

Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016

Volume 10 *A Collection of Essays Presented at the Tenth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends*

Article 78

6-5-2016

C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers: Correspondence

Marsha Daigle-Williamson

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Daigle-Williamson, Marsha (2016) "C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers: Correspondence," *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016*: Vol. 10 , Article 78.

Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol10/iss1/78

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis & Friends at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inklings Forever: Published Colloquium Proceedings 1997-2016* by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.

C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers: Correspondence

by Marsha Daigle-Williamson

Marsha Daigle-Williamson (Ph.D, University of Michigan) is Professor Emerita at Spring Arbor University where she taught English. She has translated sixteen books from Italian and is an active member of the Dante Society of America. Her book *Reflecting the Eternal: Dante's "Divine Comedy" in the Novels of C. S. Lewis* was published in 2015.

The correspondence between C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers began in 1942 and continued until her death in 1957. We have 61 letters from Lewis to her in Walter Hooper's collection, which are either responses to her letters or which call for responses from her. So, although we have only 21 of Sayers's letters to Lewis in Barbara Reynolds's four-volume collection, we know there were more. The letters demonstrate a relationship that evolved over the years from that of being professional colleagues to that of being close friends. There are three main areas of discussion in these letters: requests of each other to write something specific, comments on each other's writings, and discussions mostly on literary topics, especially Dante.

Sayers began the correspondence in the spring of 1942. She was already well-known for her detective novels and plays and was organizing a series of books called *Bridgeheads* that were intended to prepare readers for post-war social and moral reconstruction. The first in the series was her own book *The Mind of the Maker* (1941). She was aware of Lewis's writings up to that point, having already recommended *The Problem of Pain* to two of her correspondents the year before,¹ a book that she continued to recommend as "a brilliant book"² and as "excellent."³

1 See Dorothy L. Sayers, June 5, 1941, and November 26, 1941, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 2, 1937-1943: From Novelist to Playwright*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, preface P. D. James (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), p. 265, p. 325. See also Sayers's letter on January 19, 1956, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 4, 1951-1957: In the Midst of Life*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, preface P. D. James (Cambridge: Carole Green, 2000), p. 269.

2 Ibid., May 10, 1943, p. 400.

3 Dorothy L. Sayers, May 31, 1948, *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 3, 1944-1950: A Noble Daring*, ed. Barbara Reynolds, preface P. D. James (Cambridge: Carole Greene 1998), p. 375.

Sayers was reportedly also enormously impressed by *The Screwtape Letters*. Perhaps because Letters XVIII and XIX in particular contained insightful remarks on love and marriage,⁴ she wrote Lewis to ask if he would contribute to her *Bridgeheads* series on this topic.

Lewis was likewise already aware of Sayers when he received his first letter from her. Although he did not care for *Gaudy Night* because he did not like detective fiction,⁵ he had read and very much enjoyed *The Mind of the Maker*. His response on April 1942 to her request opens in his typical direct manner: “But why not write the book yourself?” The reason he gave was that “every word you wrote showed that you had the book in your own head and just straining at the leash.” He suggested she could do it as a novel or a treatise, advising, “I hope you’ll do the novel. It wd soften the blow.”⁶ (Walter Hooper believes that although Lewis did not contribute a book, “much of what Sayers asked him to say probably went into the character of the unhappily married Jane Studdock.”⁷)

He suggested in his first letter to her that they could perhaps meet sometime. A few days later in his second “refusal letter” to a very persistent Sayers about writing for her series, he took the initiative to invite her to lunch in early June.⁸ This would be their first meeting.

Although Lewis turned down her writing invitation this time, it was the first of many back and forth invitations to write something specific. One year later, she wrote Lewis a letter that included a mock memorandum in Screwtape style signed by “Sluckdrib” that she asked him to deliver, presumably to Screwtape, because “you have entrée into the Lowest Official Circles [of Hell].”⁹ Sluckdrib revels in “a growing tendency to consider the Bible as Literature”¹⁰ but also complains about the deleterious effect of some religious plays on atheists. At the end of her letter after this memo, Sayers complained to Lewis that

4 See Walter Hooper, *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, 3 vols. (New York: Harper Collins, 2004–2007), vol. 2, p. 1941.

