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Article

'Never trust a Philologist': C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and the Place of Philology in English Studies

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This article brings to light seven poems by C. S. Lewis that have never been published before. These poems, composed during the 1920s, form part of a lengthy campaign against the study of philology at Oxford, and specifically against its most eminent exponent, H. C. Wyld. Drawing on entries in his diary and personal correspondence, the article shows how Lewis's antipathy for the subject grew out of his undergraduate studies, his frustration with Wyld's published scholarship and prescriptive attitude towards language study, as well as a dislike of the man and his lecturing style. It was the appointment of J. R. R. Tolkien to the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon in 1925, and their subsequent friendship, that was to convert Lewis to the study of philology and convince him of its centrality to the discipline of English Studies. The remainder of the article describes how the two men engineered revisions to the Oxford English syllabus, which resulted in a much more prominent role for philology, at the expense of nineteenth-century literature.

In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, C. S. Lewis recounts his journey from atheism to theism and then to Christianity, a conversion that owed a good deal to his friendship with J. R. R. Tolkien.[1] This article focuses on another two-stage conversion in Lewis's early life, from a student of *Literae Humaniores*, the Oxford degree comprising the study of Classical languages and literature, to the School of English Language and Literature, and subsequently to an embracing of the discipline of philology, a process that was also greatly influenced by Tolkien. Lewis's initial disdain for philology is recorded in entries in his diary and letters, but also in a series of poems that he composed during the 1920s which are published here for the first time. While Tolkien may have publicly succeeded in recruiting Lewis to his side in the syllabus wars that divided the Oxford English Faculty, Lewis continued in occasional verse privately to vent his animosity towards philology and its leading Oxford exponent: H. C. Wyld.

It was in 1922 that Lewis began his English degree, at the suggestion of his philosophy tutor, E. F. Carritt, who thought that it would make him more employable given the expansion of the subject. Coming from the more prestigious School of *Literae Humaniores*, in which he had secured a double first, Lewis was initially rather disparaging of his fellow students, complaining

[1] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (London, 1955).

about 'a certain amateurishness in the talk and look of the people'.[2] But his particular scorn was reserved for the philological component of the degree, as recorded in numerous entries in the diary that he kept during the 1920s. The first signs of his lack of sympathy with this subject are found in his reflections on his Old English tutorials with E. E. Wardale of St Hugh's College, whose highly successful *A Grammar of Old English* (1922), which ran to an eighth and final edition in 1951, had just appeared in print. Lewis was not enamoured of her strongly philological approach to the topic, finding Wardale's teaching too concerned with phonology and linguistic theory: 'delightful subjects no doubt, but life is short'.[3]

Later that term Lewis was startled when Wardale set him an essay on phonetics and the sound laws in which she had been instructing him, admitting privately that he had not attended to any of it.[4] In order to tackle the paper, Lewis went to the library and consulted an elementary textbook on the subject by H. C. Wyld.[5] Here he spent two hours puzzling over 'phonetics, back voice stops, glides, glottal catches, and open Lord-knows-whats', concluding somewhat sardonically: 'Very good stuff in its way, but why physiology should form part of the English school I really don't know'.

Despite these unpromising beginnings, Lewis went on to achieve a first-class degree in English, completing the two-year Final Honour School in just a year. In 1926, Carritt's advice paid off and Lewis was elected to an Official Fellowship in English Language and Literature at Magdalen College. As poacher turned gamekeeper, Lewis found himself having to drill students in the elements of Old English philology. One of his first pupils was the future poet John Betjeman, whose antipathy for the subject and his tutor is well known.[6] Betjeman left Oxford without a degree; his fellow student, Henry Yorke, later a novelist under the pseudonym Henry Green, similarly struggled with the philological focus of the English course. In his memoir, *Pack My Bag* (1940), Green observed that, as an English student, he was required to learn Anglo-Saxon: 'This I found I could not do'.[7]

