

Knowing Good and Evil: T S Eliot and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

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That Eliot did not allow *After Strange Gods* (1934) to be reprinted¹ is well-known, and it is sometimes attributed to some change of mind. But two letters he wrote to Helen Gardner² in the aftermath of the 1960 trial in London in which the publishers of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were acquitted of charges relating to obscenity, show that Eliot was then affirming convictions essentially similar to those set forth in the lectures at the University of Virginia in May 1933. Five years before his death he saw himself as engaged in the same struggle, his attitude towards Lawrence remained 'ambiguous', and the efforts of his own criticism were still against 'evil'.

It was not a response to the reception of *After Strange Gods* but a recognition that the lectures had been under-prepared, that made Eliot reluctant to reprint. While he was preparing the Virginia lectures for the press, as he was required to do by the terms of his engagement, he wrote to Paul Elmer More, who had taught him at Harvard and with whom he was on friendly terms:

I have had to turn to the revision of my Virginia lectures which have to be published in the spring. Again, an unsatisfactory piece of work. A good subject, I think: fundamentally a criticism of the lack of moral criteria – at bottom of course religious criteria – in the criticism of modern literature. But the treatment is very sketchy, and I cannot do anything satisfactory to myself in the time. I should have liked to ask permission to dedicate the small book to you, as I think you would find most of it acceptable; but as I had occasion to touch upon Babbitt's Confucianism, I thought that (even if you did not wholly disapprove of what I said) you might find such incrimination embarrassing. I hope that the book (it is only three lectures) will not let me in for a great deal of controversy – not merely that Hardy is condemned – or that Lawrence appears as a *suppôt de Satan* – but that on a fundamental matter like this I seem to take up an isolated position, and dissociate myself from most of my contemporaries, including Pound, Yeats, Richards, Read.³

¹ Faber and Faber printed 3,000 copies for publication in February, 1934, and a further 1,500 in December 1934. The edition went out of print on 3 August, 1944. Harcourt, Brace and Company published an edition of 1,500 in April 1934.

² Helen Gardner (1908-1986) was in 1960 Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Her book *The Art of T S Eliot*, 1949, was regarded with favour by Eliot. In August 1947 she wrote to John Hayward about a Donne manuscript. Hayward invited her, as he did numerous other people who shared his interest in literature, to tea on 19 August at 19 Carlyle Mansions, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. They discussed the problem of access to the MS of Donne's 'Devine Meditations' which was in the possession of a Mr Merton, who chose to withhold his address, and was understood to ignore letters and refuse access (letter to Hayward, 10 Aug., 1947). It was the first of many such meetings. Eliot shared the flat with Hayward, living there from February 1946 until shortly before his marriage to Valerie Fletcher in January 1957. In her lectures published as *In Defence of the Imagination*, 1982, Helen Gardner gives a brief account of the visits: 'soon Eliot would call in around 5.30 on his return from Faber's for half an hour's pleasant, desultory chat,' p. 151. The MS correspondence between Helen Gardner and TSE at the Bodleian (see below) indicates that after TSE nominated her to the *Sunday Times* to interview him for a feature he invited her to lunch with Valerie and himself at Kensington Court Gardens on 8 September 1958.

³ To More, 7 Nov., 1933.

More, a fellow Anglican,⁴ wrote back sympathetically about the book on 1 June 1934, prompting Eliot to reply that he accounted More ‘one of the few people who would have both the knowledge of literature and theology, and the point of view from which I accept judgement on these lectures.’ Eliot confessed that of the two, theology rather than literature, was for him now more important.

The subject of *The Use of Poetry* was undertaken merely because it seemed the one on which I could write with the minimum of new reading and thinking; the field of *After Strange Gods* was one to which my real interest had turned. I therefore feel more regret at the inadequacy of the latter than of the former.

I am painfully aware that I need a much more extensive and profound knowledge of theology, for the sort of prose work that I should like to do – for pure literary criticism has ceased to interest me. I do not know whether I shall ever have the time to acquire it. And I am not a systematic thinker, if indeed I am a thinker at all. I depend upon intuitions and perceptions; and although I may have some skill in the barren game of controversy, have little capacity for sustained, exact, and closely knit argument and reasoning.