5 Despite this fact, Lewis must have looked at the novel again because he writes her on September 25, 1954, “Harriet’s sonnet in *Gaudy Night* may have come from Milton. Did you know that when you wrote it?” *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 508.

6 C. S. Lewis, April [?], 1942, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 515.

7 Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 4.

8 Lewis, April 6, 1942, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 516.

9 Sayers, May 13, 1943, *The Letters*, vol. 2, p. 409.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 410.

“there aren’t any up-to-date books about Miracles.”¹¹ He wrote back four days later and included a copy of his sermon “Miracles” that had been published a few months earlier.¹² It was a condensed or miniature version of his eventual 1947 book *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. Although he says in this letter, “I’m starting a book on Miracles,”¹³ Walter Hooper believes, “it is likely that Sayers’s observation about the lack of book on miracles was exactly the encouragement Lewis needed to write his own book on the subject.”¹⁴ When the book was published, Sayers expressed her appreciation for it to Lewis, saying that “it seems to me to be admirably well argued,”¹⁵ and she also thanked him for his kind mention of one of her books in it (Lewis had written, “How a miracle can be no inconsistency, but the highest consistency, will be clear to those who have read Miss Dorothy Sayers’ indispensable book, *The Mind of the Maker*.”¹⁶).

Two days after Charles Williams died, Lewis wrote to ask Sayers to contribute to a volume for Williams that had been meant to celebrate his return to London after the war but that turned into a memorial volume because of his unexpected death. The contributors to this volume, mostly on the art of writing, were all Inklings, with Dorothy being the only “outsider.”¹⁷ Lewis’s esteem for Sayers’s writing¹⁸ plus her friendship with and admiration for Williams after reading his *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943) are probably what opened the door for her to be one of the writers for this volume. Lewis told her she could write “on any subject you like.”¹⁹ Responding one week later, she indicated she wanted to write “something arising out of the Dante job I am doing.”²⁰ Six months later, in December, she apologized for her “sprawling 60-page colossus”; since this was the first time she was writing anything on Dante, “all my excitement is apt to come out with

11 Ibid., p. 413.

12 C. S. Lewis, “Miracles,” *St. Jude Gazette*, October, 1942.

13 Lewis, May [30?], 1943, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 577.

14 Hooper, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 573, n. 103.

15 Sayers, June 2, 1947, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 304.

16 C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 98.

17 T. S. Eliot had also been invited to write an essay for this volume because of his relationship with Charles Williams, but he never did.

18 In his preface to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), Lewis describes her as a “professional author” (p. vi).

19 Lewis, May 17, 1945, *The Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 650.

20 Sayers, May 25, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 148.

a rush, like bottled beer that has stood too long in a warm place.”²¹ When she received Lewis’s editing suggestions for cuts at the end of that month, she wrote, “I am very glad you like the Dante paper—and also that you like the best bits that I was . . . best pleased with.”²² Her revised essay reached Lewis in early January 1946, so we now have . . . And Telling You a Story: A Note on *The Divine Comedy*” included in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (1947). Four years later, Lewis, the re-reader par excellence, would write to her that he was reading her Dante essay again “with great enjoyment.”²³ (She later asked Lewis permission to reprint the essay in her *Further Papers on Dante*.²⁴)

