Editors’ Foreword

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The past decade has seen a surge in interest in the person of C. S. Lewis, with much focus on his work as apologist and also on his literary endeavours in fiction of the fantasy and sci-fi genre. Somehow this shifted the radar beam away from his primary occupation and eclipsed his activity and standing as an academic involved in literary history and literary criticism, as well as his unassuming yet inspirational figure as a Professor. His expertise which led Cambridge to create the Chair of Mediaeval and Renaissance English Literature specially for him, his magisterial lectures, his challenging tutoring style, described as a desire “to impart that learning to students, and not willing to put up with less than a student’s best effort” (Joel D. Heck, “C.S. Lewis, Tutor.” Inklings Forever 4/2004, www.taylor.edu/cslewis), paired with his “stealthy generosity” (ibid.) outline the portrait of an academic with a calling. This calling, in all its multifaceted aspects, was the point that the 2024 edition of the C. S. Lewis conferences held at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași was invited to explore. The title was deliberately related to the concept of re-enchantment, presented in his last academic book, The Discarded Image, as an invocation not to dispose of the past and its perennial values in a modernist (and postmodernist, one could add) hubristic gesture, but rather to (re)connect to the enchantment of literary transcendence.

To understand and assess the effect one must probe and reveal the process through which this came to be. This is the task Historian Paul Michelson sets to himself in the opening paper of this issue to pursue Lewis’s progression from a
quasi-anonymous apparently innocuous Oxford Don to the stature of an intellectual whose voice is heard and has a consequential impact in many areas of public concern, from education to spiritual guidance in times of war, establishing himself as a kind of cultural “brand”, to quote the author, and finally blooming (anthumously as well as posthumously) into a national and international figure. After duly establishing the origin and evolution of the concept of “public intellectual” and tracing its direct association with Lewis’s name no earlier than 1998, Dr. Michelson proceeds to identify and list a number of steps or stages that each signals Lewis’s gradual move towards a fame and prominence unsought for and yet dutifully and responsibly accepted. While they are each given different weight in this process, one can sense how each is chosen for its relevance: from the initial point of departure from an uneventful academic career to steering towards that of controversial author of science fiction prose Out of the Silent Planet (1938), the first piece of a trilogy, to the final one related to the completion of the last novel of the same trilogy That Hideous Strength. A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown-ups (1945), going through the position of lecturer for the Royal Air Force and the BBC, among others, thus addressing an entirely new audience, as he completes his journey in 1944, according to the timeline proposed by Dr. Michelson. The pithy, sometimes humorous, tone in which Lewis’s progress is presented, the richness of detail (also revealed by the extensive list of resources) and the logical objective presentation of the train of events adds to the intrinsic interest of this paper which gives account of how Lewis established himself as a public figure, often standing bitter and unfair criticism from peers, as well as the pressure of being constantly in the public eye, yet consistently remaining his rational benevolent yet undaunted self.

In the second article, “A Critic Who Makes No Claim: Disrupting Lewis’s (In)expert Rhetorical Flourishes”, Dr. Sarah Waters addresses Lewis’s rhetorical use of humility in his Hamlet lecture, challenging the notion that it is merely formulaic or false modesty. Instead, she argues that it is genuine and strategically employed to frame his expertise. The medieval humility topos, rooted in reverence and often used to establish authority while appearing deferential, influenced Lewis’s approach. Critics have noted Lewis’s engaging and audience-centered rhetoric, but often overlook his use of humility as a rhetorical strategy. By acknowledging his own limitations and deferring to the expertise of others, Lewis mirrors medieval rhetorical practices, which disarm
critics and assert his own knowledge. This tradition, used by contemporaries like J. R. R. Tolkien, emphasizes Lewis’s rhetorical sophistication and strategic self-presentation, often misunderstood by modern scholars who take his humility at face value. Waters argues that Lewis’s claim of not being a “true Shakespearian scholar” was both humble and strategic. Critics like Joel Heck suggested that Lewis’s exclusion of Shakespearean drama from his academic writings indicated his lack of expertise. However, the exclusion was a decision by the editors, not Lewis, to allow a fuller focus on sixteenth-century literature. Despite limited formal publications on Shakespeare, Lewis engaged deeply with Shakespearean texts, sparking debates with prominent scholars. His rhetorical stance of humility in his Hamlet lecture, where he likens himself to a child among experts, aims to emphasize a childlike, imaginative approach to literature. This perspective, he argues, reconnects readers with the text’s enchantment and immediate impact, countering the disenchanted, overly critical approaches. Thus, Lewis’s approach seeks to re-enthral readers with Shakespeare’s works by encouraging a direct, wonder-filled engagement rather than a purely analytical one.

