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Defining and Defending the Middle Ages with C. S. Lewis

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Abstract: The scholarly writings of C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) have both inspired the study of the Middle Ages and confirmed the relevance to the humanities that medieval literary texts can have for the present. He was aware that the straitjacket implied by periodisation can blind us to the universal values presented in medieval literature. Qualitative assumptions made about the (usually undefined) Middle Ages include an alienating remoteness, and also a general ignorance, especially of science and technology. Lewis drew attention to the knowledge of astronomy, for example, and pointed out that medieval technical skills in architecture, agriculture and medicine are important for us to be aware about. Three medieval works illustrate this universality with respect to technical skills (the *Völundarkviða*); identity and the self (the *Hildebrandslied*); and the popular love-song (the courtly love-lyric). Lewis cautioned against pejorative terms like 'Dark Ages', noted problems of perspective in assessing *all* pre-modern literature, and showed that earlier works have a continuing value and relevance.

Keywords: C. S. Lewis; periodisation; the Middle Ages; medieval studies; qualitative judgement; universal themes; technology; identity; courtly love

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> "The Chapters between William I (1066) and the Tudors (Henry VIII, etc.) are always called the *Middle Ages*, on account of their coming at the beginning". (Sellar and Yeatman 1930, p. 22)

C. S. Lewis has done more than most though his scholarly writing not only to inspire, encourage, and defend medieval studies, but also to explain and indeed to define them, partly by posing the apparently simple question of where and when the Middle Ages are to be located. He did so in two of his works in particular: first in his Cambridge inaugural lecture of 1954, "*De descriptione temporum*"; and secondly in a series of lectures given in Oxford several times before his translation to the Cambridge Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English, and published as *The Discarded Image* in 1964, just after his death. The opening of his inaugural lecture cites various typical and amusingly ill-conceived attacks on the Middle Ages, perhaps the best of them being Domenico Comparetti's contrast of them with "more normal periods of history." Lewis's other examples note the assumption of a generally superstitious dimness in a period perceived overall as a "great dark surging sea." We are all too familiar with assertions of the mists of medieval ignorance by commentators, who might themselves benefit from some acquaintance with the trivium and the quadrivium; more recent scholars, of course, have provided vigorous defences ((Classen 2017, 2020), and especially (Classen 2019b)). There seems to be somewhat less readiness to condemn *other* historical periods in such an outright and dogmatic fashion. The specific accusation of inadequacy, for example, is not usually levelled at the late Neolithic, although it apparently took our stone-age forebears many centuries just to perfect stone tools (Cummings 2017). To be fair, that period also offered the hugely important scientific development of better strains of cultivated wheat, in what has properly been called

the Neolithic revolution (Cole 1959). In terms of literary periodisation, the Bronze Age is acclaimed for Homer, and the Augustan for Vergil, without any of the opprobrium that the word 'medieval' so often carries with it. Post-Rousseau, and with a necessarily increasing awareness of ecology, attitudes are often equally uncritical, indeed more usually entirely positive (some might even call it patronising), about the levels of understanding in supposedly primitive societies.

Un- or ill-informed assumptions are always dangerous. The general ignorance assumed for the Middle Ages is often damned even further as being reflected in a literature which is in consequence quite alien to the modern world. However, to take a very modern piece of literary micro-periodisation, the writers in the golden age of the English detective story in the 1930s are not looked down upon for their complete ignorance of DNA, or of electronic media, both of which have radically changed the genre and have separated them from modern detective stories with an enormous divide. Why the Middle Ages—whenever they were—should be singled out for special attack is hard to explain. Every age is ignorant in comparison with what comes after.