It was a different story when Lewis asked her a few months later to contribute to a series of booklets that would constitute a library of Christian knowledge for young people.²⁵ Although he had told her she could pick her own topic, she declined because she objected to writing things only for edification purposes, what she called “things in which intellect and imagination are not united by the assessment of the will.”²⁶ “Anything I write,” she says, “which is not the expression of some apprehended truth which I am bound to communicate, is . . . a sin against truth.”²⁷ Three days later in another letter to buttress her point about the integrity of the artist, she even referred to one of Lewis’s own characters in her argument: “The corrupt artist in *The Great Divorce* . . . turned from serving the work and making the work serve him, and no longer paints because he is summoned to express and communicate, but for some other reason.”²⁸ Two years later she also declined a request by Lewis to write a letter or an article about the topic of women’s ordination in the Anglican Church because, according to Lewis, “the defense against the innovation must if possible be done by a woman.” The job description he gave for that task was “ANGLICAN (woman): [with] effective dialectical powers: established literary reputation essential.”²⁹ Although she agreed with Lewis that such ordination could cause an unnecessary barrier with other churches,³⁰ she never did write anything on that topic for a journal or newspaper.

21 Sayers, December 3, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 2, p. 176.

22 Sayers, December 24, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 2, p. 182.

23 Lewis, November 9, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 994.

24 Sayers, April 4, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 221.

25 Lewis, July 23, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 721-22.

26 Sayers, August 5, 1946, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 257.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 255-56.

28 Sayers, August 8, 1946, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 258.

29 See Lewis, July 13, 1948, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 860-61.

30 See Sayers, July 19, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, 387-88.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

Lewis felt free as well to decline her invitations. In the fall of 1949, when she asked him to write a preface for Helmut Kahn's book *Encounter with Nothingness: An Essay on Existentialism*, which was part of her *Bridgeheads* series, Lewis's response was quite clear: "I would'n't [*sic*] dream of writing a preface" because "I know (and care) little about the Existentialist nonsense."³¹

In tandem with these requests to write something, the letters between Sayers and Lewis often discuss and comment on each other's lectures, articles, or books. In early spring 1943, Lewis wrote to congratulate her on her address to the Public Morality Council.³² He called it "perfect—i.e., there's nothing one would wish added or removed or deleted."³³ Two months later, he wrote to Sayers about the advance copy she sent him of *The Man Born to Be King*, her series of twelve plays on the life of Christ that had been broadcast at monthly intervals from the end of December 1941 to October 1942, some of which overlapped with Lewis's own broadcast talks that began on August 6, 1941, and would later become *Mere Christianity*. He called her series "a complete success," saying that he read it with tears in spots, and affirmed, "I expect to read it times without number again."³⁴ This was not a whimsical or hyperbolic statement. Two and half years later, he wrote to her that he was re-reading the book, saying, "It wears excellently."³⁵ Later he wrote to her in 1955, "I am, as always in Holy Week, re-reading *The Man Born to Be King*. It stands up . . . extremely well."³⁶ When she sent him a copy of her 1945 lecture "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil,"³⁷ he responded, "Thanks . . . for

31 Lewis, November 9, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 995.

32 Sayers's talk, "Six Other Deadly Sins," was delivered on October 23, 1941.

33 Lewis, March 18, 1943, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 564. Two years later he again remarked on his "delighted enjoyment" of that lecture. See Lewis, May, 17, 1945, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 650.

34 Lewis, May [30?], 1943, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 577.

35 Lewis, November 7, 1947, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 811.

36 Lewis, April 6, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 593. See also his remark about this in his eulogy for Dorothy L. Sayers: "For my part, I have re-read it in every Holy Week since it first appeared and never re-read it without being deeply moved." "Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, eds. Owen Barfield and Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, 1988), p. 93.

