officers First”: Reassessing the Relationship of C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot

Ben Reinhard
Christendom College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Reinhard, Ben (2022) "“One Aims at the Officers First”: Reassessing the Relationship of C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 40: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol40/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>



Abstract

This article challenges the received account of the relationship between C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot, arguing that Lewis's antipathy towards Eliot was a defining feature of his career as a scholar, critic, and literary artist. By attending to the anti-Eliotic strain in Lewis's thought, we gain new insights into the development of his imagination and the creation of his own works, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Attitude towards T.S. Eliot; Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*; Lewis, C.S. *The Silver Chair*; Lewis, C.S. *The Pilgrim's Regress*



“ONE LOOKS AT THE OFFICERS FIRST”:
REASSESSING THE RELATIONSHIP OF
C.S. LEWIS AND T.S. ELIOT

BEN REINHARD

THE STANDARD ACCOUNT OF C.S. LEWIS'S RELATIONSHIP with T.S. Eliot is by now very well known, and scholarly discussions of the relationship tend to conform to a fairly predictable pattern. The young Lewis, it is regularly recognized, resented Eliot's modernist poetry and literary celebrity; as he matured, he came to see the common ground they shared and forsook his former hostility. Scholars do, it must be admitted, differ as to when and why he abandoned his crusade against Eliot: Lewis's conversion to Christianity (Hooper, "Preface," xvii), his viewing of *Murder in the Cathedral* (Sayer 155), the death of Charles Williams (Green and Hooper 224), and the meeting of the two at the bishop's Commission to Revise the Psalter (Brown 16-17) have all been suggested as significant events. It is all but universally agreed, however, that the two were friends, with all former differences forgotten, by the time of Lewis's death.

Two reminiscences written in the year following Lewis's death, however, give us reason to doubt these optimistic accounts of rivals-turned-friends. The first piece of evidence comes in a largely ungenerous and self-serving memorial published by the American journalist—and former Lewis pupil—George Bailey. In "My Oxford Tutor—C.S. Lewis," Bailey curries favor with his audience by describing in unflattering detail his famous teacher, pointing out the defects in his mannerisms, his appearance, and his method of teaching. In the midst of all this, Bailey suggests that Lewis's own failure as a poet inspired his dislike of Eliot. "He did write poetry in his youth, but little of it came to light. [...] He clearly fancied himself as a poet and left no doubt that he considered the poet the supreme example of creative genius in human kind. It was perhaps envy on this score that lay at the base of his dislike of T.S. Eliot" (38). Some months after publication, a copy of Bailey's article made its way into the hands of J.R.R. Tolkien, whose reaction in defense of his old friend was entirely predictable. In a letter to Anne Barrett, Tolkien condemns the pettiness of Bailey and dismisses as "a grotesque calumny" the suggestion that Lewis's distaste for Eliot was rooted in envy. "After all," he added, "it is possible to dislike Eliot with some intensity even if one has no aspirations to poetic laurels oneself" (Tolkien, *Letters* 350, #261).

Taken together, these two accounts are remarkable for what they say—and, just as importantly, what they do *not* say. From Bailey’s account, it seems that Lewis’s aversion to Eliot was sufficiently pronounced to be detected by Bailey while a student at Oxford in the late 1940s, and creditable enough that Bailey’s 1964 audience was willing to accept it as a given. Even more importantly, Tolkien does not deny that Lewis disliked Eliot (indeed, he admits that Lewis might have disliked him “with some intensity”)—only that the dislike was rooted in poetic envy. These two accounts encourage us to revisit the standard narrative promulgated by Hooper and others; when we do, we discover that Lewis’s hostility towards Eliot was no passing phenomenon. In fact, a wide-ranging dislike of Eliot—the poet, the critic, and (on occasion) the man—was one of the defining elements of Lewis’s literary-critical career; pointed criticism of Eliot appears in nearly every scholarly work Lewis wrote and runs through much of his fiction, poetry, and unpublished writing as well. But though Lewis’s dislike of Eliot was constant, it was not static, and in his shifting critiques of Eliot we can trace the development of Lewis’s imagination and thought. Such will be the purpose of this essay.

THE EARLY PERIOD

We find the first indication of Lewis’s hostility—or, at least, *potential* hostility—towards Eliot in letters he sent to Arthur Greeves during the Great War. In November 1917, he confessed to Greeves a deep “ignorance of modern, that is to say, *contemporary*, literature, especially poetry” and lambasted “that detestable thing known as ‘prose-poetry’” as the last refuge of “those who can write NEITHER prose NOR poetry” (*Letters* I.342). He also noted the danger posed by literary fads—“deadly things” that grow up around modish authors (I.342). Neither comment is specifically directed towards Eliot and his work, of course, but both give a clear indication of where the young Lewis’s sympathies lay: in favor of received tradition and against the striking innovations of modern poetry.

This natural antipathy hardened as Lewis grew older; by the 1920s, Humphrey Carpenter reports that Lewis had become “thoroughly vehement about T.S. Eliot” (21). So vehement, in fact, that Lewis initiated a punitive literary prank in the summer of 1926. He wrote mock-Eliotic poems—Lewis described his first as “very nonsensical, but with a flavour of dirt all through” (*All My Road* 409)—and planned to submit the parodies for publication in Eliot’s *Criterion*. What began as a private scheme of Lewis’s swiftly became an elaborate conspiracy as he recruited members of his circle to write poems of their own. According to Lewis’s diary, the conspirators came up with names and a biography for the imaginary authors (Rollo and Bridget Considine, siblings “united by an affection so tender as to be almost incestuous,” 413), planned who

would play the necessary parts (should Eliot happen to invite them to tea)—and even settled on the location from which the poems should be posted (Vienna, so as to avoid suspicion). If the prank succeeded, Lewis intended to use Eliot's humiliation "for the advancement of literature and the punishment of quackery" (409-10). The prank went nowhere in the end—Lewis and company seem to have simply abandoned it—but it provides a valuable witness to Lewis's "burning indignation" against Eliot (414).

The "literary dragonnade" (410) of 1926 was not Lewis's only attempt to undermine Eliot in the pages of his own publication, however. A few years later, Lewis wrote "The Personal Heresy"; the essay centered "on a subject about which current views exasperated me beyond bearing" (*Letters* III.1521): namely, the idea that poems should be read primarily as expressions of their author's personality. One of the authors whose 'exasperating' views Lewis particularly attacked was Eliot (see *The Personal Heresy* 4-5). In the fall of 1930, Lewis submitted the article to Eliot at *The Criterion* and waited for a response. None came. In April of 1931, Lewis wrote to remind Eliot that he had been waiting six months and requested a prompt decision. He was forced to wait another six weeks for a response: Eliot praised the article but declined to publish it, noting that the *Criterion* was then glutted with critical theory, and invited Lewis to submit it for consideration again in nine months (see Eliot, *Letters*, V.580). Lewis wrote back immediately to request assurances that the article *would* be published on resubmission and to suggest a possible series of articles to follow it in which he would lay out "a neo-Aristotelian theory of literature" (Lewis, *Letters* III.1523). Eliot's reply does not survive, but it is clear that he ultimately rejected the piece in the summer of 1931. Though Lewis cannot have been much surprised by the rejection, the experience—compounded delay, ineffectual praise, and ultimate rejection—can have done little to endear Eliot to him.