One of Lewis's most telling comments at the start of his lecture is the statement: "All lines of demarcation between what we call 'periods' should be subject to constant revision. Would that we could dispense with them altogether." He cites the historian G. M. Trevelyan, who had noted that: "Unlike dates, periods are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray" (Lewis 1962, p. 11; Trevelyan 1942, p. 92). That 'but' is important, and we do not, perhaps, even need the word 'historical' in the final clause. Periodisation, in history or literature, can be misleading, and Lewis's question of whether we need the periods at all is worth careful consideration. He had taken his lecture title from Isidore's *Etymologies*, and he noted that Isidore himself divided history not qualitatively, but simply into convenient blocks (Lewis 1962, 1964). A tagged period may appear to be a convenience, but to refer to the 'Middle' Ages does beg the question of what comes at either side, while more obviously qualitative terms such as the Dark Ages or the Age of Belief are even more dubious. The issue is still a relevant one. More recently, important considerations of the problem have been published in particular by Jacques Le Goff (Le Goff [2003] 2005; Le Goff [2014] 2015).

There is an argument for the use of centuries alone, even if these are themselves arbitrary, and based in any case upon a Christian calendar no longer even accepted everywhere in the West, even if we can now at least give dates according to the Common Era. Reference to the Middle Ages does, in fact, usually imply Western Europe (Lewis describes himself as "Old Western man"), and while there may be similarities here and there on individual points, we cannot apply the general notion of the Middle Ages to China, to India, to South America; it is not even entirely straightforward in the Slav world. Geographically the location is Western Europe. There has been some particularly interesting work on this problem recently with the concept of the paradigm shift (Classen 2019a).

The first response to those who voice the cliché of medieval ignorance, or use the adjective as a synonym for 'backward' or 'barbaric', must be to ask when the interlocutor thinks the Middle Ages were. The definition cited at the head of this paper from that estimable historical corrective *1066 and All That*, in fact—aside from the apposite joke—locates them in the period from the Norman Conquest to the Tudors, what we might sometimes call the later Middle Ages. However, do we set as a start date the death of Vergil? The fall of Rome? The *Völkerwanderungen*? The Strasbourg Oaths in 842? The Conquest in 1066? The great period of Gothic building? Do we end the period with the Renaissance (whenever and wherever we wish to place it)? Copernicus? The invention of printing? The Tudors? The Reformation? The discovery of the New World, or of the circulation of blood (by Columbus, that is, rather than by the Vikings, and by Harvey in 1628 rather than—query—by Galen)? It is clear from the suggested beginnings and ends of the Middle Ages that a great many dates, whether they are based upon broad movements, single events, or technological or political changes, are possible, but that the potential time covered is very long indeed, far too long for a single period.

Even classical antiquity, if we go from Homer to Vergil, embraces only eight centuries or so, the Middle Ages perhaps twelve or thirteen. The Chair to which Lewis had just been appointed

was the new one of Medieval *and* Renaissance English, and his theme was that those two supposedly distinct periods could not easily be distinguished. The breadth of possibilities for when the Middle Ages actually were can readily subsume the Renaissance. The question is left open of whether 'medieval' is a valid or useful term at all.

Lewis paid attention in his inaugural lecture to possible divisions between different ages. Of course, sub-divisions are always possible, and early, high, or late medieval may be acceptable as (very) rough guides. For the early period, the term Dark Ages is sometimes encountered, and Lewis addressed this designation as well. It, too, is pejorative, implying perhaps that those mists of medieval ignorance were at that stage especially thick and murky. Lewis notes that there were nonetheless major achievements in the centuries before 1200, and refers to the hinged book, the codex rather than the roll; and to the invention of the stirrup. The use and misuse of the term Gothic is also interesting, and it, too, was at some stages simply pejorative, implying Germanic barbarism (much as the word Vandal is currently used), although its association with perpendicular architecture (though not with the *Fraktur* typeface) has redeemed it to some extent. Its more recent applications to a genre of romance, and later still to a related fashion style have even less to do with Wulfila (Haslag 1963).

One age, then, is no more ignorant in relative terms than any other. History moves onwards, even if the term 'progress' might imply something a little more optimistic than it deserves. As time passes, specific areas of knowledge may recede, although it is rarely the case that they are forgotten completely. Lewis was aware that progress implies taking the past with us, not leaving it behind. The knowledge acquired by Greek and then Arab physicians and scientists, for example, did (just about) survive, re-emerging in Southern Europe during the twelfth century. The loss of technological skills from an earlier period, too, was even noted with regret, as in the Anglo-Saxon poem known as *The Ruin*, from the tenth-century Exeter Book. The speaker observes the broken walls and once-great buildings (possibly, though not definitely, of Roman Bath) and mourns that the craftsmen who built them are no more: "Eorðgrap hafað/waldendwyrhtan", the master-craftsmen are held by the grave's grip (Mitchell and Robinson 1986, p. 238, v. 6f.). However, building skills *did* return. It is interesting that *Victorian* architectural technology, to which reference will be made later, can nowadays itself be the subject of a *laudatio temporis acti,* though not, perhaps, in poetry.