Lewis’s inquisitive mind also turned to philosophical matters such as the nature of language and its relation to the reality it is called to speak about. In “C. S. Lewis on Reality and Metaphor. From Myth to History and Back Again”, Estera Federciu points at his separation from the trends and philosophies of his contemporaries, and parallels his position to two of the major theories of the metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual theory of metaphor and I. A. Richards’ interaction theory of metaphor. Considering Lewis’s distinctions between types of reality (physical and non-physical, material and spiritual, sensible and supersensible, natural and supernatural), but also between fact, reality and truth, the author points out that for the British scholar metaphor reveals meaning, rather than creating it. Meaning, revealed by metaphor and arrayed in linguistic form, can be accessed only by reason and imagination combined. However, this meaning can only exist in connection to an inexpressible and incomprehensible transcendent that is looked along, not at, to use Lewis’s own metaphor of “looking along the beam” from his essay “Meditation in a Toolshed”. In this, myth and metaphor serve the same purpose. Although imperfect, as any entity in this world, metaphor deemed apt becomes
the instrument that can bridge the gap between language and reality, as the author concludes.

The fourth paper, by Iulia-Teodora Driscu, is entitled “Lewis’s Laugh at Modernism: The St(ream) of Consciousness in The Shoddy Lands”. Here, she addresses Lewis’s criticism of the modernist movement, and especially of the literary technique of “the stream of consciousness”, which he nicknamed “the steam of consciousness”. Although he never actually used this technique per se, he pretended to do so in the short story The Shoddy Lands, published in 1956. Narrated from a first-person perspective, the story describes an Oxford academic who finds himself in the mind of his friend’s shallow fiancée, Peggy. The narrator experiences a distorted, superficial world filled with clear images of material possessions, reflecting Peggy’s self-centeredness. Through this portrayal, Lewis critiques the modernist emphasis on inner monologue, suggesting it often reveals trivial and narcissistic concerns. The story also incorporates a spiritual dimension with a mysterious knock at the door symbolizing Christ, highlighting the absence of deeper moral and spiritual values in Peggy’s mind. Ultimately, as the author indicates, Lewis argues that the stream of consciousness technique produces a fragmented, superficial portrayal of reality, lacking in true substance and meaning. His critiques of the self-idolatry and secularism he sees in modernist literature are also brought to attention at the end of Driscu’s demonstration.

In “C. S. Lewis Contra Mundum: How the Whole World Groaned and Found Itself Modernist”, Dr. Curtis White also explores Lewis’s pugnacious resistance to Modernism, but in opposition to Modernist poet T. S. Eliot. In The Discarded Image, Lewis urges readers to value the enduring truth, goodness, and beauty of the past, and aims to reawaken a sense of enchantment in them. This mission put him at odds with the disenchantment of his age, especially evident in his literary feud with Eliot. Dr. White mentions Lewis’s introduction to St. Athanasius’s On the Incarnation, which draws a parallel between Athanasius’s defense of orthodoxy against Arianism and Lewis’s resistance to Modernism. Theologically, Lewis emphasizes the Incarnation, believing that ordinary things can convey profound truths, in contrast with Eliot’s more abstract approach. Lewis also criticizes Eliot’s use of John Donne to defend Modernist aesthetics, particularly Donne’s use of “difficult conceits”, which make poetry intentionally hard to understand. Eliot values this difficulty, claiming modern poetry must
reflect the complexity and variety of the age. Lewis acknowledges Donne’s challenging nature but argues it often leads to reader satisfaction through tension and resolution. Conversely, he finds Eliot’s work lacks this balance, offering only endless complexity without resolution. Lewis distinguishes between Donne’s deliberate obscurity and Eliot’s modern poetry, where meaning remains elusive even to scholars. As the author points out, Lewis critiques Eliot’s promotion of difficulty as a primary poetic virtue, suggesting it turns into a vice by being overly prioritized. Lewis argues for the importance of “middle things,” or ordinary pleasures, in poetry, critiquing Eliot’s disdain for them as elitist and disenchanted. He also values the connection between earthly and eternal things, which contrasts with Eliot’s focus on the discontinuity between the two realms. After developing the strong divergences between the two writers, Dr. White ends his paper on a positive note by mentioning that, even if they never came to agree, Lewis and Eliot eventually chose to forget their differences and became friends.

