

C.S. LEWIS AS MEDIEVALIST

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis's life as an academic was concerned with the teaching of medieval and Renaissance literature, though both his lectures and his publications also incorporated his extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin classics. He argued that the cultural and intellectual history of Europe was divided into three main periods, the pre-Christian, the Christian and the post-Christian, which he treated as a matter of historical understanding and with no aim at proselytization: a position that none the less aroused some opposition following his inaugural lecture as professor at Cambridge. Ever since his childhood, his interest in the Middle Ages had been an imaginative rather than a purely scholarly one, and his main concern was to inculcate a sense of the beauty of that pre-modern thought world and its value—a concern that set him apart from the other schools of English language and literature dominant in his lifetime.

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C.S. Lewis's principal job, and his official employment, was as an academic, and in particular as a medievalist. Most of the important things about that topic were moreover said by Lewis himself, in his inaugural lecture as the first Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge, entitled *De descriptione temporum*, "on periodisation". He delivered that lecture on 29 November 1954, almost exactly sixty years ago. It is tempting just to quote it in full, as it says everything about why the Middle Ages were so important to Lewis, and indeed why that era should be so important to us too. Not the least aspect of its importance was that for Lewis, cultural history did not divide into the four periods that we now assume in the West, those of the Classical, the medieval, the Renaissance or early modern, and the modern (the postmodern had not yet been invented); but into three. Those were the Classical, which laid the ground for the next period; that next period, which embraced everything from the fall of Rome to the late eighteenth century; and finally, the modern, which Lewis defined as running from the early nineteenth century to his own present, with all its massive and distinctive cultural changes. He summed up these three ages as pre-Christian,

Christian, and post-Christian, with the biggest break coming between the last two.

That three-period division of cultural history made him the perfect candidate for Cambridge's Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English when it was established earlier that year. It was only the second established professorship in English in the university, and it was indeed established with him in mind—for hardly anyone else, certainly no one of his stature, worked with equal assurance or learning across what were generally taken, and indeed are still widely taken, to be distinct periods. For Lewis, however, the medieval and the Renaissance were not separate periods but a single one; and so to speak of Lewis as a medievalist is inseparable from speaking about him as an early modernist, though I suspect he would have reacted strongly against the term. "Early modern" insists on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as precursors of the modern world. Lewis insisted, on the basis of his deep knowledge, that those centuries were an extension of the thought world of the Middle Ages. He demonstrated that in publications alike on medieval and later literature, on Chaucer and Spenser and Milton, and perhaps most of all in what many people, myself included, think of as the best of his books, *The Discarded Image* of 1964, which is about how people of that single era imagined their world and their cosmos—a vast subject brilliantly distilled. It is still, fifty years on, the best introduction to the subject there is.

The roots of Lewis's interests were however more recognizably what we would call medieval, in Norse myths. From a very young age, these were epitomised for him in lines from Longfellow's translation of Esaias Tegnér's *Drapa*:

I heard a voice that cried
 "Balder the beautiful
 Is dead, is dead!"
 And through the misty air
 Passed like the mournful cry
 Of sunward-sailing cranes. (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 17)

The passage did not have an immediate effect, but it came back to him with the force of an epiphany when he was thirteen, and reading a coloured supplement of the periodical *The Bookman* for December 1911, which also contained Arthur Rackham's illustrations to a translation of Richard Wagner's *Siegfried* and *The Twilight of the Gods*. The lines gave him a sudden idea of "Northernness": gave him, in his own words, a sense of "a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity...I was returning at last from exile and desert lands to my own country" (Lewis, *Surprised* 18; Hooper 5-7). They gave him, in fact, a very

different kind of experience from how most schoolboys of his generation first encountered the medieval. That was much more likely to be grounded in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the late fifteenth-century assemblage of stories of King Arthur and his knights that has shaped almost all English Arthuriana down to the present day. The great explorer, adventurer and political fixer Lawrence of Arabia, who was born ten years before Lewis, carried a copy of Malory around the Middle East with him, by bicycle or by camel.