In recent centuries we have experienced an exponentially rapid rate of movement in the development of technology in particular, although Lewis again questioned how much the illusion of perspective affects this. "The distance between the telegraph post I am touching and the next telegraph post looks longer than the sum of distances between all the other posts" (Lewis 1962, p. 17). He pointed further, however, not to the possible end of the Middle Ages, but rather to what he saw as the greatest divide—the chasm—which separates us from an age which might embrace in literary terms both Homer and Jane Austen, a divide occasioned principally by the rise of the machine. When Lewis's lecture was given as a radio broadcast it was under the title "The Great Divide" (Zaleski and Zaleski 2015, p. 445).

One further comment is worth citing, since it goes, in fact, even beyond the industrial revolution: "When Watt makes his engine, when Darwin starts monkeying with the ancestry of Man, and Freud with his soul, and the economists with all that is his, the lion will have got out of its cage" (Lewis 1962, p. 17). Are we to end the Middle Ages, then, in about 1820, or even 1920? If the Middle Ages (*pace* Sellar and Yeatman) are simply those sandwiched between classical antiquity and the modern, why not take them much closer to the present?

We have moved on from Darwin, Freud, Keynes and indeed Lewis.

Two world wars and many later events have shown us very clearly what a combination of technology and real ignorance can accomplish, and on what scale. Technology and industry are a divide, but if the term 'positively medieval' is a negative euphemism, all new technologies (including the bow-and-arrow and the printing-press) are potentially double-edged, something which argues against their use in qualitative judgments of any period. It is with a perhaps unconscious irony that Lewis reminds us in his inaugural that in *Beowulf* an old sword is assumed to be better than a new

one. Henry Bessemer (of the manufacturing process) and Hiram Stevens Maxim (of the gun) were both engineers working with a technology involving steel, the one ultimately more useful, perhaps, though both were far-reaching; and the effects of the latter's invention surely outstripped any historical barbarism in terms of sheer numbers.

Medieval ignorance, held to be more or less completely comprehensive in a backward-looking period, is frequently imagined as having been bolstered by educational processes based exclusively on early and religious texts. This kind of global dismissal is readily countered by such important studies as the large second volume of James Bowen's *History of Western Education*, significantly titled *Civilisation of Europe. Sixth to Sixteenth Century* (without the term 'medieval'), which demonstrates the richness and variety in the development of education over the long period from the fall of Rome (Bowen 1971).

In *The Discarded Image* Lewis stresses the heterogeneity of all the various sources that went into medieval education (especially at the new universities), but does draw attention to the basic problem of study in the period, based as it was upon written authorities who, while accepted as authoritative, nevertheless contradict each other. He sees what he calls the Medieval Model as one of harmonisation, building and perfecting "a syncretic Model not only out of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoical, but out of Pagan and Christian elements." (Lewis 1964, p. 12). Even the fall of Rome left behind a great deal in legal and administrative terms.

In addressing the question of what was known and thought about life and the universe in *The Discarded Image*, Lewis remained aware of the apparent apartness of much of medieval thought, but stressed the inheritance of the Middle Ages from both the classical and the Germanic (and Celtic) worlds. He makes the point, too, that we need not treat a medieval literary work as we might a modern one; we should not view it as an isolated production, but as cumulative. He gives the example of Malory "doing a few demolitions here and adding a few features there" as the last in a series of authors, rather than as an individual writer using a selection of sources. He also saw what he had established as his Medieval Model of the universe as continuing down to the end of the seventeenth century (Lewis 1964, p. 33). More recent scholarship has extended this approach back into the so-called Dark Ages. A recent article (the title is of considerable interest) on "Bede, St Cuthbert and the Science of Miracles," stresses that Bede's *De temporum ratione* "assembles a strikingly coherent account of the universe as a working system […] Straightforward information on the size and orbit of the sun is given, together with an extremely clear explanation of the causes and timings of lunar and solar eclipses" (Lawrence-Mathers 2019).