The exchange surrounding "The Personal Heresy" brings us to what Lewis always regarded as the pivotal moment in his life: his conversion to Christianity in September 1931. Hooper suggests that the conversion also marked a crucial shift in Lewis's attitude towards Eliot—that his submission to Christ eradicated "that little hard core of worldly ambition" that had motivated him and made him more friendly towards his now-fellow Christian ("Preface," xvii). Unfortunately, a careful reading of Lewis's post-conversion writings make it difficult to accept this conclusion. Though Lewis's conversion and (one suspects) maturation may have constrained the sort of anti-Eliotic activities he engaged in (poetic pranks were now a thing of the past), it also provided grounds for fresh and bitter disagreement. Eliot was no longer merely a literary or intellectual nuisance. He was now a threat to the Christian faith as well.

Lewis's new attitudes towards Eliot can be traced most clearly in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. The book is, of course, an allegorical and semi-

autobiographical apology for what Lewis called ‘Romanticism’ and ‘sweet desire’—but defending these meant also attacking their foes. And, as Lewis confessed in his letters, one of the main targets of his ridicule was Eliot himself (II.94). Any number of characters in the allegory bear some trace of Eliot—or, at least, of Lewis’s *idea* of Eliot. Gus Halfways, the rebellious son of the old romantic poetry, is one such; stronger echoes still can be found in the Clevers. These are the chaotic, mad poets of Eschropolis (literally, ‘the city of filth and obscenity’; see *Regress*, 41); for Lewis, they represent the poetry of the 1920s. In their own minds, their poetry is “stark and brutal” and “the expression of savage disillusionment” (45); Lewis shows it to be merely squalid and filthy—just as he considered *The Waste Land* and, especially, the Sweeney poems to be.

If the squalor and chaos of Eschropolis reflect Lewis’s views on the pre-conversion Eliot, we meet the proper allegorical representative of Christian Eliot in the Three Pale Men. The identification here is undeniable. According to the annotations Lewis made to a copy of the work in the late 1930s, the Three Pale Men collectively represent “The harsher and also better types of anti-Romanticism, such as appear in *The Criterion*”—Eliot’s own publication (94). Their names likewise contain a barely-coded reference to Eliot. In his 1928 *For Lancelot Andrewes*, Eliot had famously described himself as a “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion” (7); it is surely not an accident that two of the Pale Men are named Neo-Classical and Neo-Angular [=anglo-catholic]. Indeed, another annotation puts the matter beyond any reasonable doubt: when Mr. Neo-Classical is introduced, Lewis explains that “T.S. Eliot flirted with something he called classicism at one time” (*Regress* 94).

But as Kathryn Lindskoog points out (61), it is Mr. Neo-Angular who most clearly represents the post-conversion Eliot; Lewis’s own annotations mark him out as an allegory of “the more venomous type of Anglo-Catholic” (*Regress* 94). He is admittedly impressive in his way: rigid, principled, and high-minded. He stands, as he tells the pilgrims, “against half-measures and compromises of all sorts—against any pretence that there is any kind of goodness or decency, any even tolerable resting place, on this side of the Grand Canyon” (97). As a consequence, he lives with his brothers in the far North, drawing near to the nihilistic barbarism of the monstrous Savage and his totalitarian dwarves. Thus Eliot is, in this presentation, venomous, arrogant, and (indeed) on the borders of absolutizing dictatorship. Neo-Angular confesses that Savage seems to him “a very clearheaded man” (107). For his part Savage admits that Angular may grow up to become a worthy opponent, but wonders whether the Pale Man is merely “an Eschropolitan turned inside-out” (106)—that is, merely a filthy poet reformed. The Hermit History later vindicates this assessment: the Pale Men are indeed “reformed Clevers” (151) who are capable only of breaking, but never creating.

All this would be biting enough—but the Christian Lewis has still harsher critiques in store. Neo-Angular discourages the pilgrim John from even speaking to Mother Kirk (that is, the Church of traditional Christianity) except through properly qualified clergy, and he forbids him to exercise reason on his own. In all this, Neo-Angular presumes, not quite to deny, but to contradict the doctrines of Mother Kirk herself. He downplays her teachings and turns the pilgrim aside from her; in so doing, is presented as a modern-day successor to the old Pharisees: closing the kingdom of heaven to others and refusing to enter himself (cf. Matt. 23:13). Angular's faith is, in the words of Humphrey Carpenter, "sectarian in its Anglo-Catholicism" and "emotionally barren and counter-romantic" (49). This portrayal of Eliot is consistent with Lewis's critique of Eliot and his party in a 1934 letter to Dom Bede Griffiths. Eliot and his followers, in Lewis's view, were in danger of turning "the Christian faith itself" into merely "one more of their high brow fads" (*Letters* II.134): something restricted to the worthy members of an intellectual elite. We see the import of all this in the second half of the novel. As John retraces his journey after his conversion, he sees the Three Pale Men revealed in their true form as Superbia—a child of the enemy, presently allegorically as a grotesque, life-denying crone (*Regress* 188). Her name and nature links her (and thus, by extension, the Pale Men) with the primordial sins of Satan and Adam. Scorning flesh, dependency, and nature, Superbia scours the earth down to bare rock, despises generation, and prides herself on fashioning her own mockery of salvation: "though I am barren, yet no man can doubt / I am clean and my iniquities are blotted out" (188).

Thus Lewis's conversion brought him to criticize Eliot's practice of Christianity; it also helped to harden and intensify his critiques of Eliot's poetry. *The Allegory of Love* gives some sense of the direction of Lewis's thought in the early 1930s: he notes that Eliot is singularly capable of portraying "ultimate deformity" in his poems, but questions "how far such passages redound to the credit of the poet" (271). In a letter to Eliot's "dear friend" Paul Elmer More, Lewis makes the guarded criticism offered in the *Allegory* much clearer:

Surely it is natural that I should regard Eliot's work as a very great evil. He is the very spear head of that attack on [limit] which you deplore. His constant profession of humanism and his claim to be a 'classicist' may not be consciously insincere, but they are erroneous. The plea that his poems of disintegration are all satiric, are intended as awful warnings, is the common plea of all these literary traitors to humanity. [...] His intention only God knows. I must be content to judge his work by its fruits, and I contend that no man is fortified against chaos by reading the *Waste Land*, but that most men are by it infected with chaos. (*Letters* II.163)

In the same letter, he condemns *The Waste Land* as “infernally poetry” and Eliot as an enemy disguised as a friend: bold words, considering the relationship of Eliot and More.

However harsh the critique of Eliot’s poetry may be, the letter ends on an even sterner—and surprisingly personal—note. In this passage, Lewis accuses Eliot of an aggravating arrogance and of leading “the Parisian riff-raff of denationalized Irishmen and Americans who have perhaps given Western Europe her death wound” (II.164). It is hard to miss a whiff of rancor when Lewis complains of Eliot (“a foreigner and a neutral”) stealing into England and securing a comfortable job at the Bank of England during the Great War—that is, at the same time when Lewis, Tolkien, and their friends were fighting, suffering, and dying in the trenches. Surveying all this early information, one might begin to wonder whether, *pace* Tolkien, envy—or at the very least resentment—played some role in Lewis’s early hostility towards Eliot. And indeed Lewis himself admits that something like this might have been at work. In a letter of December 1942, Lewis confesses that “There were years of my own life during wh. the literary situation, the ascendancy of the Eliotics, the dominance of the *Criterion* & *Scrutiny* was the daily subject of my thoughts and nagged me like a nagging tooth: but thank God I got out of it” (II.684); his 1943 “Afterword” to the *Regress* confesses that the work was written in “an uncharitable temper” (207). Even Lewis’s diary admits to wasting “a beautiful coloured evening” in 1926 in daydreams of refuting Eliot (*All My Road* 418). Hooper’s suggestion that Lewis was motivated by an unhealthy ambition is thus—to a limited degree—vindicated.