Lewis first encountered the legends of Arthur when he was about eight, not however in Malory but in Mark Twain's spoof *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*. He did not find Malory until he was sixteen, but then it made a deep impression on him, and for a while it became his favourite reading (Tolhurst). Malory's influence is evident in his work for some years. He wrote, for instance, a poem, now lost, on Merlin and the enchantress Nimue, and another, which survives, on "Lancelot". These do however owe much more to English nineteenth-century poetry, not least Tennyson's, than to Malory. Lewis was trying to write fin-de-siècle despondent mood music in the age of Eliot's modernist *Waste Land*—despondency such as is evident in the line "A dim disquiet of defeated men". He also wrote a prose romance, "The Quest of Bleheris", which features an antihero on a futile quest for a "deathless forever". It was an attempt to write a medieval romance from a modern perspective, but he left it unfinished and unpublished, and no one has ever suggested he should have done otherwise. He was however very excited by Eugène Vinaver's edition of the only surviving manuscript of the *Morte Darthur* after its discovery in 1934, and that led to a game he played with his friend Owen Barfield in which they acted as solicitors in an adultery lawcase brought by King Mark against Sir Tristram. He put Arthurian material to a different kind of use in his science fantasy novel *That Hideous Strength*, in which he puts forward the idea that the world could be redeemed through Merlin and the Fisher King if only medieval Christian values could be recovered. And he deploys Malory in a different way again in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in the closing section on the hunt of the very Arthurian White Stag, where he shifts his style from his own modern English to something modelled directly on Malory, with a series of short sentences typically introduced by "and" or 'so', and a thoroughly fifteenth-century vocabulary:

And they had not hunted long....
 And he led them a great pace....into a thicket where their horses could
 not follow....
 So they alighted and tied their horses to trees...
 "Either we shall find strange adventures or else some great change of
 our fortunes..."...
 "Wherefore by my counsel we shall lightly return to our horses"

“Madam,” said King Peter, “therein I pray thee to have me excused. For never since we four were Kings and Queens in Narnia have we set our hands to any high matter, as battles, quests, feats of arms, acts of justice, and the like, and then given over; but always what we have taken in hand, the same we have achieved.”...

“If ye will all have it so, let us go on and take the adventure that shall fall to us.” (Lewis, *Lion* 167-9)

The last phrase in particular is pure Malory.

His imagination was however rapidly enlarged by wider reading, Classical as well as medieval. The early notes he made for the plot of what in due course became *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* include a sick king who needs the blood of a boy in order to be cured, a motif adapted from the Arthurian Grail Quest (Hooper, *Companion* 5); but when he actually came to write the book, that plot element was superseded by his later reading, in particular of the *Odyssey* of Homer and the medieval *Voyage of St Brendan*, a wonderful account of an early Irish saint’s voyage to the “land of promise”, calling (like Odysseus) at strange islands along the way.

Very clearly, the appeal of these stories for Lewis was overwhelmingly imaginative, not intellectual; and we need to start from that imaginative appeal, as he did, if we are to understand him as a medievalist, for reasons summed up best at end of his *Experiment in Criticism*, on why and how we should read:

We seek an enlargement of our being... We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own. (Lewis, *Experiment* 137)

The task of the good critic, as he saw it, was to enable that seeing and imagining and feeling; and that is what all his critical work aims at doing, whether it was intended for fellow scholars or students. That was why he took lecturing so seriously: many of his published scholarly books are in fact collections of his lectures—*The Discarded Image*, *Spenser’s Images of Life*, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* and others too. He was by all accounts a remarkable lecturer. That emphasis, though, perhaps explains another feature of his published works. The most cursory look at them, whether they were originally written as lectures or not, shows up their scarcity of footnotes. His learning is evident on every page, but it is designed to enlighten at first hearing. He is very free with allusions to or quotations from primary sources, but he rarely supplies references or cites other critics. He writes with a minimal use of terms of technical jargon (much of our own theoretical vocabulary had not indeed been invented then); his scholarship arises simply from the fact that he had read huge amounts of primary material, and had it all in the front of his mind. His writings therefore give the impression, which is not altogether wrong, of being directly

spun off from his immersion in literature. Yet his earliest quasi-academic paper on the Middle Ages was on the subject of “feudalism as a product of social forces” (Bennett, in Watson 56) —not what we might have expected, but a reminder of the kind of wider knowledge he had beyond literature alone.