It has always been incumbent upon those of us concerned with medieval literature to ensure some familiarity with other aspects of life and learning in the relevant centuries, and with the workings-out of Lewis's Model. In German studies there is a well-established interest in scientific or medical writings, helping to combat the assumption that such materials were more or less non-existent. There were recognisable scientists, of course, even if their methods and resources were not like those of the modern world. As an early example we might point to Hermann of Reichenau (Hermannus Contractus, the Lame, 1013–1056), whose mathematical and astronomical work compensated for his physical disability—the comparison with Stephen Hawking is hard to avoid. His works survive in a significantly large number of manuscripts. Working in the first half of the eleventh century, "Hermann did not have access to older Greek and Arabic texts but had some knowledge of their contents through the works of authors in Spain and Lorraine […] Hermann was a key figure in passing down elementary knowledge about astronomy and mathematics to the future scholars of the west" (Archibald 1995, p. 57). As an aside, Hermann (whose writings are in volume 221 of Migne's *Patrologia*) also composed Latin sequences.

It is clear that medicine in the earlier medieval centuries was still cut off to some extent, from the work of Galen, and a glance at any medieval medical treatise (the numbers of such texts might well surprise denigrators of medieval knowledge) shows that for a long time charms were included beside recipes and procedures. Charms, of course, are regularly dismissed as classic illustrations of medieval

superstition and magic, but it is still worth recalling that occasionally—as in the case of epilepsy, for example—a charm such as the Old High German *Contra caducem morbum* (von Steinmeyer 1963, pp. 380–83) might well have appeared efficacious in the face of a seizure, and the calming of the patient with the repetitions of the Paternoster would certainly have been safer than some of the prescriptions; epilepsy is even now imperfectly understood. It is also worth wondering whether bleeding charms might (apparently) have worked (Murdoch 1988a, 1988b). There was of course a hiatus in the loss of much early medical knowledge, but the herbarium at St. Gall was celebrated, and later on, medical centres were established at Salerno and Montpellier, and some knowledge returned and was developed.

Especially interesting, perhaps, are the *mulieres Salernitanae*, the female physicians, like Trota in the twelfth century, associated with a very widely used compilation on gynaecology, or Rebecca Guarna, slightly later, who wrote on diagnosis by urine sample. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries we might mention Fracastoro and Hutten on syphilis. Figures in the field of medicine from the thirteenth century onward in Germany, too, include Ortolf von Baierlant, whose comments on dental treatment were admirably conservative (and whom we can hardly condemn for his unawareness of amoxicillin). The Cistercian Hildgard von Hürnhaim wrote on diet in the same century, and we may also refer to the polymath Konrad von Megenberg in the fourteenth, and to Heinrich von Pfalzpaint (Pfalzpeunt) on wounds in the fifteenth (Keil 1968; Bein 1989).

It is a point familiar enough to those involved with medieval German literature that the central problem of Hartmann's *Der arme Heinrich* is revealed to be metaphysical only *after* the resources of actual medicine have been investigated and found to be of no use.

On the general deficiency in technology as a whole sometimes assumed by modern detractors of the period, one needs to do little more than to point to the construction of the cathedrals and castles (Gimpel 1961; Clarke 1984). The names of the designers and technicians are perhaps not as well known, but that these edifices were built to last, and with the same skills and solidity of, say, Victorian engineering, is undeniable, even if the purposes for which they were built may no longer be viewed as necessary or acceptable. Yet it is not too far-fetched to compare the durability of Lincoln Cathedral, begun in the eleventh century, with Joseph Bazalgette's sewage system for London in the nineteenth. Those interested in the literature of the whole period (and indeed anyone venturing to comment upon it) need some grasp of the economic considerations and of technology even in the agricultural sense, as supplied by such well-known studies—to refer to just one—as that by Michael Postan on mediaeval society. It is interesting that Postan takes—albeit cautiously—the start of the Middle Ages as the Anglo-Saxon settlement of England and continues it on to the fifteenth century, and that he is also aware of necessary variations elsewhere in Europe (Postan 1972).

