

Eliot the Adversary

by Mark Anthony Signorelli (July 2012)

T.S. Eliot as Conservative Mentor," Roger Scruton attempts to make the case for Eliot as one of the great representatives of the conservative tradition in the twentieth century. Considering his achievements as both a poet and a critic, Mr. Scruton concludes that Eliot is a vital author, one who has reconciled an allegiance to the broad traditions of Christianity and conservative politics with the unique social conditions of modernity. This assessment of Eliot's achievement and its importance is more or less typical among contemporary Christians and conservatives alike, who generally take Eliot to be "one of theirs," a great champion of tradition and ordered society, a judgment no doubt based on Eliot's own description of himself as a "*classicist* in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion." I think this is a monumental error, stemming from a deep misunderstanding of the art of poetry, and its relationship to the community. When we understand these things properly, I am convinced we will recognize Eliot's influence on our poetic tradition as something perfectly baneful; we will see that he did more to wreck the art of poetry than any other man of his generation, and that for this reason he deserves to stand ahead of Freud, ahead of Nietzsche, ahead of Skinner among the intellectual villains of the modern world.