37 Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil," *Publications of the English Goethe Society, New Series 15* (1946), 1-20. It was delivered on February 22, 1945.

giving me a great deal of pleasure—and knowledge.”³⁸

Sayers also wrote Lewis in praise of his writings. During the six months between December 1945 and July 1946, perhaps because she was now better acquainted with Lewis because of their work together on the Charles Williams’s volume, she sent letters with comments about some of his novels. Sayers admitted to “an unregenerate affection for the ‘old furry people’” in *Out of the Silent Planet*.³⁹ Lewis said he was “exceedingly glad you liked *O. S. Planet*” and thanked her “for the *errata*” that she—ever the careful reader—had also sent along.⁴⁰ She also made reference to *Perelandra* as well when she commented that if “all this atomic stuff” might blow up the earth, it “might upset the inhabitants of Malacandra and Perelandra, whose orbits would presumably be displaced, making extra work for the Oyérsu [using the correct plural for ‘Oyarsa’].”⁴¹ In another letter he thanked her “for the kind things you say about ‘Grand Divorce’ [*sic*].”⁴² In terms of *That Hideous Strength*, her praise did not preclude honesty. Although she said that “the book is tremendously full of good things,” she added, “perhaps almost too full.” Commenting on the “good things,” she felt that “The arrival of the gods [eldils] is grand . . . and the atmosphere of the N.I.C.E. is superb. Wither is a masterpiece. . . . And the death of Filistrato is first-class. . . . Mr. Bultitude of course is adorable.” She also highlighted “the marvelous confusion of tongues at the dinner. And the painful realism of that college meeting.” On the other hand, she additionally offered, “I’m afraid I don’t like Ransom quite so well since he took to being golden-haired and . . . on a sofa.”⁴³

When she read a copy of the *Arthurian Torso* (1948), which includes Lewis’s commentary on Charles Williams’s Arthurian poems, she told Lewis, “How thankful I am to have it as a guide to the poems. . . . You have made sense and good order out of it.”⁴⁴ She

38 Lewis, August 19, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 737.

39 Sayers, December 3, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 177.

40 Lewis, July 29, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 729.

41 Sayers, December 3, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 177.

42 Lewis, January 22, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 700.

43 Sayers, December 3, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 177. She also said—but not to Lewis—she was irritated by “the half-hearted attempt made at one point to connect him [Ransom] with the Fisher King on the strength of the wound in his heel.” September 9, 1946, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 264. A year later, she wrote, “I cannot forgive C. S. Lewis for equating his Ransom with the Fisher King through that very artificial link of the wound in his heel.” June 26, 1947, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 309.

44 Sayers, October 22, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 400-401.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

proceeded to give it to a friend and met someone else who had found Lewis's commentary very valuable and reported to Lewis, "These are the only two mice I have so far had the opportunity of catching for you, and I lay them at your feet."⁴⁵

In 1956 when he sent her a copy of *Till We Have Faces*, she told Barbara Reynolds that in "The Psyche story . . . [Lewis] has done the woman . . . very well, I think, bearing in mind that it was rather bold of him to attempt it."⁴⁶

Her overall assessment of Lewis's writings in 1948 was "I find most of his books very illuminating and stimulating."⁴⁷ In terms of his apologetics, Sayers commented that "Lewis is magnificently ruthless with people who do set out to produce what purports to be a logical argument [and then commit logical errors]. . . . He is down on the thing like a rat; he is God's terrier, and I wouldn't be without him for the world" and "he is a tremendous hammer for heretics."⁴⁸

This assessment did not change over time but she came in the end to prefer his fiction, telling Reynolds, "I think one gets the best of Lewis not in the apologetics . . . but in the three novels and in the Narnia fairy-tales in which Christ appears as a talking Lion, and even the girls are allowed to take active part in the adventures."⁴⁹ She later added, "The girls, on the whole, are given as much courage as the boys, and more virtue (all the really naughty and tiresome children are boys)."⁵⁰ In general she concluded that "Lewis has a remarkable gift for inventing imaginary worlds which are both beautiful and plausible."⁵¹

In terms of discussing literary issues and other authors, both Lewis and Sayers pepper their letters with spontaneous allusions to and quotations from English, Latin, French, and Italian authors (as well as the Bible) that were in easy reach. Beginning at the end of 1949,

45 Sayers, December 31, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 414.

46 Sayers, September 5, 1956, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 328. This is quite high praise given that only nine months earlier she had told Reynolds, "I like him [Lewis] very much, and always find him stimulating and amusing. One just has to accept the fact that there is a complete blank in his mind where women are concerned." Sayers, December 21, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 263. She had much earlier written, "I do admit he [Lewis] is apt to write shocking nonsense about women and marriage." May 31, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 375.