THE WAR YEARS AND CHARLES WILLIAMS

“Getting out of” his nagging obsession with Eliot did not mean that Lewis became more accepting of Eliot’s thought, however. Though Lewis did stop his attacks on Eliot as a foe of “sweet desire” in the late 1930s and early 1940s, this did not signal an outright end to the hostilities. Instead, Lewis merely shifted the war to a new front: he seems to have made his personal mission to correct the defects in Eliot’s literary criticism and diminish his impact on literature and culture, albeit *sine ira et studio*. A brief summary will suffice to give some sense of Lewis’s activities in this period. The essays in *Rehabilitations* bear witness to a general anti-Eliotic tendency. In “Shelley, Dryden, and Mr Eliot,” Lewis gently but firmly questions Eliot’s pretensions to classicism: “Shelley [...] is a poet who must rank higher than Dryden with any critic who claims to be classical” (194) (Eliot, of course, had ranked Dryden higher) and suggests that Eliot’s own poetry is “squalid and chaotic” (199). In “High and Low Brows,” he hints that posterity might remember John Buchan and P.G. Wodehouse as the great artists of the early twentieth century and that Eliot might be forgotten in

eclipse—just as Shakespeare came to outshine his more intellectually respectable contemporaries (273). The main argument of Lewis’s “Hamlet: the Prince or the Poem” is a running refutation of Eliot’s “Hamlet and his Problems”—and, in particular, Eliot’s judgment that the play “is most certainly an artistic failure” (Eliot, “Hamlet” 47).

The most powerful critiques of Eliot come, naturally enough, in Lewis’s two great works of the early 1940s: *The Screwtape Letters* and *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Throughout *Screwtape*, the senior devil exhibits a strong preference for Eliot’s brand of Christianity—or rather Lewis’s caricature of it. Thus, after Wormwood’s “patient” converts to Christianity, Screwtape advises the young tempter on how best to mitigate the damage. This he can do by cultivating in the patient a snobbish disdain for common Christians (*Screwtape* 15-16), and by turning his faith into a faction, such as High Church Anglicanism (81-5)—in other words, by turning him into the caricature of Eliot found in the *Regress* and the letter to Dom Bede Griffiths! In other letters, Screwtape notes that the arts can be useful in corrupting the patient: itching for novelty, both low- and high-brow artists are “daily drawn into fresh, and still fresh, excesses of lasciviousness, unreason, cruelty, and pride” (128). They are, in other words, producing works like *The Waste Land* and infecting their audiences with chaos.

Screwtape reserves his most fulsome ‘praise,’ however, for Eliot’s social theory. In the attempt to damn the young Christian, he notes, “some theories which he may meet in modern Christian circles may [...] prove helpful; theories, I mean, that place the hope of society in *some inner ring of ‘clerks’, some trained minority of theocrats*” (125, emphasis mine). It is hard to read Screwtape’s words here as anything other than a barely disguised echo of Eliot’s *The Idea of a Christian Society*, published a mere two years before *Screwtape*. In this work, Eliot envisions a Christian elite—“the *Church within the Church*”—who serve as the lynchpin of a renewed Christian social order: “These will be the consciously and thoughtfully practicing Christians, especially those of intellectual and spiritual superiority. It will be remarked at once that this category bears some resemblance to what Coleridge has called ‘*the clerisy*’” (Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* 28, emphasis added). Eliot himself was part of just such a self-conscious elite: the Moot. The Moot had been created by J.H. Oldman and came to include such Christian luminaries as Eliot, Karl Mannheim, and Christopher Dawson; according to Eliot’s biographer, the Moot was “the closest [Eliot] would come to that association of the best ‘minds’ sharing certain fundamental ideals which had been a preoccupation of his since the early Twenties” (Ackroyd, 243). For Eliot, these Christian elites are indeed the hope of society—wholly necessary to restrain the politicians from cynicism and manipulation, and the masses from credulous superstition. For Lewis, the pride

and self-congratulation associated with such groups—either the historical Moot or Eliot’s imagined elite—are merely another means for the patient’s damnation.

For all their harshness, the criticisms of Eliot offered in *Screwtape* were at least softened by their obscurity: many readers could, and doubtless *did*, read the volume without making any connection to Eliot at all. Lewis’s *Preface to Paradise Lost* presents a much more direct and public salvo. Though the volume is dedicated to the discussion of epic poetry in general and Milton’s great work in particular, it is flavored throughout by a running criticism of Eliot. Indeed, the entire second chapter is dedicated to refuting Eliot’s “Note on the Verse of John Milton”—especially its claim that practicing poets are the only fit judges of poetic merit (*Preface* 9-12). More substantive critiques follow in later chapters, in which Lewis opposes Milton’s poetic project to Eliot’s. The crux of the matter—and the bedrock of Lewis’s later critiques of Eliot—is the *Stock Response*, which Milton cultivates but Eliot destroys. The Stock Response is “a deliberately organized attitude which is substituted for ‘the direct free play of experience’” (*Preface* 55). Insofar as Stock Responses reinforce the traditional moral order, they are closely related to the *Tao* of *The Abolition of Man*: both provide the “trained emotions” without which “the intellect is powerless against the animal organism” (*Abolition* 24).¹ The cultivation of these conventional, learned emotional reactions—such as veneration for an old man, chivalrous reverence for a beloved, or scorn for a bully—is, for Lewis, “one of the first necessities of human life, and one of the main functions of art is to assist it” (*Preface* 55).

But Eliot’s poetry not only fails to teach the correct responses: it actively undermines them and substitutes degraded (and degrading) responses in their place. As Hooper notes, Eliot’s poems “were for Lewis the supreme instance of the destruction of the right Stock Response” (*Companion and Guide* 611). On Lewis’s reading, the opening line of “Prufrock” is “a striking picture of sensibility in decay” (*Preface* 56)—and, because of the impact art has on its audience, is likely to produce very many more decayed sensibilities in the real world. The sustained modern assault on ordered emotions has left us with a world in which “those Stock responses which we need in order to be even human are already in danger” (*Preface* 57). This critique builds to a magnificent crescendo in the conclusion to the *Preface*. The Stock Responses will not make a man a saint: but they are necessary for human society to function.

¹ *The Abolition of Man* seems to provide another oblique criticism of Eliot. In the essay, Lewis concedes that “a great poet, who has ‘loved, and been well nurtured in, his mother tongue’” (46) may make changes to his native language. But Lewis, as George Sayer notes, “tended to regard the new poetry with its formlessness and lack of poetic diction as a revolutionary movement deliberately directed against the traditions of English poetry” (*Jack* 204).

As long as we live in merry middle earth it is necessary to have middle things. If the round table is abolished, for every one who rises to the level of Galahad, a hundred will drop plumb down to that of Mordred. Mr. Eliot may succeed in persuading the reading youth of England to have done with robes of purple and pavements of marble. But he will not therefore find them walking in sackcloth on floors of mud—he will only find them in smart, ugly suits walking on rubberoid. (*Preface* 137)

Eliot may intend to build the City of God, but he has only succeeded in fortifying the City of Man on earth.