Apart from one intelligent review by Edwin Muir in the *Spectator*, reviewers either praised or damned the book according to their predispositions, without apparently studying the text with any care. The *Times* review was typical of the *Times*, as well as symptomatic of the chasm between “literary” reviewers and “theological” reviewers in the Anglo-Saxon world. The editor, Bruce Richmond, has always been a good friend of mine, and a kind one. But he has a *Times* mind, the Oxford and specifically All Souls’ mind: such minds have one very strong principle and conviction, which is the absence of principle and conviction erected into a principle and conviction itself. And that indeed is the way the country is being governed. Is not the upper middle class to-day almost utterly destitute of principle and conviction? Is there anything that they would, as single individuals and not as a mob, die for?

It is quite possible that I overestimate Joyce, in that context, or use him as a stick to beat the others with. I should not (and cannot remember that I did) consider him as a “moralist”; and to say that his work is penetrated with Christian feeling is not to say that the man is established in Christian principle and conviction. I mean something for which he cannot, morally, be given any particular credit; an accident, if you like, of birth and education from which he draws the advantage. I say nothing as to his *intentions*. And if I condemn him, it would not be *with* Lawrence and Hardy, but in quite another *giro*.⁵

Declaring itself a Primer of Modern Heresy, *After Strange Gods* adopted an adversarial position against a complex of ideas and practices that Eliot almost called modernism. The preface opens provocatively in French: ‘*Le monde moderne avilit [degrades]. It also provincialises, and it can also corrupt.*’ A few paragraphs later there is a reference to ‘a society like ours, worm-eaten with Liberalism’. Calculated to make a stir in the lecture hall, but in accord with a respectable Harvard tradition,⁶ such Liberalism, ‘the absence of principle and conviction erected into a principle and conviction itself’, becomes elsewhere in *After Strange Gods* ‘excessive tolerance’. Since ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919) there had been a development: ‘Tradition by itself is not enough; it must be perpetually criticised and brought up to date under the supervision of what I call orthodoxy.’⁷ In Eliot’s new, theological, world, the good may be the enemy of the best. There are beliefs

⁴ P E More (1864-1937) was in his own right a defender of orthodoxy. He was author of *Christ the Word*, 1927, *The Catholic Faith*, 1931, *Christian Mysticism: A Critique*, 1932, and with F L Cross of *Anglicanism, Illustrated from the Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, 1935.

⁵ To More, 20 Jun., 1934.

⁶ George Santayana (1863-1952) had been a member of the Faculty of Philosophy at Harvard until 1912, and was author of *The Life of Reason*, 1905-1906. He pitted himself indefatigably against liberalism and democracy. Eliot is more discursive, and perhaps more persuasive, about liberalism in *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939), where it is a ‘necessary negative element’ (17), and ‘more clearly illustrated in religious history than in politics’ (16) – in this context liberalism is, as it is in Santayana, to be associated with Reformation Protestantism.

⁷ *After Strange Gods*, p. 62.

too important to be surrendered, even at the cost of personal or class interest, or life itself.⁸ Eliot's rousing words to More anticipate others to the reading public in *The Idea of a Christian Society* after Munich in 1938.⁹

Concerning Joyce, Eliot recapitulates to More, by way of explanation, his argument in *After Strange Gods*. But the condemnation of Lawrence (and of Hardy) stands: Lawrence is a *suppôt de Satan*, a fiend. No discussion is necessary. The bracketing is inevitable. Turn to *After Strange Gods*, and you find generalisations about Lawrence set upon a not very substantial criticism of a story, 'The Shadow in the Rose Garden'.¹⁰ Lawrence's liberalism, here called heresy, is derived from his biography – 'the deplorable religious upbringing which gave Lawrence his lust for intellectual independence: like most people who do not know what orthodoxy is, he hated it.'¹¹

Eliot attributes a number¹² of 'aspects' to Lawrence in *After Strange Gods*. A 'lack of sense of humour', 'a certain snobbery' and (itself in danger of sounding snobbish) 'a lack not so much of information as of the critical faculties which education should give, an incapacity for what we ordinarily call thinking.'¹³ Then there is an 'extraordinarily keen sensibility and capacity for profound intuition – intuition from which he commonly drew the wrong conclusions', and finally, 'a distinct sexual morbidity.'¹⁴ All this is bolted into a makeshift theological framework:

Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity. . . . A man like Lawrence, therefore, with his acute sensibility, violent prejudices and passions, and lack of intellectual and social training, is admirably fitted to be an instrument for forces of good or forces of evil.¹⁵

The reader is left in little doubt about which of the alternatives is applicable. Eliot is not isolated, holding such views. Bertrand Russell who, unlike Eliot, knew Lawrence and corresponded with him, described in a BBC talk in 1952 the decline of their relationship as Lawrence ranted and inveighed in several letters. 'It was only gradually that I came to feel him a positive force for evil.' 'I did not know then that [his mystical philosophy of blood] led straight to Auschwitz.'¹⁶

⁸ c.f. the comment of a prominent spokesman for liberal values, E M Forster, in 1938: 'If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country' ('Credo', *London Mercury*, 38, (Sep. 1938), p. 398).