47 Sayers, May 31, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 375.

48 Sayers, July 10, 1947, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 314.

49 Ibid.

50 Sayers, February 10, 1956, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 271.

51 Sayers, December 21, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 264.

however, their discussions shifted almost entirely to Sayers's writings about and translations of Dante and his *Divine Comedy*. Sayers early on described her problem with Dante: "If one once gets a taste for Dante, one is liable to become a Dante-addict. He acts like a drug—or rather, like an attack of rabies; the people who are bitten rush madly about biting all their friends."⁵² This was not a problem for Lewis, who already considered Dante his favorite poet.⁵³ When her translation of the *Inferno* reached him in November 1949, there was a flurry of letters to her. Lewis responded after reading the first nineteen cantos, "You have got (what you most desired) the quality of an exciting story. . . . Notes & maps excellent." According to him, "the untiring quality and inexhaustible cleverness . . . fill me with astonished admiration. Your version of any passage will always be *one* [italics original] of the things I shall take into account in trying to understand any difficult place: and that . . . [is] saying a lot."⁵⁴ This high praise, however, was also accompanied by his gentle assessment that "the metrical audacities are nearly all effective," and as for her colloquialisms, "I approve a great many of them."⁵⁵ Four days after finishing his reading of her *Inferno*, he wrote, "There is no doubt. . . . It is a stunning work. . . . *Brava, bravissima*."⁵⁶ She responded to this input, saying, "I have had a lot of nice letters about the *Inferno* but I think yours is the very nicest, because you understand so well what the thing's about, and what a translation aims at." Showing her respect for his expertise she added, "Provided people like you" approve it, "I shall feel that I am at any rate on the right lines."⁵⁷ Lewis continued the discussion in a letter the following week about the metrics in Dante and in particular about her translation of the "*orazion picciola*" by Ulysses in *Inferno* 26.117 as "little speech." Lewis objected that this translation "conjures up vicars and bazaars!"⁵⁸ It was a small point but it rankled Lewis, and he brought it up again in another letter two days later.⁵⁹

As for Sayers's first book of literary criticism on Dante in 1954, Lewis's assessment was enthusiastic: "Your *Introductory Papers* have

52 Sayers, July 25, 1946, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 249.

53 See C. S. Lewis, "Dante's Similes," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, coll. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 76.

54 Lewis, November 11, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 996.

55 Ibid.

56 Lewis, November 15, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 997.

57 Sayers, November 18, 1949, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 465.

58 Lewis, November 21, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 999-1000.

59 Lewis, November 23, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 1001.

given me a regular feast. . . . It is a lovely book Every essay and nearly every page enriched me,”⁶⁰ he says, and he lists a number of specific examples with their page numbers: “P. 97 is you at your very best. . . . P. 122 at the end of that essay is first-class.” But with his typical honesty, he also adds that “On P. 115, I have my only grumble”: he objected to her diction in the phrase “evolving in the direction of perfectibility.”⁶¹ Although he had earlier raised questions about her interpretation of which things she considered comic in Dante, Lewis wrote to her again a week later, saying, “I’ll fight to the death for your lighter and freer view of D. [Dante] against the outer world.”⁶²