Using the various perspectives on identity, communication and relationship offered by philosophers Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber, psychologist Viktor Frankl, Raluca Ştefania Pelin addresses a particular prose by Lewis, his (theological) fantasy *The Great Divorce*, in her paper “C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*—The Misunderstood Dynamics Between the Self and the Other”. After elaborating from the perspective of two Biblical commandments described as “key” on the salient concepts of *Self* and *(An)Other* and on the relation between *I, You* and *It*, and identifying the divorce of the title as the unbridgeable gap not only between Heaven and Hell, but also between the Self and the Other in the fallen world, the author brings into discussion the unifying perspective effected by viewing the *I* as *Another* and the possibility of extricating oneself from the destructive world of *It* through the relation with an *Eternal Thou* and the human *Thou* through responsible love and genuine communication. Lewis’s novel is then explored, considering the characters—the passengers on the bus—caught in a misguided flawed dynamic of the *I-Thou* pair, that could well be captured in the Sartrian line “Hell is—other people!” Each of the passengers, “loveless and the self-imprisoned”, is trapped in their own individual version of a failed *I-Thou* relation, with an obsessive focus on the *I*, and redemption, as the author concludes, could only come from a total transformation which would include the *Other* viewed as sharing the sameness of the initial Christic image.
In “C. S. Lewis and Derrida: An Exploration”, Dr. Melody Green, offers an overview of Lewis’s and French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida’s different perspectives, while also introducing concepts that they both address and similarities in their views. Scholars often position Lewis’s work as defending authorial intent and absolute Truth, in contrast to Derrida’s deconstructionist views, seen as nihilistic and undermining truth and language. Green claims that this binary opposition misses nuanced connections between the two. Some scholars, like Kyoko Yuasa and David Downing, argue that Lewis and Derrida share significant concepts. They highlight similarities in how both thinkers view language and meaning as context-dependent and subjective. Lewis’s thoughts on reader interpretation and the shifting nature of meaning align with Derrida’s ideas about deconstruction and the fluidity of linguistic contexts. Both explore how meaning arises not from fixed centers but through interaction with shifting contexts, suggesting that understanding involves stepping outside one’s perspective. Dr. Green argues that Lewis and Derrida are also connected through the concept of “wonder”, despite differing interpretations. Derrida’s notion of “aporia”, a form of wonder, signifies encounters with otherness, prompting philosophical inquiry. Lewis, while seldom using the term “wonder”, conveyed similar ideas through the term “joy”, which led him to Christian faith. Both viewed these experiences as pointers to something beyond, though Derrida’s points to otherness and Lewis’s to God. Dr. Green remarks that Derrida and Lewis also both wrote an essay “On Forgiveness” which explore forgiveness beyond personal interactions, considering it in response to atrocities; both reject the notion that excuses negate the need for forgiveness. Derrida sees genuine forgiveness as addressing inexcusable offenses, ultimately deeming true forgiveness impossible. Lewis, however, believes in divine forgiveness and its necessity for Christians, shifting the burden of forgiveness to the forgiver. Derrida views forgiveness through a cultural lens, while Lewis sees it as a relational act with God, illustrating their fundamental philosophical divergence.

Dr. Joyce MacPherson concludes the present issue with a paper, “Nobility from George MacDonald to C. S. Lewis”, drawing on a core concept shared by Lewis and his declared mentor or master, George MacDonald, that of nobility, a value which pervades both writers’ fictional universes. Defining such a complex and multifaceted concept is not easy and implies an excursion into the etymology of the word and its meaning, which has shifted from the literal one
referring strictly to heredity to a more expanded one including the spiritual and moral aspects. The way the concept is developed and expanded by the two writers is traced both in their fiction—mainly in MacDonald’s Curdie novels and in Lewis’s Narnia books—and in their essays and non-fictional prose. With the understanding of nobility as a never-ending process of growth, of aspiration and of becoming a better fit for the kingdom of God, the ultimate image of the monarch to whom all lineage can be traced through Adam and Eve, comes a “cost”, in Dr. MacPherson’s words, which includes accepted pain and sacrifice, service for the others, humility—the wisdom of obedience, an earnest admission of one’s limitations and the willingness to ask for help, as well as the—trained—ability to see beyond appearances in people and in circumstances. In narrative terms, one could also say that nobility is a voyage and an adventure. The paper also interestingly relates nobility with the issue of identity and points out the common standing of the two writers that the role of literature, of fantasy specifically, is to remind the readers of their royal identity and consequently of their nobility that should awaken them to their full potential.

Lewis as historian (literary historian or historian of ideas) and generally his complex and carefully reflected on relation to history is a novel and interesting notion proposed in the volume *Many Times and Many Places. C. S. Lewis and the Value of History* authored by K. Alan Snyder and Jamin Metcalf and reviewed by Dr. Michelson in the final section of this issue.

Preserving the interdisciplinary scope of the conference, the current *Linguaculture* issue brings together some of the papers presented during the proceedings of the 2023 conference of Iasi. The comparative thread discernible in several of the oral interventions at the conference is still present in the final two titles, addressing comparatively core concepts such as wonder, forgiveness or nobility, however, the weight lies with Lewis’s standing—as revealed in various works by the British academic—regarding relevant matters for his contemporaries as much as for himself and undoubtedly for us today: the reversal of values and roles engendered by Modernism (as apparent in various essays and the relation to T. S. Eliot as well as in his prose piece *The Shoddy Lands*), the critic’s (and literary historian’s ... and philosopher’s...) persona in relation to his topic and his public, as well as the projected and perceived level of expertise, as derived from his lecture “Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem” (1942), language and the role of metaphor (as discussed in various essays), or the distressing yet
ultimately restorable relation between the Self and the Others (as echoed in his fantasy *The Great Divorce*). Thus, each of the papers adds to a more refined outline of Lewis’s profile as an academic and contributes to a deeper more comprehensive understanding of his work and its rippling effect into the present.