The criticisms offered in the *Preface to Paradise Lost* were direct enough—and public enough—to elicit a response from Eliot. He wrote to Lewis in early 1943 to praise the book—but also to challenge Lewis’s critique of his “Note.” Lewis responded on February 23 of the same year:

I hope the fact that I find myself often contradicting you in print gives no offence: it is a kind of tribute to you—whenever I fall foul of some widespread contemporary view about literature I always seem to find that you have expressed it most clearly. One aims at the officers first in meeting an attack! (*Letters* II.557)

The tone of the letter is, as Janice Brown notes, “cordial” and friendly (14); so too is the tone of a subsequent letter sent in March of the following year. Brown suggests that the friendly tone is indicative of a change in sentiment as well—that Lewis was, perhaps, softening in his views on Eliot and his work.

Whether or not the restraint exhibited in Lewis’s public writings permit such an optimistic view is perhaps open to debate. But Lewis’s private writings make Brown’s conclusion unlikely in the extreme: the careful civility exhibited in his back-and-forth with Eliot was not mirrored in near-contemporary letters with other acquaintances. In a letter to Dorothy L. Sayers of 23 October 1942, Lewis characterized his frequent corrections of Eliot in a far different manner: “Oh Eliot! How can a man who is neither a knave or a fool write so like both? Well, he can’t complain that I haven’t done my best to put him right—hardly ever write a book without showing him one of his errors. And he still doesn’t mend. I call it ungrateful” (II.533). In other letters from around the same time, Lewis accused Eliot of having made modern poetry a horror (II.424) and of having installed Furies in place of the Muses (II.429); Eliot was moreover a “jeune critic” (II.442-3). While it is just possible that Lewis found a new and authentic respect for Eliot between October 1942 and February 1943, it is much easier to believe that Lewis’s restrained tone in his letters to Eliot had more to do with professional courtesy than any newfound respect.

Around this time, a dynamic new force burst into Lewis’s life to complicate his feud with Eliot: Charles Williams. Williams was a friend to both Lewis and Eliot, and both men viewed him with a sort of reverential awe. Lewis was simply swept away by the force of Williams’s personality: when Williams spoke, he said, “[h]is face becomes almost angelic. Both in public and private he is of nearly all the men I have met the one whose address most overflows with *love*. It is simply irresistible” (*Letters* II.501). Lewis repeated his praise of the “angelic” Williams in his letters and in private conversation with Peter Bayley (see *Letters* III.1548, Carpenter 120). Eliot likewise believed that Williams was somehow more than human. According to Eliot, Williams possessed a seemingly preternatural ability to be at ease in any situation and in any company (*All Hallows’ Eve* ix, xiii)—and, more than that, an esoteric mastery of the supernatural as well. “For him there was no frontier between the material and spiritual world. [...] [H]e was somehow protected from evil, and was himself a protection. He could have joked with the devil and turned the joke against him” (*All Hallows’ Eve* xiii-xiv). The shared friendship with Williams, however, did little to bring the two men together, and may in fact have driven them farther apart. In 1942, the literary editor for *Time and Tide* wrote Lewis, asking him to recommend a reviewer for Williams’s *Forgiveness of Sins*. Lewis enthusiastically suggested Owen Barfield, adding as an afterthought “Not Eliot at any price. He couldn’t understand one word of C.W.’s book” (*Letters* III.1545). This postscript is wholly gratuitous, both in content and in tone. One may be forgiven for wondering whether Lewis was unwilling to share his irresistible friend with his foremost literary foe.

Williams did not accept the existing state of affairs, however, and worked actively to bring his two friends together—a fact Lewis alluded to already in his letter to Eliot in February 1943. He eventually succeeded in arranging a meeting at tea at the Mitre Hotel; this meeting is dated by Brown to late 1944 or early 1945 (15). According to Fr. Gervase Matthew, it was a painful affair: Lewis took offense at Eliot’s remarks about his appearance and his books, and “a very bad time was had by all except Charles Williams,” who “enjoyed himself hugely” (Green and Hooper 223-4). There is no reason to doubt, as Brown does, the accuracy of Fr. Matthew’s recollections or to deny that it was, as Green and Hooper suggest, a “disastrous” affair (see Brown, 15; cf. Green and Hooper 224): just such an uncomfortable afternoon is what the other evidence from the period would lead us to expect. The meeting did, however, produce one definite result—it signaled the end of Lewis’s public attacks on Eliot-as-critic. Shortly after the meeting at the Mitre, Lewis wrote in one of his notebooks “Mr Eliot [...] has asked me not to write about his literary criticism. Very well. I obey” (quoted in Green and Hooper 224). Both the request from Eliot and the

taciturn response from Lewis suggest that hard feelings existed before the meeting and continued after it.

If Williams failed to bring the two men together in life, he was no more successful in death. When Williams died, his friends—chief among them Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers—decided to compile a *festschrift* to honor his memory and provide financial support for his widow. Eliot's friendship with Williams, literary celebrity, and prominence in the world of publishing made him a natural choice for inclusion. In May 1945, Lewis invited Eliot to contribute to the collection and inquired whether Faber and Faber, Eliot's firm, might be interested in publishing it (see *Letters* II.650-1).

The collaboration was doomed to failure. The work would ultimately be published by Oxford, not Eliot's firm, and a survey of the letters suggests that Eliot was from the onset less enthusiastic and optimistic about the project than Lewis had been (it appears that Eliot had questions about the collection's coherence and marketability; see *Letters* II.655), though he did agree in June 1945 to write an essay on Williams's plays (*Letters* II.658). Months passed, but the essay never materialized—and neither did the poem Lewis suggested as a substitute. Lewis's frustration can be detected in a series of increasingly pressing letters to Eliot from February through May 1946, and in a couple of rather more blunt letters to Sayers: “[h]e's not a *writer* in your sense at all,” he wrote to her on 28 February; “He's one of these poets (in the worst sense of the word). Shakespeare, Dryden, and Pindar could all deliver the goods to date” (*Letters* II.703). Eventually, Lewis was forced to take the collection to press with no contribution from Eliot; this chapter of the Lewis/Eliot feud concluded with a conciliatory—but pointed—response to Eliot's final apology: “You cannot regret your absence more than we all do” (710). With the magnetic Williams gone, the two men once again parted ways.

A POST WAR DÉTENTE?

In the years following the war, Lewis's references to Eliot become notably less frequent: it very much appears that Lewis honored his promise to keep silent on Eliot's literary criticism. Beyond this, it is difficult to say much with certainty. Some have seen glimmers of an improved relationship at this time, and indeed some of his post-war interactions may have been positive. Charles Huttar shows that Lewis's 1948 poem “The Turn of the Tide” is a response to Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*; it is his conjecture that the work was intended also “as a response to Eliot, conciliatory to a degree” (“*Nativity Ode Revisited*” 339). Derek Brewer, a pupil of Lewis's in 1941–2 and again in 1945–7, claims that Lewis “greatly admired” Eliot's work (50)—though I confess, one may reasonably question the accuracy of Brewer's 40-year-old recollections, especially given Lewis's frequently expressed frustrations with

Eliot. Finally, Green and Hooper claim that Lewis “put Eliot out of his mind” between 1945 and their reacquaintance in 1959 (224).