Lewis went on to build not just on Malory and the Arthurian legends, but on the Classics, both Greek and Latin, and on Classical philosophy. He had studied Classics (“Greats”) for his undergraduate degree at University College Oxford, followed up by a second degree in English; and he then spent a year teaching philosophy there before being elected to a Fellowship at Magdalen. He was thus able to bring to bear on his critical writings not just Homer, Virgil, Dante, Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, but the philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Tertullian and Hugh of St Victor, Humphrey Gilbert and Vives and Vida and Scaliger and dozens of other writers of increasing unfamiliarity. He enlarged his imagination through theirs, in ways that made him uniquely qualified to talk about them, and which he saw as essential to understanding them. When the young A.S. Byatt, now a much respected novelist, went up to him after a lecture to express her interest in continuing the kind of work he had been doing in his *Allegory of Love*, he told her, “You will of course have to learn Greek” (Leith).

That unique range of knowledge, that belief in the need for reading to be a process of learning to share a writer’s imagination, was what he emphasised in his inaugural lecture, in a plea for the reinstatement of what he called “Old Western culture”: the almost-lost knowledge of, and sensitivity to, those pre-Christian and Christian eras. For a key part of the argument of that lecture was that religion *of any kind* was what really made the difference between cultures and periods. To quote him again:

Christians and Pagans had far more in common with each other than either has with a post-Christian. The gap between those who worship different gods is not so wide as that between those who worship and those who do not. The Pagan and Christian ages alike are ages of...the externalized and enacted idea; the sacrifice, the games, the triumph, the ritual drama, the Mass, the tournament, the masque, the pageant, the epithalamium, and with them the ritual and symbolic costumes...crown of wild olive, royal crown, coronet, judge’s robes, knight’s spurs, herald’s tabard, coat-armour, priestly vestment, religious habit – for every rank, trade, or occasion its visible sign. (Lewis, *De descriptione* 7-8)

To understand all that, he needed to respond to those cultures—that culture—with his whole imagination, to live inside it as “his own country”, in ways that scholarship alone could not reach; and he believed that he had achieved that. He used the analogy of a dinosaur, which just by virtue of living in its own skin could reveal to us things about dinosaurs that palaeontologists never could; or of a native Athenian, who if he came back to life could tell us things

about his culture that no modern scholars could grasp, even if he did so unwittingly, since he knew it from the inside. He concludes his lecture:

I stand before you somewhat as that Athenian might stand. I read as a native texts that you must read as foreigners... Who can be proud of speaking fluently his mother tongue or knowing his way about his father's house? It is my settled conviction that in order to read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have acquired in reading modern literature. And because this is the judgement of a native...where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen. I would even dare to go further. Speaking not only for myself but for all other Old Western men whom you may meet, I would say, use your specimens while you can. There are not going to be many more dinosaurs. (Lewis, *De descriptione* 21)

In an article published three months later, Graham Hough, another lecturer in English at Cambridge, described the reaction to that inaugural lecture. Some in the audience, he records, had loved it; but the whole thing had been delivered with Lewis's customary forcefulness, and Lewis was, as Hough noted, "one of the dwindling race of dons ...whose every utterance seems to arouse a powerful reaction, either of approval or indignation" (Hough, in Watson 237). And the indignation was very strong indeed. Hough ascribed it not to the content of the lecture—on scholarly or critical grounds, it was indeed hard to fault – but simply to the fact of Lewis's Christianity, even though (as always in both his teaching and his academic publications) he made no requirement that his audience, or scholars of the medieval more broadly, should share it, just that they should accept its historical validity. The lecture, Hough says, was met with an anti-theological rancour that was itself "of theological intensity" (Hough, in Watson 242-3). The idea that Christianity might in some way be historically defining—those three periods Lewis described as shaping Western cultural history—was anathema within the studied stance of atheism within the Cambridge English Faculty of the 1950s, as too was his insistence on rehabilitating the medieval, of redefining the humanist Renaissance in medieval terms. Much of that debate over period division has gone on unbroken ever since, and Lewis's belief in their historical continuity is still receiving only cautious and intermittent consent. The rebranding of the Renaissance, with its etymology indicating the rebirth of the Classics, as the "early modern", the precursor of our own modern world, has largely taken place since Lewis's time, but it is one aspect of that skewing of history: current scholars of the post-medieval, like the Renaissance humanists themselves, want to mark themselves out as different from the medieval. Lewis, by contrast, took as his point of departure that "the barrier between the [ages of the medieval and the Renaissance] was greatly exaggerated, if indeed it was not largely a figment of Humanist propaganda" —humanist propaganda, because a major element of

