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978-1-107-65943-8 - The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition

C. S. Lewis

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A STUDY IN
MEDIEVAL TRADITION

BY
C. S. LEWIS

*Multa renascentur quae jam cecidere, cadentque
Quae nunc sunt in honore.*



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TO
OWEN BARFIELD
WISEST AND BEST
OF MY UNOFFICIAL
TEACHERS

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PREFACE

It is to be hoped that the purpose of this book is sufficiently explained in the text, and the preface need therefore be occupied with nothing but thanks where thanks, so far as I can recall, are due. But I cannot promise to remember all my debts, and I am well aware, like the philosopher, that 'if I had succeeded in owing more, I might then perhaps have gained more of a claim to be original'.

Of unambiguous debts my first is naturally to the Delegates of the Clarendon Press and to the skilled and patient anonymities who serve them; then to Dom André Wilmart, O.S.B., for careful criticisms of the first two chapters; to Professor C. C. J. Webb for his helpful interest in the second; to the Medieval Society of Manchester University (and specially to Professor Vinaver) for their kind hearing and useful discussion of the third; to Dr. C. T. Onions for subjecting my attempts at Middle English verse to that best criticism in which all distinction between the literary and the linguistic is resolved; and to Dr. Abercrombie, for all that is not erroneous in the Appendix on *Danger*. The first chapter was read and commented upon by Mr. B. Macfarlane and Professor Tolkien so long ago that they have probably forgotten the labour, but I do not therefore forget the kindness.

Thus far my task is easy; but behind these unmistakable creditors I detect a far larger circle of those who have helped me, directly or indirectly, when neither they nor I

Preface

supposed that any such matter was toward. There seems to be hardly any one among my acquaintance from whom I have not learned. The greatest of these debts – that which I owe to my father for the inestimable benefit of a childhood passed mostly alone in a house full of books – is now beyond repayment; and among the rest I can only select. To have lived on the same college staircase with Professor J. A. Smith is in itself a liberal education. The untiring intellect of Mr. H. Dyson of Reading, and the selfless use which he makes of it, are at once spur and bridle to all his friends. The work of Dr. Janet Spens has encouraged me to say more boldly what I saw in Spenser and to see what I had not seen before. Above all, the friend to whom I have dedicated the book, has taught me not to patronize the past, and has trained me to see the present as itself a ‘period’. I desire for myself no higher function than to be one of the instruments whereby his theory and practice in such matters may become more widely effective.

I have tried to acknowledge the assistance of previous writers wherever I was aware of it. I hope it will not be supposed that I am either ignorant or contemptuous of all the celebrated books I do not mention. In writing my last chapter I have regretted that the particular point of view from which I was approaching Spenser did not allow me to make much use of the labours of Professor Renwick and Mr. B. E. C. Davis, or even of Professor de Sélincourt’s noble preface. Such knowledge as I have of Latin poetry would have been more easily and pleasantly acquired if Mr. Raby’s great works had reached me earlier. But when all is said, doubtless I have still failed to mention many giants on whose shoulders I have stood at

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one time or another. Facts and inferences and even turns of expression find a lodging in a man's mind, he scarcely remembers how; and of all writers I make least claim to be αὐτοδίδακτος.

C. S. L.