As indicated, the awareness of DNA might well now offer an even greater divide between our age and earlier periods than the industrial revolution, even more so than that provided by modern advances in astronomy, or indeed space travel, because that was at least imagined before it became reality. The Middle Ages may not have reached the moon or established the existence of exoplanets, but Lewis's chapter on the heavens certainly attacks the view that everyone in the Middle Ages had their feet firmly on a flat earth, gazing superstitiously at the stars. The idea of the earth as a sphere goes back to the fifth century B.C.E., of course, even if it is fair to say that a layman at almost any period, including the present, might still (subconsciously) assume flatness in terms of practicality, or more likely not think about it at all; and superstitions regarding the stars may be found in any newspapers even now. Lewis discusses natural laws, and his Medieval Model of the universe is "in many ways… scientifically astute" (Zaleski and Zaleski 2015, p. 257). In terms of magnitude, for example, Lewis cites the *South English Legendary*, from what is in any case a remarkable passage, on the route to the stars: "Muche is betwene heuene & eorþe," so that a man might travel "Euerich dai forti mile" but still not reach the highest heaven "in eiʒte þousond ʒer" (Lewis 1964, p. 98; D'Evelyn and Mill 1956, p. 418). Multiplied out, that is still far short of what we now know of astronomic distances, but as Lewis again notes, the imaginings of ten million miles and a thousand million are much the same.

Of course, it must be added that there are still very many things that were not foreseen, and that the progress made in astronomy (increasingly so since the Hubble telescope) continues with enormous rapidity; but summary judgements are still dangerous.

Lewis did much to dispel those medieval mists. Having looked at the stars, he turns his attention in *The Discarded Image* to the inhabitants of the earth, acknowledging that some aspects of medieval zoology can indeed seem childish, although it might be added that even now it is probably easier to believe in the unicorn than in the platypus, if one has never visited Australia but has perhaps seen a narwhal tusk in a museum. The *Physiologus* (second or third century) and Conrad Gesner's *Historia animalium* (of the sixteenth century) both *do* include the unicorn, even if otherwise they are themselves very far apart scientifically, with Gesner as the father of modern zoology, although occasionally both are assigned to the Middle Ages. Lewis points out, too, that genuine knowledge of some animals at least was far more detailed than it is in the (urban) present, in the persons of the shepherd, the henwife, the beekeeper.

Lewis's principal interest, however, was literature, and it is worth noting that his own critical approach in another and rather different book, *An Experiment in Criticism*, published in 1961, makes no distinctions in his examples between periods (Lewis 1961). The work is about taste and reading in general, and it is relevant that he can in the discussion of one aspect—realism, in fact—draw upon *Beowulf*, Chaucer, Dante, Swift and Wordsworth to make his point. Medieval literature—do we need to add "of course"?—deals much of the time with universals equally prominent in modern literature (Classen 2020). We may look, at least briefly and with Germanic examples only, at three themes treated in medieval texts—technology, identity, and love—in order to underscore the relevance (a much-used word, usually negated in comments on the Middle Ages) of such texts for the modern reader. It would be too obvious, however, to include a celebrated late medieval morality play: Death still summons Everyman, and that theme is as modern as it always was.