This latter claim is, however, simply and demonstrably false. Lewis’s distaste for Eliot clearly endured, and while he moderated his published disagreements with Eliot’s literary criticism, he became (if anything) more free in his comments about Eliot’s poetry. Most of these critiques were offered privately: in meetings of the Inklings, in letters, and (perhaps, if we privilege Bailey’s account over Brewer’s) in his tutorials. According to his brother’s diary for 27 September 1947, Lewis started an argument among the Inklings on the subject of Eliot’s poetry. He had begun a reading of one of Eliot’s poems “but broke off in the middle declaring it to be bilge” (Green and Hooper 157). In the ensuing debate, Jack told the others the poem “had nothing to say worth saying in any case” (ibid.). Similarly pointed critiques appear in his post-war letters. In a 1953 letter to an American academic, Lewis lamented “I wish your *bad* poets weren’t so exportable! You sent us Eliot in the flesh and Pound in the spirit” (III.341-2); he repeated the claim the next year in a letter to Robert Penn Warren. In the same year, Lewis revisited the idea of the Stock Response in letters to Katharine Farrer. He accused Eliot of “denigrat[ing], in the leering modern mode, the high creation of God” (III.423) and warned against Eliot’s more shocking images: “I believe that anything but the most sparing admission of such images is a v. dangerous game. To invite them, to recur willingly to them, to come to regard them as normal, surely, poisons us?” (III.427).²

These private critiques of Eliot’s poetry did not remain purely private, however: they worked their way into several of Lewis’s public comments as well. Taken together, the private and public critiques from the early- to mid-1950s form a remarkable (and largely understudied) cluster of anti-Eliotic activity. Perhaps the most public statement comes in Lewis’s “*De Descriptione Temporum*” — his inaugural lecture at Cambridge, first published in 1955. Here, he credits Eliot with initiating a radically new age in poetry. According to Lewis, all other poets, at all other ages of human history, wrote to be understood; Eliot writes not to be understood, but to baffle. In support of this claim, Lewis adverts to a recent colloquium on Eliot’s “Cooking Egg”:

² Here, Lewis seems to resurrect an argument from 1939’s *Personal Heresy*: “The ‘Dirty Twenties’ of our century produced poems which succeeded in communicating moods of boredom and nausea that have only an infinitesimal place in the life of a corrected and full-grown man. [...]” He concludes that though we may praise the poet’s skill, we should not allow them to influence us: “Wash their feet, and I will praise your humility: sit at their feet, and you will be a fool” (ibid.).

Here we find seven adults [...] whose lives have been specially devoted to the study of poetry discussing a very short poem which has been before the world for thirty-odd years; and there is not the slightest agreement among them as to what, in any sense of the word, it means. (9)

Lewis is careful to avoid any direct judgment here, and in fact goes out of his way to avoid it. His discussion of Eliot begins and ends with protestations of indifference: “nothing is farther from my purpose than to make any judgement of value” and “I am not in the least concerned to decide whether this state of affairs is a good thing, or a bad thing” (9).

He protests too much: the posture of indifference is clearly more rhetorical than actual. Put simply, for one self-identified classicist and traditionalist to accuse another of a radical break with the universal poetic tradition does, in fact, imply judgment. Similarly, it is hard to avoid the cutting suggestion concealed in other asides contained in the lecture: “In music we have pieces which demand more talent in the performer than in the composer. Why should there not come a period when the art of writing poetry stands lower than the art of reading it? Of course rival readings would then cease to be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and become more and less brilliant ‘performances’” (9n). Thus some virtuoso rhapsode—Cleanth Brooks or Russell Kirk or John Crowe Ransom—might be able to create some aesthetically pleasing interpretation of *The Waste Land*—but the critic, not the poet, is the real artist.

The second, and more aggressive, statement comes in Lewis’s 1954 poem, “A Confession.” Here he puts his defense of the Stock Response—articulated in his *Preface to Paradise Lost* and his letters to Katharine Farrer—into verse. The poem begins by repeating Lewis’s standard attack on “Prufrock.”

For twenty years I’ve stared my level best
To see if evening—any evening—would suggest
A patient etherized upon a table;
In vain. I simply wasn’t able. (ll.3-6)

We must of course be cautious of identifying the speaker of any poem with its author; however, the similarity of “A Confession” to Lewis’s consistently expressed beliefs is sufficient to greatly blur the line between Lewis the poet and Lewis the poetic persona. Our speaker, poor and unpoetical as he is, simply cannot see the horror all around him; thus far, Lewis echoes Chesterton’s earlier poetic parody, “To a Modern Poet.”³ But Lewis extends his critique farther than

³ This poem, even more abusively parodic than Lewis’s, exaggerates modern poetic conceits—including the arbitrary breaking of lines—to absurdity. Two stanzas of Chesterton’s semi-nonsense poem might have suggested Lewis’s opening. With

Chesterton had. Instead of the arresting, compelling, and unnatural images and ideas of modern poetry, Lewis confesses that he is

Compelled to live on stock responses,
Making the poor best that I can
Of dull things . . . peacocks, honey, the Great Wall, Aldebaran,
Silver weirs, new-cut grass, wave on the beach, hard gem,
The shapes of horse and woman, Athens, Troy, Jerusalem.

There is a double irony at work here. For Lewis, as we have seen, the Stock Response is anything but poor and dull—it is flatly necessary for civilized human life. Moreover, the things that the Stock Response treats with—grass and wave and woman—are in themselves wonderful and beautiful. Only those with imaginations already poisoned would see such things as “dull”—as was Lewis’s old acquaintance who once dismissed “a real weir under a real moon as ‘conventional’” (*Preface* 56). Here, the “silver weir” returns, with its accompanying wonders, to be seen again with a clear eye.

The original title of the poem, “Spartam Nactus,”⁴ gives further support to this anti-Eliotic reading. This title is an allusion to the Latin proverb *Spartam nactus est, hanc exorna*. Sparta is your lot—make it beautiful. Lewis suggests that we who dwell in the ‘merry middle earth’ ought to do the same: to reenchant reality, rather than disenchant or ‘sordidify’ it, as he accuses Eliot of doing in near-contemporary letters (see *Letters* III.426-7). Somewhat distressingly, most critical commentary on the poem in the last two decades has sought to diminish the impact of Lewis’s critique—or to deny it altogether. Charles Huttar warns us against an interpretation of the poem that would lead us to “Lewis’s supposed antipathy to modern poetry and to Eliot in particular” (“Prufrockian Vision” 6; see also Huttar’s argument in “Lifelong Love Affair” 94-7); a decade later, Malcolm Guite would make the same point in almost the same language (294). There is, however, nothing ‘supposed’ about Lewis’s antipathy to Eliot; the critique of Lewis’s “Confession” crowns and completes nearly two decades’ worth of attacks on Eliot and his influence on the modern imagination.

meaningless line breaks removed, they read: “But I am very unobservant. I cannot say I ever noticed that the pillar-box was like a baby skinned alive and screaming. I have not a Poet’s Eye which can see Beauty everywhere” and “Now you mention it, of course the sky is like a large mouth shown to a dentist, and I never noticed a little thing like that” (*Collected Poems* 41).

⁴ The title given in the 2015 *Collected Poems* (388) is almost certainly an error. *Spartam nactus es* is a recognized proverb, one quoted directly by Lewis in “The Idea of an ‘English School’” (18). *Spartan nactus* is gibberish. For discussion of the editorial errors that may have resulted in the misspelled title, see Quay 76-79.