⁹ 'Had [our society] any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest or the maintenance of dividends?'. 'The choice before us is between the formation of a new Christian culture and the acceptance of a pagan one' etc., *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 1939, pp. 64, 13.

¹⁰ A wife reveals 'to her commonplace lower middle class husband (no writer is more conscious of class distinctions than Lawrence) the facts of her intrigue with an army officer several years before her marriage. The disclosure is made with something nearly approaching conscious cruelty.' But 'the characters themselves . . . betray no respect for, nor even awareness of, moral obligations, and seem to be unfurnished with even the most commonplace kind of conscience.' 'Lawrence is for my purposes an almost perfect example of the heretic.' Pp. 36, 37, 38.

¹¹ p. 58.

¹² The number is given as three, but is possible to count more.

¹³ Lawrence had qualified as a secondary school teacher at University College, Nottingham. Contrast the advantage conferred on Joyce by his Catholic education, according to the letter to More, 20 Jun, 1934. The ascription of snobbery was not forgotten by F R Leavis who, in the *Spectator* (17 Feb., 1961) opined: 'Nothing could be more ridiculous than the one-time orthodoxy that called [Lawrence] a snob.' Although Leavis had published *D H Lawrence Novelist* in 1955, he was not among the expert witnesses at the 1961 trial.

¹⁴ p. 58.

¹⁵ p. 59.

¹⁶ *The Listener*, 24 Jul., 1952, pp 135-6. Russell's argument against Lawrence, made with a flourish seven years after the Nazi horrors were uncovered, is more convincing than recent laboured attempts, such as those of

Eliot also had found critical admiration giving way to revulsion. In the Lawrence of *Aaron's Rod*, Eliot wrote in 1923, 'is found the profoundest research into human nature, as well as the most erratic and uneven writing, by any writer of our generation.'¹⁷ A year after Lawrence's death Eliot characterised him as representative of modernism.¹⁸ In a review of Middleton Murry's *Son of Woman: The Story of D H Lawrence* in the *Criterion*¹⁹ he disagreed that Lawrence's 'mother-complex' was a sign of the times. His

family life, with such consequences to a sensitive child, can hardly have taken place only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. What is peculiar to the time is the way in which Lawrence tried to deal with his peculiarity. That is what is modern, and it seems to me to spring from ignorance. . . . It is by the adoption of a crazy theory to deal with the facts that Lawrence seems modern, and what I mean by "ignorant".

I may make this clearer by instancing a peculiarity which to me is both objectionable and unintelligible. It is using the terminology of Christian faith to set forth some philosophy or religion which is fundamentally non-Christian or anti-Christian.²⁰

Now a Christian of some four years' standing, Eliot recalled in 1931 the respect he had learnt in Unitarianism for the Son and Holy Ghost of Christian orthodoxy. Lawrence breached these codes, these taboos. Murry's comparison of Lawrence with Jesus Eliot found 'strikes cold upon my imagination, though I could have understood a comparison with Rousseau.' Nevertheless Murry's account of Lawrence's modernism is quoted with approval:

There is a great fascination in a completely effected 'idealism', that is, a completely achieved mental consciousness of our natures. To this fascination the modern world is succumbing; this is, indeed, the distinguishing mark of the modern world – that which makes it modern.

With Lawrence Eliot associated Aldous Huxley and Murry himself as 'disciples', but he had a corrective to supply, 'prescription and regime', that 'is only to be found – and in our time with great difficulty if at all – in Christian discipline and asceticism.'

In the 1931 *Criterion* review article Eliot admitted that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was 'one of the novels which I have not read', but he was, surprisingly perhaps, consistently liberal about censorship.²¹ He announced early support of Joyce's *Ulysses*, which could not be published in Britain in 1922, and of which the first unlimited edition was issued in England and America in 1937.²² In the pages of the *Criterion* and the *Nation and Athenaeum* he made common cause with E M Forster and Virginia Woolf against the suppression, on account of its lesbian theme, of M Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness*. On Lawrence's death however, in 1930, Eliot was at pains to announce his disagreement with Forster's obituary in the *Nation and Athenaeum* in tones of aloof distaste that seem to be transferred from Lawrence to Forster: 'Unless we know exactly what Mr Forster means by

Anthony Julius in *T S Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*, 1995, to implicate Eliot in the holocaust through his scattered unideological expressions of anti-Semitic prejudice.