Technology is a central theme in one early work: the Old Norse *Völundarkviða*, the poem of Wayland the Smith (to whom Lewis refers in *The Discarded Image*), perhaps of the tenth or eleventh century. There is magic involved here with the swan-maidens (although fantasy-writing is currently more popular than ever, so that this should not lead to the dismissal of the work); and there is a story-teller's horror-motif in the making of drinking cups from the skulls of two murdered boys, jewels from their eyes, and a necklace from their teeth. This seems (and is) thoroughly barbaric, or even (in the *modern* literary sense), Gothic, although in the context it is designed to underline not just the skills of Völundr, but more firmly the necessary and necessarily *visible* political removal of the king's only legitimate heirs. The *Völundarkviða* is a narrative of abduction, revenge, murder and rape (none of them exclusive to the Middle Ages), but the central theme is the initial capture of Völundr by Niðuðr, from which all else derives, and on which the narrative depends. He is abducted for the clear reason that he is the smith, the maker of gold rings, but also of weapons; his gold is taken, but so is his sword, and it is because of his mastery of metal that he is hamstrung so that he cannot leave. He manages, however, not just to remove Niðuðr's sons, but to drug and impregnate his daughter Böðvild, forcing the king to swear—significantly "by shield-rim and sword-edge" (*at skjaldar rönd… ok at mækis egg*, (Jónsson 1926, p. 151, strophe 34))—that it is *his* child who will inherit the kingdom. Völundr is able to escape, too, by his own skills. His (literal) flight is again a fantasy element, but at the heart of the narrative remains Niðuðr's desire for the smith's technological skills, even if at the last he is forced to realise that those skills are more than he bargained for; technology can be dangerous (Murdoch 1996). The Eddic poem does not promote abduction, murder and rape. In the context they are simply political realities, and this, too, is not exclusively medieval.

If a personal anecdote (Lewis had one in his lecture) may be permitted, a former student specialising in management studies, who had also enjoyed a course on the Germanic hero, was asked by a sceptical interviewer why she had done so. She reported that she had compared a modern CEO to a medieval king, often facing unforeseen problems that might require drastic action, even

if not actually murder. Her quick thinking presumably secured the post for her, rather than the *Nibelungenlied* as such, but the point is a good one.

In his Cambridge lecture Lewis mentioned specifically, although again briefly, the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, noting that it would have been understood by the readers of the *Iliad*, many centuries before. This is doubtless true in terms of important warriors facing one another in single combat, but the work can also speak clearly to the modern world, as has been pointed out by Classen (2005). The poem addresses an existential problem, the potential impossibility of asserting or establishing one's own identity in a given (and here a tragic) situation.

In terms of transmission it is easy to dismiss the *Hildebrandslied* as an almost paradigmatically obscure medieval work. It is incomplete, and it survives in a single manuscript in a linguistically confused form, such that every word in it has been picked over by the philologists (von Steinmeyer 1963, pp. 1–15). Whether its origins are Gothic or Lombardic is equally often debated. As a story it contains no suspense, and most of it is dialogue or soliloquy (Classen 2013). It is not, however, about a battle between two warriors at all, even though the narrator gives that impression in the opening lines. It is about the discovery by one man that it is impossible to avoid a battle when he wants and needs to do so. We are told at the start that the two potential combatants are representative champions from different armies, and although, with reference to a somewhat distorted history, it can be imagined which armies these are, that is of lesser relevance. Each of the two has a job to do in respect of the armies to which they owe allegiance, but a further piece of information sets the tone for the whole work: the dvandva-compound *sunufatarungo*, a father and a son, bound together in a single word. Hildebrand, the father, is, however, alone—the word is chosen deliberately—in being able to perceive the whole situation. He tries to say who he is, but the long-lost son who stands before him has no reason to believe him, and voices first the logical idea that since his father was a famous warrior, he is probably dead by now, and then hardens this to the entirely definite conclusion that he actually *is* dead: *tot ist Hiltibrant*.

The existential isolation of the older warrior means that he must demonstrate his continued prowess as the only way to assert his own identity. That we have no ending may be symbolic, but it is unimportant: Hildebrand must kill his son, even if the latter had clearly inherited some at least of his father's skill to have become a champion himself. Only by killing his own son can Hildebrand show who he is, and only then could the story be known. Hildebrand's attempts at reconciliation are not only failures, but counter-productive; the offer of gold which is, the audience is told in an aside, obviously associated with the Huns merely lets the young warrior, Hildebrand's son Hadubrand, assume perfectly reasonably that his adversary *is* a Hun who is trying to trick him. Hildebrand eventually accepts that he might as well be a Hun. This is the extreme situation faced by the principal protagonist, who is forced, if his existence is to be valid at all, to choose (distorting Sartre's example) to jump from the cliff.