THE BISHOP'S COMMISSION

Lewis's relationship with Eliot was not, however, one of unrelieved hostility. There are some signs of softening in the 1950s. But the watershed moment in Lewis's relationship with Eliot came in early 1959, when the Archbishop of Canterbury empaneled the Commission to Revise the Psalter, inviting both men to take part. Lewis and Eliot became reacquainted at a Commission meeting in April of that year. As Hooper notes, "much had changed since their last meeting" (*Companion and Guide* 91). Both were, by now, old men; both were recently married—and, under the auspices of the Archbishop, a late friendship bloomed. Carpenter notes that the two were "soon on the friendliest of terms" (246); Hooper goes so far as to suggest that part of the description of friendship in *The Four Loves* may have been based on their newfound relationship (*Companion and Guide* 654). They began to correspond again. Lewis now addressed his letters to "My dear Eliot"; this style of salutation was reserved for Lewis's closest friends (see Brown 16). The letters from this period are packed with warm sentiment and cordial detail: discussion of dining together with their wives, praise of each other's labor, agreement on social-political questions. Lewis once confided to Hooper that, once he met Eliot, "he found it easy to 'love' him" (Hooper, *Companion and Guide* 91). Finally, as Brown notes, Lewis entrusted his *A Grief Observed*—perhaps his most intimate and personal work—to Eliot's publishing house (18). By all indications, the friendship that began in the late 1950s would endure until Lewis's death in 1963.

Even after Lewis and Eliot had come to be friends, however, Lewis's distaste for (and criticism of) Eliot's poetry endured. Lewis's *Experiment in Criticism*, published in 1961, repeats many of the same critiques that Lewis had been making for three decades—more gently, perhaps, but no less firmly. Thus we find that Lewis's discussion of modern poetry largely repeats his arguments in "*De Descriptione Temporum*": while much of the meaning of ancient poetry could be expressed in prose,

modern poetry, if it 'says' anything at all, if it aspires to 'mean' as well as to 'be', says what prose could not say in any fashion. To read the old poetry involved learning a slightly different language; to read the new involves the unmaking of your mind, the abandonment of all the logical and narrative connections which you use in reading prose or in conversation. You must achieve a trance-like condition in which images, associations, and sounds operate without these. Thus the common ground between poetry and any other use of words is reduced to almost zero. (97)

As a natural consequence of this, Lewis notes, modern men do not read modern poetry; the critic of modern poetry needs an art “hardly less exalted” than that of the composer (98). This is, again, the argument of “*De Descriptione*.” The critique is softened ever so slightly, and the unflattering direct reference to Eliot removed—but, beyond that, the argument remains unchanged.

But the *Experiment*'s criticism of Eliot is not limited to rehashing a nearly decade-old argument. Lewis begins his experiment by distinguishing the literary from the vulgar reader. The latter are “entirely dominated by fashion. They drop the Georgians and begin to admire Mr Eliot [...] at exactly the right moment” (8). It is hard to avoid the half-suggestion that a significant portion of Eliot's popularity was due to simple modishness—and that a great number of Eliot's admirers are, in fact, mere vulgar readers. Moreover, towards the end of the volume, Lewis asserts that the “great critics” (among whom Eliot must certainly be numbered) are a fundamentally useless class—incapable of improving the appreciation “of any scene, chapter, stanza, or line” (122). Other writings lend further support to the ideas that Lewis's *literary* dislike of Eliot continued, no matter what may have happened to his personal hostility. So, for instance, in a letter to Laurence Whistler from late October of 1961, Lewis critiques some of Whistler's poetry as “too Eliotically gnostic” (III.1293); when he met Hooper in the summer of 1963, he admitted that he “never liked Eliot's poetry, or even his prose”—however much he had come to value Eliot's friendship (see *Letters* II.1030)! Finally, there is good evidence that Lewis never abandoned his attachment to and defense of the Stock Responses. In his discussion of the medieval cosmos in the posthumously published *Discarded Image*, Lewis lingers on the ideas, attitudes, and emotions—that is, the Stock Responses—associated in the medieval mind with the various planets. These planetary archetypes “need to be seized in an intuition rather than built up out of concepts; we need to know them, not know about them” (109). Once the proper Stock Response is lost, it can only be retrieved with difficulty. It is clear that, while Lewis may have abandoned the fight against Eliot, he never abandoned the principles that had first motivated it.

AN EXPERIMENT IN CRITICISM: *THE WASTE LAND* AND *THE SILVER CHAIR*

Lewis's crusade against Eliot is thus, as we have seen, one of the defining features of his career as a literary critic. We are justified in wondering whether it similarly impacted his career as a literary artist. As a full examination of Lewis's fiction in relation to Eliot is, of course, far beyond the scope of this paper, I propose to examine the anti-Eliotic echoes in merely one literary work: *The Silver Chair*. It is a natural enough place to start. With the other *Chronicles*, *The Silver Chair* is the product of the early- and mid-fifties—and thus directly contemporary with Lewis's mature anti-Eliotic phase.

To understand Lewis's aims in writing *The Silver Chair*—and, indeed, the entire *Narnia* series—it will be helpful to consider his own statements about the use and value of good storytelling: his appreciative comments on the works of others give us some sense of what he valued in his own. In *The Lord of the Rings*, “heroic romance, gorgeous, eloquent, and unashamed, has suddenly returned at a period almost pathological in its anti-romanticism” (“The gods return” 99). Lewis notes that, though the book foregrounds pain and loss—so much so, in fact, that “anguish is [...] almost the prevailing note”—it does so without succumbing to the squalid monstrosity of modern literature. Frodo's spiritual and physical torment is not “as in the literature most typical of our age, the anguish of abnormal or contorted souls: rather that anguish of those who were happy before a certain darkness came up and will be happy if they live to see it gone” (102). Those who knew Lewis well can hardly have missed the implicit suggestion. Tolkien is praised, in large part, because he is the anti-Eliot: the champion of romanticism against Eliot's anti-romanticism, and the exemplar of health and sanity against the chaos and squalor of *The Waste Land*, *Prufrock*, and the Sweeney poems.

The exaltation of healthy normality returns us to the question of the Stock Response. As we have seen, Lewis believed that one of the chief purposes of story was to train the reader, young or old, in the appropriate Stock Responses. As he notes in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, the old poets knew that they were to teach as well as delight, and poetry was “one of the chief means whereby each generation learned, not to copy, but by copying to make, the good Stock responses”; because of this “We need most urgently to recover the lost poetic art of enriching a response without making it eccentric, and of being normal without being vulgar” (57). A good story can do just that, “strengthen[ing] our relish for real life” and serving to re-enchant everyday reality (“On Stories” 100). Here again, *The Lord of the Rings* was for Lewis the story *par excellence*. In his 1955 review of *Lord of the Rings*, Lewis had written “If you are tired of real landscape, look at it in a mirror. By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it” (“Dethronement” 16). This rediscovery sends us back to our real lives “not relaxed but fortified” (“The gods return” 103). Tolkien has—like the speaker of the “Confession”—done his poor best with dull things; the result is a world transformed.

Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* are of course incapable of rivalling the sheer artistry of *The Lord of the Rings*. But Lewis could and did imitate what he took to be Tolkien's aims. Sayer notes that “The Narnia stories show a complete acceptance of the Tao, of the conventional and traditional moral code” (317); Ward suggests that he wrote the series—at least in part—to counteract Eliot's impact on the modern imagination. Eliot had infected a rising generation with

his “Saturnocentric” universe; “[t]o Lewis’s Mind, ‘a heap of broken images’ was itself an image and one that needed breaking” (206). This could be done by restoring the stock archetypes to their proper place.