how the humanists sold and promoted themselves in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was to proclaim their difference from what had gone before by denigrating it, belittling it, emphasising the differences and ignoring the far greater continuities, in ways that still dominated thinking in the 1950s as in 1550s, and indeed now. As a result, any term for the pre-humanist age—what we call the medieval, though the word had not yet been invented in the sixteenth century—became a term of abuse, and that is indeed still the commonest popular usage of “medieval”: it’s an insult. And Christianity, furthermore, was as much decried by some in the 1950s Cambridge English Faculty as Roman Catholicism had been in the Protestant England of the 1580s. “Humanism” was good; but it was humanism in its modern meaning, with its associations of agnosticism or atheism. Lewis by contrast never hesitated to point out, rightly, how deeply religious the original humanists were. It was not for nothing that Thomas More, the brightest light of English humanism, became a martyr for his faith.

That inaugural lecture picked up an argument that Lewis had been making just a few months earlier, in the introduction to his most substantial single work of criticism, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*. This is a work that it is almost impossible to mention without attaching the epithet “magisterial” to it. It formed volume 3 of Oxford University Press’s series the Oxford History of English Literature, commonly abbreviated as OHEL—or “Oh hell”, as Lewis increasingly called it as his years of labour on it increased. It had been commissioned from him in 1938; his work for it became the basis for the series of Clark Lectures he gave in 1944; and it was finally published in 1954, just before his arrival in Cambridge. Both the length of time it had taken him, and its magisterialness, derived from the fact that he had set out to read every work of literature he talked about, and he talked about a great many that most of us have not even heard of. The Introduction to the book was subtitled “New Learning and New Ignorance”, its argument being that the humanist so-called new learning was one aspect of that humanist propaganda attacking the Middle Ages (that is, it was not nearly as new they claimed); and it was a reminder too that some of that new learning was extraordinarily wrong-headed. The Middle Ages used the supernatural to animate their perception of the universe, and to liven up stories. Some of the greatest intellects of the Renaissance went further, to treat the supernatural as apprehensible magic that could be deployed, actually practised, in ways that take “early modern” thought heading off in utterly the wrong direction as a precursor of our modern world. Lewis’s arguments about the strength of the “old learning” have moreover been confirmed increasingly by more recent scholarship, even in the field of science. A wonderful book by James Hannam, *God’s Philosophers*, demonstrates with something of Lewis’s own clarity and brilliance that early modern scientists—“natural philosophers”, as they called themselves—did not just rediscover some

of what was known in Middle Ages, but actively drew on it to enable their own advances, in cosmology and optics and mathematics.

Unsurprisingly, that heading of “new ignorance” to the first page of the Oxford History volume invited (and received) attack—deliberately invited it on Lewis’s part, one suspects: he was a man who loved a good argument, and if a polemic about the new ignorance could stir things up, so much the better. So before he ever gave his inaugural lecture, that introduction had already infuriated those who believed that civilization had gone into abeyance between the Classics and the humanists, though Lewis, as that introduction also demonstrated, knew far more about both the Classics and the humanists than the great majority—maybe all?—of his detractors. So if the lecture offended those who held that any reference to Christianity as being significant amounted to a dereliction of rational thought, the Oxford History volume attacked their own credentials, by showing the hollowness of their claims that to be working in a humanist tradition was self-evidently superior to the medieval.