The context may be a medieval one; the existential solitude of Hildebrand is not.

C. S. Lewis's first major work, *The Allegory of Love*, was published in 1936 and remains a standard handbook. His study of the medieval phenomenon of courtly love—something which is, as he admits at the start of the work, "apt to repel the modern reader"—nevertheless presents it as the basis for modern ideas of romantic love. Lewis's introductory remarks have a bearing on his overall view of periodisation when he points out that the examination of a period when allegorical love was a normal state of expression will enable us to understand our present, and even our future (Lewis 1936, p. 1; see Zaleski and Zaleski 2015, p. 181).

Courtly love, and its expression in lyrics such as those of the German *Minnesang* is (as Lewis was aware) one of the areas frequently dismissed as merely medieval, of no relevance to the modern world, and in any case pretty odd. There is a very strong connection indeed between *Minnesang* and the popular love song from the Victorian period to the present, apart, however paradoxical this may sound, from the music. It is admittedly difficult to separate the music from the words, and between the medieval and the modern love lyric there is also a difference in reception. Popular music is now

classless and also very widely disseminated, and modern technology has ensured that it requires a mental effort for us now to separate the words from the melody. The music to which medieval German love lyrics were sung is either inaccessible, or, when reconstructed, alienating, but the alienation disappears when the focus is upon the lyrics as such. Ruth Harvey wrote a paper nearly sixty years ago linking the lyrics of Heinrich von Morungen with those of Cole Porter and Hoagy Carmichael (Harvey 1963), but many of her parallels still hold and will doubtless continue to do so. Comparisons with Lennon and McCartney would be just as plausible. It is impossible to cite entirely up to date examples of popular songs about love because the concept of what is up to date shifts constantly, but the theme is—and will surely continue to be—ever with us.

The basic premise of the poetry of courtly love is the direct or indirect expression of undying devotion to an unnamed (or if named, then still unidentified) beloved, who may or may not reciprocate that love. That the object of the love may be married to someone else is similarly not unknown in modern love songs (Country and Western provides examples).

Courtly love persists in a popular song culture which also maintains the eternal paradox of all love poetry, that a public (with modern media *very* public) declaration is being made of what is supposedly a private passion. Since it is all equally clearly a literary construct, it can be received and redirected in the mind of the individual listener towards another person, or, if it is more objectively about the pains of love, for example, then it can be applied empathetically.

Those who dismiss courtly love as yet another illustration of medieval apartness might also consider the (physically) massive collection edited by Arthur Hatto under the title *Eos* of the aubade, the *tageliet*, or dawn-song throughout the ages in a very wide range of cultures indeed (Hatto 1965) The theme of the lover leaving at dawn or cock-crow is familiar to students of medieval German in the early anonymous "Slâfest du, friedel ziere?"("Are you asleep, dear love?"), in the poems of Heinrich von Morungen, or in such striking pieces as that by Wolfram von Eschenbach beginning "Sine klâwen durch die wolken sint geslagen," with the opening image of dawn's talons having torn through the clouds of darkness. Now as then the dawn-song can reach a high level of poetry, including one example by a Nobel literature laureate, in Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright." Hatto's collection refers in its English section to "Empty Bed Blues," and the Everly Brothers produced in 1957 an entirely classical aubade (which remains familiar) in the strikingly modern context of a drive-in movie with "Wake Up, Little Susie." Hatto's *Eos,* incidentally, is a particularly good example of literary continuity, since it takes us from Ancient Egyptian, to Far Eastern parallels and to poetry in Quechua, as well as including most European vernaculars of the Middle Ages and beyond.