Not all students were so unwilling to engage with the topic. While marking one student's essay on the history of English, Lewis found himself having to check certain facts. This required him to purchase a copy of Wyld's *Historical Study of the Mother Tongue* (1906); despite this special effort, Lewis was frustrated to find himself still unable to locate the required information.[8] In January of the following year, Lewis spent an entire morning poring over the book, leading him to exclaim: 'a curse be on Wyld'. The next day Lewis applied himself again to the text, attempting to discover everything Wyld has to say, 'in spite of all Wyld does to prevent me'.[9] Lewis found the partial explanation of sound changes and their outputs particularly frustrating, leading him to wonder: 'Are all philologists mad?' A further day spent tracing the changes in vowels that mark the transition from Old to Middle English prompted Lewis to despair: 'What a brute Wyld is – no order, no power of exposition, no care for the reader'.[10]

Lewis's low opinion of Wyld's published works extended to his lectures, which he attended as a student but found similarly unenlightening. Having sat through the series 'Outlines of the History of English', Lewis lamented the lack of new information on offer: 'He spoke for an hour and told us nothing I haven't known these five years: remarking that language consists of sounds, not letters, and its growth did not depend on conscious changes by individuals, that two and two make four and other deep truths of that kind'.[11] As well as the elementary nature of Wyld's

[2] C. S. Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, ed. Walter Hooper (London, 1991), 120.
[3] *All My Road Before Me*, 125.
[4] *All My Road Before Me*, 129.
[5] *All My Road Before Me*, 130.
[6] A. N. Wilson, *Betjeman* (London, 2006), 51–5.
[7] Henry Green, *Pack My Bag* (London, 2000), 138.
[8] *All My Road Before Me*, 387.
[9] *All My Road Before Me*, 428.
[10] *All My Road Before Me*, 431.
[11] *All My Road Before Me*, 120.

approach, Lewis took exception to his tendency to harangue his audience; it was this hectoring style that prompted Lewis to refer to Wyld simply as 'the cad' throughout the remainder of his diary.

In one lecture the subject of Wyld's attack was the poet Robert Bridges, as well as another unnamed opponent who had lectured erroneously on English pronunciation and who Wyld claimed to have conquered in the ensuing discussion.[12] But, more commonly, the targets of Wyld's rebukes were the students who made up his audience. On one occasion Lewis records Wyld turning to an unsuspecting young man in the front row and bellowing: 'Do you understand that? Could you give an explanation of that?' When the student made no response, Wyld exclaimed: 'You weren't listening were you? I should advise you to listen if I were you'. Lewis was so struck by this unprecedented onslaught that it made him cross for the rest of the day. Sharing the story with a fellow student revealed that such harangues were quite common with Wyld. On one occasion he bellowed at a young girl, who was flicking through her book, '"Haven't you found the place yet, there? I am not going to lecture in this Sunday School way"'. Lewis added: 'I begin to understand why the Greats School was called *Literae Humaniores*', that is, 'more humane letters.'[13]

According to one of Lewis's friends, Wyld had been heard to boast an enjoyment of frightening students during vivas; during his period working at Liverpool University, female candidates regularly left his room in tears.[14] A lecture Lewis attended on 5 February 1923 on Middle English dialects was full of 'all the usual old tricks'—including a tirade against people who lacked a detailed knowledge of the subject.[15] At the next lecture Lewis found himself sitting beside a student he had not met before; as had become his habit, he took the opportunity to enumerate Wyld's many enormities.[16]

Along with complaints about time-keeping, poor concentration, and a general lack of knowledge, Wyld took issue with his audience's use of fashionable (what he called 'superfine') pronunciations of words like *waistcoat*: 'You may pronounce it this way', he is reported to have said—picking out some terrified individual in the audience—'but I prefer the gentlemanly pronunciation of weskit'. Here Wyld appears to be contradicting his own claim that language change is subconscious, blaming shifting pronunciations on the self-consciously fashionable usage of the younger generation, while attempting to curtail such developments by stubbornly holding to his personal preferences. Driving Wyld's determination to preserve 'weskit' are ideas of correctness and class that underpin many of Wyld's writings, despite his attempts to assert a scientific and disinterested approach to language study.