¹⁷ 'Contemporary English Prose', *Vanity Fair*, Jul., 1923.

¹⁸ In the Encyclical *Pascendi Dominica Gregis* (1907), Pius X (r. 1903-14) had denounced modernism as "the résumé of all heresies". Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, OUP, 1996, p. 799.

¹⁹ *Criterion*, Jul., 1931, pp. 768-774.

²⁰ Blake had been similarly diagnosed in 1920: 'What his genius required . . . was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention on the problems of the poet' ('William Blake', *Selected Essays*).

²¹ See my *T S Eliot's Social Criticism*, 1971, pp. 93-95.

²² 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', *Dial*, lxxv.5 (Nov. 1923).

greatest, imaginative and novelist I submit that this judgement is meaningless.’²³ Eliot rated Lawrence considerably lower than did Forster.

Lawrence’s last novel, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, written in Florence in 1927, was published the following year in Florence and Paris. It enjoyed a *succès de scandale* which brought Lawrence and his wife Frieda some much needed income during his final illness. Not until the changes in English law brought about by the Obscene Publications Act in 1959 did any unpirated edition appear in Britain or America.²⁴ In early 1960 Penguin Books decided to make of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* a test case, and printed 200,000 copies of which six were handed to the police to help their consultations with the department of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Michael Rubinstein of Rubinstein, Nash & Co, solicitors acting for Penguin Books wrote to potential witnesses in the trial. His letter²⁵ explained that under the new Act ‘the opinion of experts as to the literary, artistic or other merits of an article may be admitted in any proceedings under this Act either to establish or to negative the ground’ i.e. that publication was in the interests of science, literature, art or learning. Potential witnesses were asked whether (1) they favoured publication and considered it to be justified ‘as being for the public good’; (2) they were willing to give evidence. Eliot was among those who received such a letter, and his response resulted in a meeting with Rubinstein.

At the Old Bailey trial in October 1960 the defence lawyers announced an intention to bring forward thirty-five witnesses. A second cohort of fifty experts was held in reserve. Graham Hough²⁶ and Helen Gardner were the first to testify, and E. M. Forster and Raymond Williams were among those who followed. Eliot was among the reserves and, although prepared and waiting, was not called.

In an undated deposition Helen Gardner wrote:

When I saw the solicitors for Penguin Books over the trial of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, I was told that Mr Eliot was prepared to be called for the defence, and, thinking that the prosecution might well quote passages from *After Strange Gods* at me, I asked whether I might see his brief of evidence. After the trial, at which Mr Eliot was not in fact called, though I gather he was ready in his office to be summoned if necessary, I was asked by Messers Rubinstein, the solicitors, to return the brief and wrote to Mr Eliot to apologize for not having done so at once.²⁷

Eliot replied:

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²³ Quoting this P N Furbank (*EM Forster: A Life (1879 - 1970)*, London, 1979, ii, 163-164) gives Forster’s spirited reply in the following issue of the *Nation and Athenaeum*. At the *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* trial Forster firmly repeated his accolade: ‘The greatest imaginative novelist of our generation.’

²⁴ In America the first unexpurgated and legally sanctioned American edition of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was published by the Grove Press in 1959 following a successful appeal against US postal inspectors. Where others had failed, Grove succeeded with a scholarly edition – there was an introduction by Mark Schorer and a preface by Archibald MacLeish (Jay A Gertzman, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, Greenwood Press, 1989.) In Britain the second Penguin edition, 1961, was supplied with an introduction by Richard Hoggart. Hoggart, author of *The Uses of Literacy*, 1957, who was Senior Lecturer at the University of Leicester at the time he gave evidence at the trial.

²⁵ One to John Hayward, dated 29 Aug., 1960, is referred to here.

²⁶ Graham Hough (1908-1990) was Fellow and Tutor in English at Christ’s College Cambridge. He was the author of *The Last Romantics*, 1949, and of an important critical study of Lawrence, *The Dark Sun*, 1956, which contained a chapter on *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

²⁷ Helen Gardner sent me copies of the letters Eliot wrote to her on 8 and 13 Dec. 1960, and of her explanatory note, sometime in 1972. Subsequently she gave them to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, where they are catalogued as, respectively, Bodleian MS Eng. lett.d.294 #57, #59 and #55.