We see this clearly when we turn to *The Silver Chair*. Like all of the Narnia books, *The Silver Chair* exults in the stock descriptions of experience: glittering armor, sizzling sausages, golden sun and silver moon, and all the rest. On Lewis’s own terms, this is itself enough to place the book in an anti-Eliotic tradition. But the book may go well beyond defending the Stock Response. Lewis had hoped to call the work *The Wild Waste Lands* (see *Letters* III.229-30; the title is preserved in the sixth chapter, “The Wild Waste Lands of the North”). Could this be a deliberate reference to Eliot’s most famous poem? Given Lewis’s decades-long engagement with Eliot, it seems unlikely that the similarity in title was purely accidental—and indeed further similarities in plot, themes, and imagery suggest that it was not. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of the two works. *The Waste Land* begins with Eliot’s famous inversion of Chaucer:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (ll. 1-4)

This would have been, for Lewis, a chaotic and destructive image—inverting the properly trained emotions and disrespecting the high creation of God. It is no surprise, then, that Lewis offers a much more conventional use of the pathetic fallacy at the beginning of *The Silver Chair*: “It was a dull autumn day and Jill Pole was crying behind the gym,” and, a paragraph later, “That was why Jill Pole was crying on that dull autumn day on the damp little path which runs between the back of the gym and the shrubbery” (*Silver Chair* [SC] I.1, 2). *The Waste Land*’s dullness, vegetation, rain, and seasonal reference are all here—but restored to their proper relations; the two passages form a chiasmic frame around a depiction of the Experiment House’s cruelty. The opening paragraphs of *The Silver Chair* thus form something like a “stock” reimagining of the first lines of *The Waste Land*.

More striking parallels emerge as the works proceed. Both works center around a quest for spiritual and physical renewal; both quests drag the heroes through ruined cities and appalling wastes. Time and again, Lewis’s adventure story seems to echo Eliot’s poetry. Lewis’s wasteland, like Eliot’s, features a heap of broken images: when the heroes come to the giant’s bridge, they find the remnants of decaying old carvings. But Lewis’s broken images are shown to be hideous and worthy of rejection: “Mouldering faces and forms of giants, minotaurs, squids, centipedes, and dreadful gods” (VI.74). Lewis’s Queen of Underland casts a powder on her fire to create a “sweet and drowsy

smell" in an attempt to enchant the heroes; the smell "grew stronger, and filled the room, and made it harder to think" (XII.151). In "A Game of Chess," the lady's perfumes "Unguent, powdered or liquid—troubled, confused / And drowned the sense in odours" as they mingle with the firelight from her candles (ll.88-9). Eliot gives us his "Unreal City" in which innumerable crowds pass under the half-light, exhaling "sighs short and infrequent" (ll.60, 64); Lewis gives us his "queer city" in which "endless crowds" of Earthmen, each one "as busy as it was sad" make "a soft, murmuring noise" as they move about under a mournful light (X.129). Other examples could be multiplied: both works make use of the motifs of death-in-life and burial alive and birdsong; both feature important images of solitary figures fishing on banks, metal thrones, and more. Finally, if Ward is correct that the *Chronicles of Narnia* were written to correct the "Saturnocentric" Eliot, it is surely significant that Father Time, slumbering in the witch's underground kingdom, was originally called Saturn (see Ward, 199-200).

Arguably the most interesting point of connection, however, comes in the uses the two works make of *Hamlet*. Eliot's poem alludes twice to the play: the women in the pub quote Ophelia (ll.172-3), and the poem ends with a fragment of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*: "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe" (l.432). The inclusion of Kyd's play links *The Waste Land* to Eliot's "Hamlet and his Problems": there, Eliot argued that Shakespeare's reliance on Kyd accounted for the failure of his play. But in Lewis's rebuttal of Eliot, he had rejected the importance of Shakespeare's reliance on Kyd and advanced a more traditional picture of Hamlet as "a pale man in black clothes" (Lewis, "Hamlet" 104). It appears as though Lewis's construction of Prince Rilian is dependent on these conversations. We meet Prince Rilian as "a young man with fair hair [...] dressed in black"—and, as the narrator tells us, he looks like Hamlet (X.131). Later, the prince is described as "pale as putty" (XI.142); and of course he is, like Hieronymo and Hamlet, recurringly mad. His primary quest—lest we forget—is vengeance for a murdered parent. We see here a remarkable convergence of probabilities. On its own, any one would rightly be dismissed as mere coincidence. But the collective weight of these possible echoes makes it, to my mind, unlikely. It has been suggested by others that Lewis at times repurposed images and ideas drawn from the poetry of Eliot (see Huttar, "Prufrockian Vision," and Schakel 122). If it be accepted that he has done so elsewhere, why not here?

The possibility of an intertextual relationship between *The Silver Chair* and *The Waste Land* is rendered considerably stronger by the certain intertextual relationship between *The Silver Chair* and anti-Eliotic portions of *The Pilgrim's Regress*. In many ways, the children's adventures in Narnia are a re-presentation of John's adventures. The entire quest in *The Silver Chair* is set in the Northern

wastes—and in the *Regress*, the North is the home of anti-Romantic reaction, the enemies of Lewis’s ‘sweet desire.’ As we saw earlier, many of the northern characters (Gus Halfways, the Clevers, and the Pale Men) are connected to Eliot. But if the *Regress*’s North is rooted in Lewis’s critique of Eliot, *The Silver Chair* is rooted in the *Regress*’s North. *The Silver Chair* follows the *Regress* in featuring northern giants—and in making the giants initially mistaken for mountains (*Regress*, 48; *Silver Chair* 81). In the *Regress*, John and Vertue find the Eliotic Pale Men by journeying onto the desolate northern plateaus:

On every side of them the tableland seemed perfectly flat, but their muscles and lungs soon told them that there was a slight but continuous rise. There was little vegetation—here a shrub, and there some grass: but the most of it was brown earth and moss and rock, and the road beneath them was stone. The grey sky was never broken. (93)

The action of “The Wild Waste Lands,” takes place in a strikingly similar environment: Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum “turned their faces to the North. The vast, lonely moor stretched on and up as far as they could see” (VI.68); later, the northern landscape becomes “a desolate, rocky plain” (VI.80) and, indeed, a “tableland” (VII.84, 89). In *The Silver Chair*, the Queen of Underland argues that all good things in the world—the sun and sky and Aslan himself—are mere copies of her own nightmare world, just as the Giant Spirit of the Age had done in the *Regress* (SC XII.152-158, compare *Regress* 61). Both books feature a northern serpent, slain by the heroes in strikingly similar ways. In the *Regress*, John is able to kill the ice dragon—but only after the serpent has looped and coiled around him and stared with “eyes full of cruelty” directly into his face (*Regress* 200); Rilian’s serpent does almost exactly the same—and with similarly monstrous eyes (SC XII.160). Finally, both works remind us of the perpetual danger posed by the foes of sweet desire and joy. History tells John that the Three Pale Men are merely the last in a long line of servants of Ignorantia and Superbia; the “older and wiser” Narnians realize that the Queen of Underland is akin to White Witch herself. “Those Northern Witches always mean the same thing,” the oldest dwarf reminds the audience, “but in every age they have a different plan for getting it” (XV.200-201).