Wyld claimed the study of philology as an empirical science; when comparing different linguistic varieties, the philologist observes and records variation in a dispassionate and impartial way: 'We collect varieties in speech as an entomologist brings together different kinds of moths. We do not love the one and despise the other: we simply observe and compare them.'[17] But this stance of scientific objectivity found itself on slippery ground when Wyld tried to determine when dialect usage was acceptable and when it was not:

> 'The first thing is to realise that in itself a Provincial or Regional Dialect is just as respectable, and historically quite as interesting, as Standard English. The next thing is to realise that if you want to speak good Standard English, pronunciations which belong typically to a Provincial

[12] *All My Road Before Me*, 137.
[13] *All My Road Before Me*, 139–40.
[14] *All My Road Before Me*, 133.
[15] *All My Road Before Me*, 191.
[16] *All My Road Before Me*, 195.
[17] H. C. Wyld, *The Growth of English: An Elementary Account of the Present Form of our Language & its Development* (London, 1907), 68–9.

> Dialect are out of place. It is probably wise and useful to get rid of these Provincialisms since they attract attention, and often ridicule, in polite circles'.[18]

For Wyld, the 1920s were the high-water mark of a distinguished career that began at Oxford, where he read philology under Henry Sweet, followed by a lectureship and then appointment to the Baines chair of English Language at Liverpool University, returning to Oxford to take up the Merton Chair of English Language and Literature in 1920. Wyld was the author of several influential textbooks on the history of the English language. *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, published in 1920, was reprinted numerous times and defined the subject for at least the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1930s Wyld was appointed to the BBC's Advisory Committee on Spoken English, which was tasked with offering specialist insights into the correct pronunciation of doubtful words. Wyld was a very willing member of the committee, although correspondence shows him to have been particularly concerned with the financial side of the arrangement. Wyld repeatedly requested his stipend to be paid in advance, an arrangement that caused BBC authorities some inconvenience and embarrassment. When the committee was disbanded in 1940, Wyld suggested ways in which he might continue the association, reporting regularly on pronunciation or accentuation, since he would be 'very sorry to sever my connections altogether'. An internal memo notes somewhat sarcastically that 'Dr Wyld only means … that he would like to do something in order to be able to draw an honorarium'.[19] C. T. Onions, by contrast, refused to engage with the committee, expressing disapproval of its mission as well as a reluctance to collaborate with Wyld—further evidence of Wyld's reputation as an awkward figure amongst his Oxford colleagues.[20]

Although Wyld's *A History of Modern Colloquial English* offers a detailed and scholarly account of the history of English, its methodology is underpinned by this same expressly prescriptive attitude. Wyld begins by recognizing the distinction between spoken and written English, accepting that it is possible for a speaker with a regional accent to write using the standard form. But, even here, he explicitly contrasts a provincial accent, typified by a 'more or less strange pronunciation' with 'good English'. Dialect speakers, according to Wyld, tend to use words that are not 'current coin' throughout the rest of the country, and particularly not among the more educated speakers. Wyld contrasts regional dialect with the variety that most people think of when they refer to English. This he terms 'Good English, Well-bred English, Upper-class English', which is sometimes—in his view too vaguely—referred to as Standard English.[21] That this highly classist view of correctness influences his account of the history of English is perhaps clearest in his encomium for the Elizabethan age. For Wyld, this was the Golden Age of linguistic correctness, when a standard of speech emerged that was not just the best of its time, but the best that has ever been attained:

> 'When we consider the various kinds of eminence collected together at Queen Elizabeth's Court, the mental and literary attainments of many of the foremost men, and the general standard of taste and refinement among the courtiers of that age, we shall assert that the English which they spoke was not merely reputed the best type, but that it actually was the best attainable'.[22]

No justification is offered in support of this view, which is based on prejudice and assumption rather than linguistic evidence. For Wyld the subsequent history of English pronunciation has

[18] H. C. Wyld, *Elementary Lessons in English Grammar* (Oxford, 1909), 208.
[19] Jürg R. Schwyter, *Dictating to the Mob: The History of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English* (Oxford, 2016), 184–5.
[20] Schwyter, *Dictating to the Mob*, 92.
[21] H. C. Wyld, *A History of Modern Colloquial English* (London, 1920), 2.
[22] Wyld, *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, 111.