It is a row that seems increasingly irrelevant now. We live at a moment in critical theory when New Historicism, the argument—the belief—that all literature reflects the specific political circumstances of the moment at which it was written, and that it is all about power, is giving way to a “religious turn”, the recognition that you can’t get any sound historical grasp on literature if you don’t take the writers’ own religious beliefs seriously. So we are at last beginning to catch up with Lewis—though again, it must be stressed that that process is entirely different from requiring belief. Lewis’s first book, indeed, and the one that established his critical reputation, *The Allegory of Love* of 1936, had its roots in his reading before his conversion to Christianity and is much more evidently secular in focus; but it shows just the same ability as his later books to think himself inside literary forms that at first glance seem deeply alien. It was a book that transformed many people’s perception of medieval literature: it showed us how to read it, how to appreciate it even in what seemed its most difficult manifestation, allegory. The trouble with allegory was—to an extent still is—that readers now assume that they are not going to like it before they have even looked at any; but as Lewis pointed out in his *Experiment in Criticism*, if you start with that assumption, you will always find it fulfilled. Lewis insisted on reading with imaginative empathy and understanding, and showed how it should be done. Jack Bennett, Lewis’s successor in the Chair at Cambridge, who devoted his own inaugural lecture largely to Lewis’s achievements, described *The Allegory of Love* as the work that “stimulated our mental thirst for the Middle Ages” (Bennett, in Watson 58). He entitled his lecture “The Humane Medievalist”, in an attempt to heal the breach Lewis seemed to have made between scholars of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, by writing his predecessor into both camps.

The Allegory of Love made Lewis recognised as a giant of learning, as the scholar who deserved the commission to write the Oxford History volume, and indeed in due course as the right person for the appointment to the new Chair at Cambridge. It also established his independence of any of the current critical traditions. For all his knowledge of Old English and Latin and Greek and French and Italian, and therefore of his inside knowledge of philology, he stood well apart from the linguistic tradition on which the Oxford English school had been founded, and by which it still operated. That was a tradition of Germanic philology; and one might have expected that Lewis would have been deeply committed to its principles, fascinated as he was by language. He was most fascinated, however, by the concepts that words represented—by changes of meaning rather than changes of morphology. His *Studies in Words* of 1960 set out to show those changes of meaning as individual words moved across languages and cultures and time periods: words such as wit, sad, free, sense, simple, conscience and conscious. And if that interest in the historical depth behind words was different from the philological model prevailing at Oxford, it also carried a different emphasis from Cambridge's flagship movement of practical criticism, the close reading of texts. He had still less interest in Cambridge's attachment to modernism, and indeed the new professorship was established partly with the intention of counteracting that, so that the holder could provide more historical and scholarly depth to the department. Lewis's distrust of the modern therefore set him apart from many of his colleagues, as it set him apart from much contemporary literature. He notoriously disliked modern poetry of the T.S. Eliot variety; and certainly his own attempts at poetry, which rhymed and scanned beautifully but did rather little else, could hardly have been more different from Eliot's.

So as a medievalist, Lewis pursued a path very different from the dominant ethos at either Oxford or Cambridge. He also sought his own independent middle way between the painstaking textual recovery of the past developed by the Early English Text Society, with its primary interest in the historical development of the forms of English, and the enthusiasm for the Middle Ages such as fired the medievalizing novels of Sir Walter Scott and the poetry and art of William Morris. He did however share with them, as Jack Bennett noted (in Watson 65), an insistence on the past "as a value". He thus came to establish both a movement and a style of his own. He had both the advantage and the drawbacks of writing in an age when literary criticism was designed to be read by anyone who loved literature, rather as much serious history can be read now, and that meant outside the universities as well as inside. The literature studied in the Oxford English course stopped in the early nineteenth century, since it was taken for granted that everyone was brought up knowing the literature written after that without there being any need to study it. There was a strong view, when the question of having an English course at

Oxford at all was under discussion in the 1890s, that there was no place for English as an academic subject; the most its opponents granted was that it might be useful for women undergraduates who did not have an adequate Classical training, and for second- and third-rate male candidates for the Classics course such as might want to go into schoolteaching, as if such people were lower forms of intellectual life. It was an age too when editions not just of Shakespeare but of Chaucer and Spenser were commonly bought by anyone of reasonable education. Lewis's career made a strong contribution to raising the academic profile of English, demonstrating how it was not enough just to pick up such an edition and read it with untrained, and therefore only partial, enjoyment: for a full understanding, you needed guidance too. Although most of his published academic work derives from his university lectures, they can be read by a much wider audience, in a way that little modern criticism can be, and by people who have very little specialist or scholarly knowledge. They are written, that is, so as to give their readers a sense of what such knowledge might reveal to them.