TSE/AM

8th December 1960

Miss Helen Gardner
St Hilda's College
Oxford.

Dear Miss Gardner

It is courteous of you to write to me about the brief which Mr Rubinstein gave you. I only knew that copies had been given to a few other witnesses before the trial when Professor Pinto²⁸ wrote to me and asked whether he could present his copy to the Library of Nottingham University. I accordingly asked him to send me his copy and I made alterations and deletions. Mr Rubinstein only took some notes in longhand, and a great deal of the document is in his idiom rather than mine. Furthermore, there were some personal details which I was merely explaining to him and did not wish to be elicited in the witness box. I have written to Mr Rubinstein, who has promised me to ask those persons to whom he had given my brief to return it to me.²⁹

In retrospect I am glad not to have been called upon, although at the time I felt rather let down. But my feelings toward Lawrence remain ambiguous and my desire to give witness in his favour was really rather as a protest against other books, such as *Lolita*,³⁰ which struck me as really evil, which much more deserve censoring. The great pity is that the Crown chose Lawrence's book for prosecution. One knows what will happen: once a book has been under the charge of obscenity not even a jury can give absolution, and the book will be bought by thousands out of curiosity who are quite incapable of understanding what Lawrence was after. And I feel pretty sure that I should have disliked Lawrence personally if I had known him.

Yours sincerely

[signed] T. S. Eliot

Helen Gardner:

In reply to his first letter I said that I could not agree with him about *Lolita*, whose literary merit I would happily have defended; but I was very uncertain about Durrell's Alexandria novels,³¹ which Fabers had published, which seemed to me much more perverse than *Lolita* and much less defensible on literary grounds.

Eliot replied:

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TSE/AM

13th December 1960

Miss Helen Gardner
St Hilda's College
Oxford.

Dear Miss Gardner

²⁸ Vivian de Sola Pinto (1895-1969) was Professor of English at Nottingham University 1938-1961. He edited with Warren Roberts *The Complete Poems of D H Lawrence*, 1961, and appeared for the defence.

²⁹ Eliot did permit Pinto to present the copy of the brief that he marked with his annotations to the Library. See below.

³⁰ *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov was first published in 1955 by the Olympia Press in Paris, and subsequently by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

³¹ *Justine*, 1957, *Balthazar* and *Mountolive*, 1958, *Clea*, 1960. According to Durrell, the central topic of the Alexandria Quartet was 'an investigation of modern love'.

Thank you very much for your letter of the 11th. I have now heard from Mr Rubinstein that all of the other witnesses to whom he sent copies of his memorandum of my status [sic] and opinions have returned them, so I have no complaint against him. I am only writing to say how very curious that we should differ so widely about *Lolita*! It did seem to me a book which would make anyone in whom such a perverse tendency was latent more conscious of his craving. And it seems to me a peculiarly undesirable book at a time when so many little girls have been abducted and strangled. As for Durrell's *Alexandria* novels I must confess that I have never looked into them. I very seldom read modern fiction, and my distaste for novels has at least the precedent of Paul Valéry. So, as I say, the fiction published by Faber and Faber mostly escapes my notice. I only read *Lolita* because I had read about it and wanted to see how it compared to my mind with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. And it did seem to me that the latter book came out as something very much more decent. But if you will tell me which you think the most unpleasant of Durrell's novels I will try to read it!

Yours sincerely

[signed] T. S. Eliot

By contrast with the defence, the prosecution in the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial called no witness. The jury of nine men and three women was required to read the novel, and that reading constituted the Crown's primary evidence. Despite the Act's allowance of expert evidence 'to establish *or to negative*' the literary worth of a book (referred to in Rubinstein's letter to potential defence witnesses), the Director of Public Prosecutions decided not to call expert witnesses. Mervyn Griffith-Jones³² for the prosecution explained, 'the Act restricts me to calling evidence only as to the literary and other merits of the book'.³³ Had a call gone out for expert literary evidence against *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the author of *After Strange Gods* would surely have been the star candidate, as Helen Gardner evidently perceived.