been one of degeneration, as this most polite of usages, spoken by unaffected and refined gentlemen, was corrupted by the 'slipshod' speech patterns of vulgar speakers attempting, but failing, to imitate their betters. Wyld's censuring of spelling pronunciations like 'waistcoat' instead of 'weskit' finds parallels in the way he critiques the 'vulgar' and 'finnicky' innovations 'fore-head' instead of 'forrid' and 'often' instead of 'offen'. The 'offen' pronunciation, still used in Wyld's day by 'good speakers', has the authority of being the preferred form of Elizabeth I, corrupted today by the 'new-fangled innovation' in which the 't' is sounded.[23]

Lewis's disapproval of Wyld and his teaching methods was not limited to disparaging remarks in his diary. In his personal copy of H. C. Wyld's *A Short History of English*, he added a series of poems in which he engaged in a more comprehensive and uncompromising attack on Wyld's lecturing style and the hypocrisy of his approach to language change. These poems are published here for the first time:[24]

I
Loud-mouthed, a bully, publicly professing
The impartial, scientific attitude,
Yet, on the point of dialects, confessing
How pruriently class-conscious was his mood.
The MILES GLORIOSUS of Phonetics
Boasting his triumphs: evermore digressing
To scourge dead rivals with apologetics,
And pat his own broad back with transient blessing.
Yet did I never know his fuller power
Of full-fed yoked insolence, till that hour
Where in a mood of graciousness surprising
He told us 'I am far—ahem—from despising
The literature of England'. Fact! It's true:
He said those words in nineteen twenty-two.

II
He opens and closes his glottis at pleasure,
Explosives and stops he is able to measure,
No grunt and no gurgle escapes his attention,
Religiously marking each slackness and tension,
You find him in air-bursts beguiling his leisure.

Can any one blame him if, doomed to mistaking
Each word in its meaning, he studies the making?
Condemned to be blind to the picture, the frame
Instead let him chip at. But why, in God's name,
Lead us from Parnassus to join your muck-raking?

Why, pray, should a squire of the Muse and Apollo
Yield thus with a living steam-organ to follow?

[23] Wyld, *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, 11.

[24] These poems are reproduced with permission of the C. S. Lewis Company Ltd. I am indebted to the C. S. Lewis Company for granting me permission to reproduce the poems here; I remain responsible for the opinions and any errors of fact in this article. I am also grateful to Walter Hooper for giving me access to the volume containing the poems and for his encouragement in the writing of this article.

Leave us to the spirit and keep your phonetics,
Don't come to the table to talk dietetics.

His Berkshire garden grows, I'm told,
Enormous marrows tinged with gold

III
Pacis more Dei superantis pectora nostra,
Sic liber obscurus, devia charta senis.
Annales patrii sermonis scripsit: at ipse
Nil nisi barbarica dicere voce potest.
E tenebris tantis verborum carpere nullam
Doctrinam potui. Num male sanus ego?
Forsitan. At menti scriptoris surgit imago
Qui proprium nomen Desipientis habet.
Improbus horribili stridentis voce tyranni,
Non ulli facilis, non generosus erat:
Contemptor morum musarum hominumque deumque,
Semper in ore minae saevaque rusticitas;
E rostro male dicere eos, quis nulla potestas
Respondere, etiam non toleranda loqui,
Cominus aut terrere puellas, summa voluptas,
—haud digna ingenio talia Britannico.
I, pete Germanos Scythicosve! Oxonia tandem
Respuat immundum Desipientis onus!