It is something of a by-way in the defence of the Middle Ages, but it is an irony that the enthusiastic endorsement of the period by the Romantics and much later by Hollywood might actually have reinforced some of the prejudices of those who dismiss the period. People and situations made to look and sound archaic in a way that cannot have had any basis in reality have doubtless contributed to the process of alienation. Lewis was keen on the writings of Sir Walter Scott, and delivered a toast to him in Edinburgh in 1956 (Bennett 1965), but for all that, Scott has quite a lot to answer for in the perception of the Middle Ages, even if the Scottish Tourist Board and many later and less skilled storytellers (and writers for television) might well wish to defend him. Lewis was at least balanced in his praise of Scott, who did stimulate interest in the Middle Ages, although he certainly distorted things as well. The dangers are even clearer in, for example, the earlier translations of medieval works such as *Kudrun* or the *Nibelungenlied* in popular series such as Everyman's Library, in which there were no finely dressed, strong warriors, but inevitably heroes of doughty mien apparelled in noble raiment. Tushery is not medieval.

Lewis set the machine age as the great period divide, more important than any limits for the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, but others may now be suggested, and we may well continue to shift that great divide onwards, with the effect that even comparatively recent ages (and their literature) are pushed backwards toward the Middle Ages. The awareness of DNA is, as already mentioned, one such new divide, but we might also cite nuclear energy (and its implications), the awareness of black

holes (though relativity is simply too complex), sound and image recordings, film and television, or more philosophically the sexual revolution (which, according to Philip Larkin's poem, began in 1963, the year of Lewis's death) and the beginnings, at least, of gender equality.

It ought not to be necessary to point out that a negatively qualitative judgment of the undefined Middle Ages as a period of especial ignorance which has nothing to say to the present, is illogical at best. Efforts can and must be made to show that the Middle Ages were not unaware of all science and sociology, but were simply a stage in the normal progress of humanity which is reflected in the literature; one really does wonder why Comparetti (who should have known better) thought the Middle Ages were less normal than other periods, or what, indeed, he thought of as a normal period of history at all. Now, long after Lewis's own declaration of himself as a dinosaur, there have been many evaluations of his importance as a medievalist and literary scholar (Adey 1998; MacSwain and Ward 2010).

It must be noted, of course, that there have been plenty of changes and shifts in emphasis in medieval studies themselves, especially since the end of the nineteenth century, and indeed since Lewis's time. One example is the welcome growth of interest in the role of women in religion, literature and society, which is an important development. To take only a few examples, we may refer to the focus upon writers like Mechthild von Magdeburg and other women mystics, or on literary figures such as Christine de Pisan, and to recent very detailed historical studies such as (to offer a fortuitous example) that by Massimiliano Vitiello on queenship and the Ostrogoth Amalasuintha (Vitiello 2017). The present essay is focused upon C. S. Lewis, however, and it is inappropriate to move too far away from the theme, but it is also worth noting that there have been methodological shifts in the approach to medieval topics, as demonstrated and enumerated, for example, in Michael Titzmann's examination of the way the early Germans have been presented (Titzmann 1991).

Lewis's worries about periodisation should not lead, however, to a counsel of despair, and we need not take his reservations to mean that we must refer only to the literature of the tenth century, or the fifteenth century and so on. It simply means that in writing and teaching we need to be aware of, and cautious in our use of blanket terms like 'medieval,' making clear that it is difficult in literary terms, though not impossible, to embrace Ausonius and Boethius as well as Malory or Sebastian Brant, and also that social and historical elements which set the writing in this and every other period apart from today's world are constantly shifting. The broad term 'medieval' will continue to mean, probably, the period roughly from the folk migrations to the birth of printing, but even that is only an approximation, always requiring closer (but neutral) sub-definition in terms of early, central, late and so on. Above all, Lewis reminds us that periodisation, if it is to be done at all, must not be done qualitatively, and that with the passing of secular time things and attitudes simply change, and that those changes should be noted. As a cultural division, Lewis was also aware that Latin (let alone Greek) is no longer regularly found in the school curriculum, so that it may now be pointless to note that *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*, but it is pertinent nonetheless. We should defend Medieval Studies in the way Lewis did, define and redefine, as scholars since his time have done, and make clear, too, that works of literature written in the whole extended period regularly have a great deal to say, because great literature in all periods deals with universals.

We may end with another quotation from C. S. Lewis, in this case employing a railway image, which in itself reflects (for the moment, anyway) another of the great divides between all literature up to Jane Austen, and ourselves: "Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some ways we are still." (Lewis 1936, p. 1).

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