Believing itself unable to call the evidence of experts, the prosecution made its case by accentuating the aspects of Lawrence's novel that might give offence to readers of literary, moral and religious sensibility. The suggestion was made that the storyline reprised, and sought to justify, Lawrence's own adulterous action: 'He had run off with his friend's wife, had he not?'³⁴ The suggestion was put to one or two defence witnesses that the novel didn't amount to much more than a dozen passages describing in coarse Anglo-Saxon language 'bouts' of copulation with unremarkable narrative transitions between them. The witnesses disagreed. Forster extended his obituary tribute, saying that 'Lawrence too [like Bunyan and Blake] had this passionate opinion of the world and what it ought to be, but is not.'³⁵ Earlier Helen Gardner averred that

certain passages of it have very great merit indeed, and are among the greatest things that he wrote. . . . Lawrence was attempting to bring home to the imaginations of his readers certain aspects of modern society: the failure of relations between man and man, the degraded condition in which many people live without beauty and without joy, the slavery of all classes, because he doesn't exempt the working, middle or upper classes, from what he calls, to use the phrase of Henry James, "the Bitch Goddess, Success", so men have been remote from each other and remote from the true sources of life and happiness. I think he thought the

³² Mervyn Griffith-Jones (1909-1979) was First Senior Counsel to the Crown at the Central Criminal Court, 1956-1964. He was one of the British prosecuting counsel at the trial of major war criminals at Nuremberg, 1945-1946.

³³ H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Lady Chatterley's Lover Trial with an Introduction*, London, 1990, (referred to as HMH) p. 281.

³⁴ Question put to a defence witness, Joan Bennett, Fellow of Girton College and University Lecturer in English at Cambridge, quoted in C H Rolph (ed.), *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited*, Penguin, 1961, p. 65.

³⁵ HMH, p. 160.

most fundamental thing that was wrong in modern society was the relation between men and women, what we call sex, and therefore that becomes the heart of his book.³⁶

In order to persuade the jury of the novel's noxious qualities, Griffith-Jones drew attention to passages which he read out and commented on. Thus of one on page 219 of the *sub judice* Penguin edition, where Lawrence uses a phrase from Psalm 24, 'Lift up your heads, O you gates . . . that the King of Glory may come in,' he asked, acutely enough, 'Has it occurred to you who is the King of Glory in that passage? It is [Mellors'] penis. That is what he is borrowing the words, the title King of Glory to describe.' And for 'gates' he offers a corresponding female identification.³⁷ Earlier Griffith-Jones asked Graham Hough, 'Do you really tell this court that the inclusion of those words from the Scriptures adds literary merit to the book?' And Hough replied: 'I think it is the only sentence in that passage that has any literary merit at all.'³⁸ Another phrase, 'Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in kindred love', used for the relations of Connie and Mellors in the novel, is identified as lifted by Lawrence from a hymn in Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos*³⁹ 'I do not think,' said Hough in answer to a question, 'the quotation from the hymn is the least irreverent.'⁴⁰

If the subversion of religion was one of the prosecution's arguments, another was the subversion of morals. It was pointed out to the jury that while she was married to Clifford, Connie engaged in an adulterous affair with Mellors. By contrast, Helen Gardner had suggested that the novel evidenced a high-minded view of human sexual relations, and Donald Tytler, Director of Religious Education in the Diocese of Birmingham, had testified that the book was 'a most impressive statement of the Christian view of marriage'⁴¹ 'Is that a book,' the counsel for the prosecution asked rhetorically, 'which suggests a permanent and satisfactory union of love between man and woman, when all they have done before they decide to run away and get married and get their respective divorces is to copulate thirteen times?'⁴²

In an editorial comment after Penguin Books' acquittal, *The Times* announced that Lawrence 'depicts no perverted vice, his characters do not indulge in unnatural practices or abhorrent acts. There is no nastiness in his approach.'⁴³ The jury had reached the right verdict. But in his closing address Mervyn Griffith-Jones had directed attention to the passage on p. 258 of the novel, concerning the 'night of sensual passion', where the language suggests pain and shame, and (Lawrence's words) a 'piercing, consuming rather awful sensuality' where Mellors was a devil and Connie a 'physical slave' ready to 'die of shame'. The reader of imagination, given these suggestions, could scarcely do other than infer some unnatural practice. The prosecution did not name the sexual perversion or perversions, nor indeed does Lawrence in the novel, but such a passage would, it was suggested, 'deprave and corrupt' the

³⁶ HMH, p. 118-119.

³⁷ HMH, p. 293.

³⁸ HMH, p. 219.

³⁹ In the original 'kindred' was 'Christian'.