As for her translation of the *Purgatorio*, which did not appear until the summer of 1955, Lewis had said beforehand, “I look forward very much to going up and round the terraces [of the *Purgatorio*] with your guidance,”⁶³ and again later, “our tongues are all hanging out for the *Purgatorio*.”⁶⁴ This may have been due to the fact, as Lewis shared with her, that the *Purgatorio* “is perhaps my favourite part of the Comedy.”⁶⁵ But the long wait was worth it. Lewis’s assessment was that “Your *Inferno* was good, but this is even better.” As he typically did, Lewis listed out specific things he appreciated, saying that her note on *Purgatorio* 31.60 “is a masterpiece” and he took “especial pleasure to see the metrical licenses.” His overall conclusion was that “it makes one hungry for your *Paradiso*.”⁶⁶ He ended the letter, “With deep congratulations,” addressing her with a title in Old French “*grante translateuse*.”⁶⁷ As Sayers continued working on her translation of the *Paradiso*, she wrote to Lewis, “I shall probably approach you when it comes to launching the *Paradise*, for permission to quote your pregnant words on Dante’s style.”⁶⁸

When Sayers’s second book of Dante criticism, *Further Papers on Dante*, came out in 1957, Lewis wrote her, “I think this book even better than the first.” His letter did not include the same kind of list

60 Lewis, November 14, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 523-24.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 526.

62 Lewis, November 22, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 529.

63 Lewis, December 16, 1953, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 387.

64 Lewis, April 6, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 594.

65 Lewis, December 16, 1953, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 387.

66 Lewis, July 31, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 634.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 635.

68 Sayers, August 8, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 252-53. Unfortunately, that never occurred because Sayers finished only 20 cantos before her death, leaving Barbara Reynolds to complete the other 13 based on Sayers’s notes and to see its publication in 1962.

INKLINGS FOREVER X

of specifics this time because he was recovering at home with muscle spasms in his back and the book was back at Cambridge. He had, however, earlier gone through the book thoroughly: “with all the lines in the margins—all prepared for the ‘very judicious letter.’ . . . There were dozens of good and really illuminating things which I can’t remember. I’d like to go through the whole thing with you.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately that proposed session never happened because of Sayers’s unexpected death at the end of that year.

Although they were writers of different kinds, Lewis and Sayers were lumped together during the late 1940s and the 1950s—for good or ill. When Lewis was on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1947, the article describes Lewis as belonging to “a growing band of heretics among modern intellectuals: an intellectual who believes in God,” and lists Dorothy Sayers as one of that band.⁷⁰ Kathleen Nott’s book, *The Emperor’s Clothes*, in 1953 was, according to the subtitle on the cover, “An Attack on the Dogmatic Orthodoxy of T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, & Others.” Nott singles out and couples Lewis and Sayers, often in the same sentence like Bobsey twins, fourteen times in her book, saying that Sayers is “Lewis’s fellow-thinker”⁷¹ and “his literary status may be compared to that of Miss Sayers.”⁷² Lewis wrote Sayers on December 16 of that year, “I see we have been in the pillory together,”⁷³ which no doubt gave him great pleasure. She responded a week later that she had not read the Nott book: “Why should one pay good money to hear one’s self abused?”⁷⁴ Even recently the two have been linked as “comrades-in-apologetics” by Philip and Carol Zaleski.⁷⁵

There came a shift in their relationship in 1954. Although their letters generally continued to focus on literary topics and each other’s writings, their letters demonstrate a lighter, more playful and personal tone. Up until this point the tone of their letters was that

69 Lewis, June 25, 1957, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 860-61.

70 “Oxford’s C. S. Lewis, His Heresy: Christianity,” *Time*, September 8, 1947, p. 65. The article is found on pp. 65- 74. The other two mentioned were T. S. Eliot and Graham Greene.

71 Kathleen Nott, *The Emperor’s Clothes* (London: Heinemann, 1953), p. 284.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 256.

73 Lewis, December 16, 1953, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 387.

74 Sayers, December 21, 1953, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 117.

75 Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015), p. 314.