In the *Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis suggests that the evaluative criticism popular at the time he was writing was less important than this kind of cultural contextualization. He was also, however, keen to make his listeners or readers want to go and read the works he is talking about; or if he does not want you to do that, he tells you why not. This happened not just in his lectures, but in the Oxford History volume too, starting with the notorious division he makes of sixteenth-century literature into the Drab and the Golden—a division that blighted the study of earlier Tudor literature for years. To take a sentence completely at random:

If we sit down to read Rainoldus for a whole morning we shall be disappointed. (Lewis, *English Literature* 313)

So we are let off reading Rainoldus—a writer whom I doubt if many of us had known existed. But Lewis has read him for us, and sums him up in a handful of sentences. He is just as good, however, or even better, at conveying enthusiasm, as he does in some of the very best passages in the volume in the early chapters on Scottish and English literature at the close of the Middle Ages.

Reading Lewis's academic writings can none the less often be a deeply frustrating experience, on account of his reluctance to give references. He stirs your interest, but then does not tell you where you can pursue the ideas further. That makes sense in terms of orally-delivered lectures, but rather less so in their published forms. The Oxford History did have a lengthy bibliography—largely compiled, as is noted in the Preface, by other people; but it is impossible to use as a source for further scholarship other than in the most general way. Any desire to look up the original sources he uses or cites, for instance, especially the sources of his quotations from Latin, is made effectively impossible by his

translation of them into a very good pastiche of sixteenth-century English. He even changes the spelling conventions, such as the interchangeability of the letters u and v, so that it is impossible to tell if what you are looking at is a contemporary translation (as it sometimes is) or Lewis's own. In the preface, he says that he does it "not simply for the fun of it but to guard the reader from a false impression"—presumably, a false impression of modernity; but it is also an effective way to guard his own territory. He does translate longer passages of Latin, but he always leaves single phrases or sentences untranslated, on the assumption that his readers will understand them. And indeed many of them would; but it is still a reminder of just how he envisaged those readers (male, educated at the expensive independent schools), and of how much cultural and educational climates have changed since his time.

A complaint that is increasingly heard now about Lewis's criticism is that it is not scholarly. He did not use the best available editions, and he will on occasion throw out misleading remarks without thinking them through. Again, that may have made for better lectures, and indeed for a livelier reading experience, but it can still be damaging; and even his most considered ideas were sometimes wrong. Perhaps the most notorious example would be the *Allegory of Love*, which does not so much expound the concept of "courtly love" as almost single-handedly invent it. His account includes the patently untrue remark that one of its defining characteristics was adultery: a remark that set medieval literary studies on the wrong path for two or three generations, and we have still not quite got over it.

One reason why we perhaps see some things more clearly now than he did was that we are much more cynical than he was – more cynical than I think people were in the Middle Ages, indeed, but Lewis had a sense of the *ideal* so strong as almost to exclude irony. One aspect of that ideal is mirrored in his comparison of himself to that ancient Athenian, with its assumption that the ancient Athenian in question would be a free white male: a woman or a slave or an outsider would have a very different impression indeed of what life in Athens meant, but Lewis still lived in an age when women or slaves or outsiders barely impinged on his vision of the intellectual life. The critical movement of New Historicism is very poor at dealing with the transhistorical, but Lewis's concern for the larger picture could exclude any more time-specific nuance. Gender studies too have opened our eyes to whole areas that Lewis did not see. Reading any of Lewis's works now results in a mixture of admiration for his learning, genuine enlightenment, and a good deal of frustration. The frustration, however, is offset by his having much larger critical purposes than our own more limited scholarly aims: he wanted to make people, and especially students, better readers, by way of inculcating that sense of transhistorical value. His vision of the ideal has, I believe, more historical force behind it than our own reluctance to credit the good in anything. He stressed not only what a writer said, the logos

or what we might call the discourse element of a text, but also the quality of literature as something *made*, the Greek “poemia”: the created beauty that modern criticism all too often overlooks, along with the beauty of the Old Western cosmos apprehensible above all through Greek and Latin. Perhaps the New Ignorance of which he accused the humanists is as nothing compared with our own.

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