⁴⁰ HMH, p. 219.

⁴¹ To which the prosecution aptly contrasted Lawrence's words in *A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1930): 'Marriage is no marriage that is not basically and permanently phallic, and that is not linked up with the Sun and the earth' HMH, p. 237. Both Christian and Jewish traditions share a proscription of adultery. Lawrence's 'link up' with the sun and earth, as in animistic and New Age religion, and his 'phallic' emphasis, as in numerous fertility cults, disconnect him from the tradition of 'You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath.' Exodus 20:2-4.

⁴² HMH, p. 290. Permanent union is the requirement set forth in his teaching by Jesus: 'What God has joined together, let man not separate.' Matthew 19:6.

⁴³ 3 Nov., 1960.

readers.⁴⁴ The prosecutor's delicacy was to be amply compensated for by literary exposition in the decade that followed.⁴⁵

The details of the jury's deliberations are not a matter of record, but it would have been possible for them to judge the novel as tending to 'deprave and corrupt' and yet to have sufficient merit as a novel to be published all the same. Hearing of the 'Not Guilty' verdict Lawrence's brother George, aged 88, commented, 'I have followed the case with interest but disagree with the verdict. I don't think this book is fit for young people. These books that introduce a lot of sex I don't like. I had more than one argument with him, but I did not manage to persuade him.'⁴⁶

In a House of Lords debate in November, two weeks after the trial, Lord Teviot⁴⁷ was among those who spoke against the novel. He referred to numerous letters he had received expressing 'a deep sense of shock at this disgusting, filthy affront to ordinary decencies.' His reading of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* had brought a sense that it was 'far worse than anything I could have thought could be published in this country,' unless it were Lawrence's story 'The Man Who Died' (the earlier version of which was called 'The Escaped Cock'). This was about the wanderings of Jesus after his Resurrection, and how he met a priestess of Isis in a temple on the coast of Phoenicia, and how they lived together and she became pregnant. 'Could there be anything more profane, more blasphemous than that?'⁴⁸

A surprising contrast was offered by J A T Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, who in evidence at the trial said that Lawrence portrayed sex in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* 'as something sacred, in a real sense as an act of Holy Communion.'⁴⁹ *The Times* editorial invoked religion, noting that Lawrence had been defended also as a pagan during the trial. But this was irrelevant: 'ours is still supposed to be a Christian Society.'

Speculation concerning what, if he had appeared at the Old Bailey, the author of *The Idea of a Christian Society* would have said under oath is assisted by the survival of Eliot's trial brief. It is extensively annotated, and two or three sentences are literally excised from the foot of a page. The result is a document of considerable interest but also considerable ambiguity. A full presentation and discussion is necessarily held over for some future occasion, but my provisional understanding is as follows. Eliot agreed to be interviewed by Michael Rubinstein because he was and always had been against the censorship of literary works. The defence lawyers had reason to think that, on the record of *After Strange Gods*, Eliot would be the most likely, and authoritative, figure to give evidence for the prosecution to the effect that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* would 'deprave and corrupt', or that it was a low grade piece of literary work. It was therefore a coup for them to have it known that Eliot was prepared, at their request, to testify.

Eliot felt, however, that the solicitor's notes, known as the Trial Brief, of their interview misrepresented him to such an extent that shortly after the trial he called in all copies, except one. This he annotated heavily and allowed to be deposited in the library of

⁴⁴ HMH, p. 217.

⁴⁵ See Frank Kermode's Fontana Modern Masters book, *Lawrence*, 1973, pp. 122-139, which documents the critical discussion and describes the gradations of sexual perversion in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as well as the contextualising ideological apparatus contrived for it by Lawrence.

⁴⁶ HMH, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Formerly Lt-Col Charles Kerr. He was Chairman of the National Liberal Party.

⁴⁸ HMH, p. 44.

⁴⁹ HMH, p. 127. Robinson, author of *Honest to God*, 1963, was a leading representative of theological liberalism. There's a play here on 'real', since a doctrine of real presence has fuelled both faith and controversy over interpretations of Jesus' words at the Last Supper commemorated in the Holy Communion and the Mass. There's another play on 'communion', transposing the sacred transcendent to the human carnal. Why a bishop in a Christian church should adopt such a stance raises some questions; c.f. the comment of the Rev. D Tytler, mentioned above, about Lawrence as 'impressive' spokesman for Christian marriage.