Proceedings from the Francis White Ewbank Colloquium

of professional colleagues who respected each other and shared the same Christian faith. Sayers had accepted an invitation for lunch in February that year, and Lewis's March letter, which referred to some of her poems and to "your delightful visit," included his poem "Evolutionary Hymn."⁷⁶ Sayers, having met Lewis's brother Warnie, was now reading and enjoying his book, *The Splendid Century*.⁷⁷

Up until this time Lewis had addressed his letters to her as "Miss Sayers," and her letters were addressed first to "Mr. Lewis" and then to "Dr. Lewis" after 1946 when Lewis was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Divinity.⁷⁸ Lewis took the initiative in June to ask her, "Call me Jack as others do."⁷⁹ By September of 1954, Lewis was addressing his letters to her as "Dear Dorothy" and signing them as "Jack." She responded in kind.

When Sayers felt that Kathleen Nott's book called for a debate, Lewis agreed to her request to join her.⁸⁰ The debate was set for October of that year in London. Although Nott in the end decided not to come,⁸¹ it was an opportunity for Lewis to introduce Joy Gresham to her.

After Lewis sent a notice to Sayers in November of his upcoming change of address to Cambridge,⁸² she apparently sent him a card with an allegorical image. His request for an explanation of the image on what he called her "cryptic card" took the form of a 16-line poem of rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter.⁸³ Two days later, Sayers responded by sending her explanation in a 40-line poem in rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter.⁸⁴

Sayers was unable to attend Lewis's Inaugural Address at Cambridge,⁸⁵ so she insisted that Reynolds go hear it to report on it.⁸⁶

76 Lewis, March 4, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 434-37.

77 See Lewis, March 9, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 438.

78 Lewis was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Divinity by the University of St. Andrews on June 28, 1946.

79 Lewis, June 12, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 488.

80 Ibid.

81 Nott declined in the end since T. S. Eliot's presence at the debate had been the one condition for her attendance, and he was unable to come at the last minute. The debate did occur with her friend G. S. Frazer in her stead.

82 See Lewis, November 30, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 532.

83 Lewis, December 27, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 568.

84 Sayers, December 29, 1954, *The Letters*, vol. 4, pp. 197-98.

85 C. S. Lewis's address, "*De descriptione temporum*," was delivered on November 29, 1954.

86 See Sayers, November 24, 1954, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 179.

When Sayers received the text of his talk six months later, she was startled to see, and quoted in her letter, Lewis's statement, "I read, as a native, texts you must read as foreigners," because on the evening before she said she had thought and said exactly the same thing with a friend.⁸⁷ She signed this letter, "your obliged and appreciative fellow-dinosaur."⁸⁸ Lewis's response two day later, referring to Sayers, Warnie, and himself, asked, "Shd. we someday form a Dinosaurs' Club?"⁸⁹ A few days later, Sayers, repeated the metaphor when she defined, "Dinosaurs like C. S. Lewis and me" to Reynolds as those who "want to get back to studying the work for its own sake . . . [rather than for] spotlighting the psychology of the authors."⁹⁰ In a letter to her two years later, Lewis addressed her as "sister Dinosaur" in the text of the letter.⁹¹

Although his letters to Sayers are fewer in number after 1954, he does share personally significant and private things with her. By August of the following year, he mentions that Joy Gresham is typing some of his responses.⁹² The day before Christmas in 1956, Lewis wrote to inform Sayers of his civil marriage to Joy Gresham on April 23, 1956, and explains, "You will not think that anything wrong is going to happen. Certain problems do not arise between a dying woman and an elderly man."⁹³ However, as things developed, Lewis did fall in love with Joy and after their Christian marriage on March 21, 1957, when Joy was quite ill, he explained to Sayers, "A rival often turns a friend into a lover. Thanatos [Greek god of death] is a most efficient rival,"⁹⁴ and he asks her, "I hope you will give us your blessing: I know you'll give us your prayers."⁹⁵ Her quick response must have been positive and understanding because Lewis wrote a few days later, "Joy and I both enjoyed your letter v. much and thought it full of sweetness and light."⁹⁶ His last letter to her, on September 29, 1957, thanked her for the copy of her translation of *The Song of Roland*, which he called "a good swinging, readable story," but he found it

87 Sayers, April 4, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 222.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

89 Lewis, April 6, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 596.

90 Sayers, April 15, 1955, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. 224.

91 Lewis, July 1, 1957, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 863.

92 See Lewis, August 9, 1955, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 437-38.

93 Lewis, December 24, 1956, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 819.

94 Lewis, June 25, 1957, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 861-62.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 862.