Thus there are strong connections between, on the one hand, *The Silver Chair* and Lewis’s complex of anti-Eliotic writings, and *The Silver Chair* and *The Waste Land* on the other. How, then, should we interpret all this? Several interpretations of the book have been offered: in a 1961 letter, Lewis suggested that the book was ultimately about “the continued war against the powers of darkness” (III.1245); Michael Ward has suggested that it is largely an exploration of the lunar archetype (127-39). All this may well be true. But whatever else it may be, it is clear to me that the book is in part a response to the Eliot and his

poetry. *The Silver Chair* seeks to restore the disintegrated imagination of *The Waste Land*, to take the scattered fragments and restore them to a coherent unity.

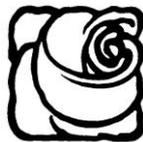
CONCLUSION: THE FIRE AND THE ROSE

Thirty years ago, Stephen Medcalf suggested that Eliot and Lewis were antitypes of each other: Eliot chose the “way of negation” and “a ruthless self-anatomizing in relation to self and consciousness”; Lewis chose the affirmative way (144). I hope to have demonstrated that this antitypical relationship was, on Lewis’s part, deliberately chosen: that, throughout his career, he positioned himself in conscious opposition to Eliot and his works. One question remains: given this abundant, consistent, and well-attested body of evidence, what are we to make of those scholars who are unaware of—or even deny—Lewis’s habitual (and largely one-sided) battle with Eliot? For this is the dominant note in the field. One need scarcely look to find works of scholarship highlighting the similarities in their literary criticism (Logan 32-3), poetic technique (Guite 294), and general worldview (McGrath 39-40); whole books and collections have been written that treat the two men as representatives of the same general movement (Brown, *Lion in the Waste Land*; and Tadie and Macdonald, *Permanent Things*).

But perhaps this justifiable in the end. Whatever their differences in the field of poetics and literary theory, Lewis and Eliot were linked by their Creed and Confession, and had much in common in their politics, social criticism, and approach to modernity. As Lewis himself admitted in the *Preface to Paradise Lost*, “I agree with him about matters of such moment that all literary questions are, in comparison, trivial” (*Preface* 9). What united the two men was sufficient to set them apart from the dominant spirit of the 20th century—and still more the dominant spirit of the 21st. The passage of time has eroded the once-sharp differences between them, and—though it is instructive to recognize the differences—it is perhaps only natural that we should treat them together. What Eliot describes in *Little Gidding* has in fact come to pass:

These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.

The affirmations of Lewis and the negations of Eliot have, we may hope, led their authors to the same end, where the fire and the rose are one.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackroyd, Peter. *T.S. Eliot*. Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Bailey, George. "My Oxford Tutor, C.S. Lewis." *The Reporter*, April 23, 1964, pp. 37-40.
- Brewer, Derek. "The Tutor: A Portrait." *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table and Other Reminiscences*, edited by James T. Como, Macmillan, 1979, pp. 41-67.
- Brown, Janice. *The Lion in the Waste Land: Fearsome Redemption in the Work of C.S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and T.S. Eliot*. Kent State UP, 2018.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their Friends*. Houghton Mifflin, 1979.
- Chesterton, G. K. "To a Modern Poet." *The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton*, Dodd and Mead, 1932, pp. 40-42.
- Eliot, T.S. *Christianity and Culture*. Harcourt Brace, 1948.
- . *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*. Harcourt Brace, 1991.
- . *For Lancelot Andrewes*. Faber and Faber, 1970.
- . "Hamlet." *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode, Harcourt Brace, 1975, pp. 45-49.
- . "Introduction." *All Hallows' Eve*, by Charles Williams, Eerdmans, 1981, pp. ix-xviii.
- . *The Letters of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, vol. 5: 1930-1, Faber and Faber, 2014.
- Green, Roger Lancelyn, and Walter Hooper. *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*. Harcourt Brace, 1974.
- Guite, Malcolm. "Poet." *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 294-310.
- Hooper, Walter. *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
- . "Preface." *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1969, pp. vii-xx.
- Huttar, Charles A. "C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, and the Milton Legacy: The *Nativity Ode* Revisited." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 44, no. 3, fall 2002, pp. 324-48.
- . "C.S. Lewis's Prufrockian Vision in 'The Great Divorce.'" *Mythlore*, vol. 22, no. 4 (#86), 2000, pp. 4-12.
- . "A Lifelong Love Affair with Language: C.S. Lewis's Poetry." *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis*, edited by Peter J. Schakel and Charles A. Huttar, U Missouri P, 1991, pp. 86-108.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.
- . *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C.S. Lewis, 1922-7*. Edited by Walter Hooper, Harcourt Brace, 1991.
- . *The Allegory of Love*. Oxford UP, 1936.
- . *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*. Edited by Walter Hooper, 3 vols. HarperSanFrancisco, 2004, 2004, and 2007.
- . *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Don W. King, Kent State UP, 2015.
- . "De Descriptione Temporum." *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1969, pp. 1-14.
- . "The Dethronement of Power." *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, edited by Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro, U of Notre Dame P, 1968, pp. 12-16.

- . *The Discarded Image; an Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Cambridge UP, 1964.
- . *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*. Clarendon Press, 1954.
- . *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge UP, 1969.
- . "The gods return to earth: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*." *Image and Imagination*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 99-103.
- . "Hamlet: The Prince or The Poem?" *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1969, pp. 88-105.
- . "High and Low Brows." *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1969, pp. 266-79.
- . "The Idea of an English School." *Image and Imagination: Essays and Reviews*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 3-20.
- . "On Stories." *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, edited by C.S. Lewis, Eerdmans, 1966, pp. 90-105.
- . *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason and Romanticism*. 1958. Wade Annotated Edition, Eerdmans, 2014.
- . *Poems*. Edited by Walter Hooper, Harcourt Brace, 1964.
- . *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. Oxford UP, 1961.
- . "Shelley, Dryden, and Mr Eliot." *Selected Literary Essays*, edited by Walter Hooper, Cambridge UP, 1969, pp. 187-208.
- . *The Screwtape Letters*. Macmillan, 1951.
- . *The Silver Chair*. Collier, 1970.
- , and E.M.W. Tillyard. *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*. 1939. HarperOne, 2017.
- Lindskoog, Kathryn. *Finding the Landlord: A Guidebook to C.S. Lewis's Pilgrim's Regress*. Cornerstone Press, 1995.
- Logan, Stephen. "Literary Theorist." *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward, Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 29-42.
- McGrath, Alister E. *The Intellectual World of C.S. Lewis*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
- Medcalf, Stephen. "Language and Self-Consciousness: The Making and Breaking of C.S. Lewis's Personae." *Word and Story in C.S. Lewis*, edited by Peter J. Schakel and Charles A. Huttar, U of Missouri P, 1991, pp. 109-44.
- Quay, Grayson. "The Façade of Impenetrable Mysteries": C.S. Lewis, Literary Modernism, and the New Physics." M.A. Thesis, Georgetown University, 2019.
- Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*. Crossway Books, 1988.
- Schakel, Peter J. *Imagination and the Arts in C.S. Lewis: Journeying to Narnia and Other Worlds*. U of Missouri P, 2002.
- Tadie, Andrew A. and Michael H. MacDonald, editors. *Permanent Things: Toward the Recovery of a More Human Scale at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Eerdmans, 1995.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- Ward, Michael. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*. Oxford UP, 2008.

BEN REINHARD is an Associate Professor of English at Christendom College. This is his second essay for *Mythlore*.