Nottingham University.⁵⁰ The copy temporarily in Helen Gardner's possession, referred to above, would not have had Eliot's annotations, in other words would carry the defence 'slant'. Quite possibly the defence distributed copies to potential witnesses *pour encourager les autres*. And quite possibly they judged that they could not risk Eliot's appearance in the witness box: the would-be spokesman of Christian orthodoxy was unlikely to make an incisive statement of the kind desired. Some fifteen years after seeing it Helen Gardner wrote:

His brief of evidence, which I saw, made quite clear his repudiation of his attack on Lawrence. He was prepared to say that when he spoke of the author [of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*] as 'a very sick man indeed' [*sic*, see below the actual words], he was very sick himself.⁵¹

Eliot's annotations were made after the trial. His intention was not then to edit a document supporting the defence, rather his editorial, indeed censoring, effort was for the record, to correct ascriptions which he considered tendentious or inaccurate. On the front page he wrote in ink: 'The underlinings in pencil are not by me.' But instead of clarity this produces ambiguity. Does Eliot mean the pencil marks, or the words they underline? It is quite possible that the underlinings were made during the course of a telephone conversation by Rubinstein or by some one in his office. When Rubinstein quotes in the Brief from *After Strange Gods* the words are sometimes underlined, even when accurately quoted.

A facsimile with colour-coded annotations, as with *The Waste Land* manuscript, is probably the best way to present this highly ambiguous document for scholarly interpretation. This point I made to Mrs Valerie Eliot, editor of the excellent facsimile *Waste Land*, when seeking her permission to quote from the letters to More referred to above.⁵² Her refusal was accompanied by the news that Faber & Faber is to publish an expanded edition of *After Strange Gods*, though *sine die*. The Trial Brief and letters to Helen Gardner are to be included. Meanwhile, after examining the Brief my inferences are:

- Eliot stood by what he had said in *After Strange Gods*, correcting misquotations and repeating his explanation of why he had allowed it to remain out of print. Its hasty formulations were 'based on inadequate knowledge'.
- Eliot did not say that in 1933 he, not Lawrence, had been spiritually sick.⁵³ Nevertheless the phrase, 'The man's vision is spiritual, but spiritually sick' (*After Strange Gods*, p. 60) is quoted but underlined in pencil, though not for emphasis. The charge of 'distinct sexual morbidity' receives explicit attention, and Eliot states in a marginal note, 'I withdraw the term "morbidity". A sickness against which Lawrence was fighting, and his works are a striving towards health.'
- Eliot did not consider that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* should be suppressed or censored. It contained some 'fine passages of literary art and some inferior parts, e.g. Lady C's father'. He detected here cruelty resembling that in 'The Shadow in the Rose Garden', but not 'scenes of physical brutality and torture'.

⁵⁰ La R 4/5/2 forms part of the D H Lawrence Collection. Permission to photocopy or to quote is routinely withheld by Mrs Valerie Eliot.

⁵¹ *The Composition of Four Quartets*, 1978, p. 55. My reference to this in *T S Eliot's Social Criticism*, p. 94n, I now allow to be incorrect.

⁵² Copies of these letters had been given me by Mrs Eliot herself in 1969. My more recent request was also to quote in full the letters to Helen Gardner, to which she held the copyright, though not to quote the Trial Brief in detail, since I believe it merits special presentation.

⁵³ See Helen Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*, 1978, p. 55 and note (also my *T S Eliot's Social Criticism*, p. 94 and note).

After the trial Edith Sitwell, a friend of Eliot's since his earliest days in London, was scathing. 'The public canonisation of that insignificant, dirty little book *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a signal to persons who wish to unload the filth in their minds on the British public.'⁵⁴ *Lady Chatterley's Lover* accounted for 42% of the group profits for Penguin Books in 1960-61.⁵⁵ None of the expert witnesses received a fee for their part in a unique public spectacle, at once trial, Areopagus and practical criticism. In it representatives of what Eliot called in *The Idea of a Christian Society* 'the conscious mind and conscience of the nation', the 'Community of Christians', pronounced their *nihil obstat* on a text Eliot had, for reasons he made public, consigned to outer darkness; and doing so they demonstrated the motions of a liberalism that offered to eclipse the traditional orthodoxies cherished by Eliot.

⁵⁴ Edith Sitwell, *The Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Greene, 1997, quoted in a review by Jackie Wullschlager, *Financial Times*, 15 Mar., 1997.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 3 Apr., 1962, 18b; 9 May 1962, 17b.