96 Lewis, July 1, 1957, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 863.

“in places too slangy for my taste.”⁹⁷ In this last of his letters to her he shares good news about Joy’s health and his own. It was his last letter because the next thing he would write to praise her would be his “Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers” that he was asked to do for her memorial service.⁹⁸

In assessing these letters in context of their entire correspondence, both wrote letters to a wide variety of correspondents on a daily basis with lively wit and humor that displayed an enormous wealth of knowledge at their fingertips. The biggest difference is that, since Lewis hated writing letters and she loved writing them, his letters tended to be very short and hers very long. Early on Lewis had in fact told her, “You are one of the great English letter writers. . . . But I am not.”⁹⁹ Her response was to chide him, saying, “It was most rash of you . . . to encourage me to write letters because I am only too ready to do so, at great length, on the slightest provocation,—or none.”¹⁰⁰ Lewis later commented to her, “You write such excellent letters that if I were a bad man I should lure you into an epistolary controversy and you wd. find you had written a book . . . without knowing it.”¹⁰¹ On receiving her letter about his commentary on *Arthurian Torso*,¹⁰² he wrote back, “Your letter shines amid the day’s mail like a good deed in a naughty world.”¹⁰³

P. D. James in the preface to the fourth volume of Sayers’s letters, says, “A writer’s correspondence, provided it isn’t written with an eye to publication, is more revealing of the essential personality than any biography or autobiography.”¹⁰⁴ In totality the letters of both Lewis and Sayers are proof of that, and in particular their letters to each other reveal their relationship better than any biography could.

97 Lewis, September 29, 1954, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, 885.

98 See C. S. Lewis, *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1982), pp. 91-95. Although Lewis was unable to attend the memorial on January 15, 1958, at St. Margaret’s Church in London, his eulogy was read by the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell.

99 Lewis, December 14, 1945, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 682-83.

100 Sayers, December 24, 1945, *The Letters*, vol. 3, p. 182.

101 Lewis, July 29, 1946, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 728.

102 See Sayers, December 31, 1948, *The Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 414-15.

103 Lewis, January 1, 1949, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 902.

104 P. D. James, preface, *The Letters*, vol. 4, p. viii.

WORKS CITED

- Hooper, Walter. *C. S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Edited by Walter Hooper. 3 vols. New York: Harper Collins, 2004-2007.
- “Dante’s Similes.” In *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*. Collected by Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
- Miracles: A Preliminary Study*. New York: Macmillan, 1960.
- “Panegyric for Dorothy L. Sayers.” In *“On Stories” and Other Essays on Literature*. Edited by Owen Barfield and Walter Hooper. New York: Harcourt, 1982.
- Lewis, C. S., ed. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947.
- Nott, Kathleen. *The Emperor’s Clothes*. London: Heinemann, 1953.
- “Oxford’s C. S. Lewis, His Heresy: Christianity.” *Time*, September 8, 1947, pp. 65- 74.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 2, 1937-1943: From Novelist to Playwright*. Edited by Barbara Reynolds. Preface by P. D. James. New York: St. Martin’s, 1998.
- The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 3, 1944-1950: A Noble Daring*. Edited by Barbara Reynolds. Preface by P. D. James. Cambridge: Carole Greene 1998.
- The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume 4, 1951-1957: In the Midst of Life*. Edited by Barbara Reynolds. Preface by P. D. James. Cambridge: Carole Green, 2000.
- Zaleski, Philip, and Carol Zaleski. *The Fellowship: The Literary Lives of the Inklings*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015.