Translation:

Like the peace of God that keeps our hearts and minds, this book 'passeth all understanding'. These are the rambling remarks of a man past his prime. He has undertaken a chronicle of our native language, but what he himself manages to say about it is not English at all. From the great murk of his words, I could glean nothing worth learning. I was not going mad, was I? Maybe. But then there arose in my mind the picture of a writer appropriately named 'WILD'. He is shameless, with the rude voice of a shrill scourge, cold-hearted and ungenerous to all. Holding in contempt the customs of the Muses and of mortals and immortals, he forever speaks with menace and relentless vulgarity. To insult from his pulpit those who have no way to answer back; to espouse as well what must not be tolerated; and to terrify too female undergraduates in their vivas: these make up his chief delight. Such is an unworthy consideration of British talent. Go! Take up German or Slavic studies! Let Oxford at last reject the squalid burden of this 'WILD' critic.[25]

IV
Lāreowa lāþost, lēodhata,
Henriċ wæs hāten heard-tunga monn,
Wæs Wēold hāten fēond werum
Eġesful eorla dryhten in Oxenaford.
Oft hlōh and hlȳdde hlynede and dynede
Siþðan lārsele, lāþ Nerġende,

[25] I am very grateful to Dr A. T. Reyes for supplying me with a transcription and translation of this poem.

Wēold warode, wælhrēowa monn,
Bōcere bealofull, bismerode ealra ġehwylċ.
Him wæs wamb wīder þonne wera ǣnigum.

Translation:
The worst of teachers, a tyrant,
Henry was the hard-tongue man called,
Wyld was called an enemy to humans
Awe-inspiring leader of men in Oxford.
Often he laughed and roared, clamoured and made noises
After Wyld, hateful to the Saviour,
Blood-thirsty man, occupied the learning-hall,
Wicked scholar, mocked each of them all.
His belly was wider than that of any other man.[26]

V
Ὦ πόποι ἦ μέγα θαῦμα τόδ' ὀφθάλμοισιν ὁρῶμαι
πάγκακον ἦλθε τέρας, μέγα θήριον, εἰς Ἀκαδήμην.
Βαρβαρόφωνον ἔην, γ[ο]ργωπόν, δεῖμα βρότοισιν.
Ὕβρις τόνδε ἔτεκεν κρατερον μήστ[ω]ρα φόβοιο,
Ὕβρις, δεινοτάτη [σ]κοτία, θεα αὐδηέσσα. 5
Τόν δὲ πάτηρ θνητός ὀλοόφρων γείνατο Βῖλδος,
Βιλδος, μαινομένης Λύσσας παῖς, σχέτλια εἰδώς.

Translation:
Truly, what a great marvel I see with my eyes!
An utterly evil monster, a big beast, came to the Academy.
He was speaking a foreign tongue, fierce-eyed, a terror to mortals.
Pride gave birth to this powerful agitator of fear,
Pride, the most terrible darkness, goddess with a human voice.
He was begotten by a baleful mortal father, Bild [i.e. Wyld],
Bild, son of raging madness, expert in cruelties.[27]

VI
O rage, o désespoir! Qu'un vie[i]llard de champagne
Des Raleigh des Murray se trouverait compagne,
Que l'Acadême ainsi souff[r]irait les long[u]eurs
D'un triste chien
[ends unfinished]

Translation:
How enraging, how exasperating! That some useless old peasant
Can find himself in the company of a Raleigh or a Murray,
That the Academy should now have to suffer the tiresome ramblings
Of a miserable mutt[28]
[ends unfinished]

[26] I am very grateful to Dr Rafael Pascual for advice concerning the transcription and translation of this poem.
[27] I am very grateful to Joaquín Gutiérrez Calderón for supplying me with a transcription and translation of this poem.
[28] I am very grateful to Lucy Horobin for help with the translation of this poem.

It is typical of Lewis's experiments with poetry that these verses are in a range of poetic forms and metres. Poem II is an acrostic with the initial letters spelling out the name 'Henry Cecil Wyld He', indicating that Lewis intended to elaborate on Wyld's Berkshire garden and golden marrows at a later date. When composing poems in languages other than English, Lewis's method was to draw upon lines from familiar literary sources. Poem IV brings together various stock phrases from Old English verse that Lewis would have encountered as part of his Old English studies and teaching duties. Particularly fruitful for Lewis was the poem *Judith* and its descriptions of Holofernes as 'lāðne lēodhatan (line 72a), which Lewis here uses to characterize Wyld as 'Lāreowa lāþost, lēodhata', 'worst of teachers, a tyrant'. The *Judith* poet's description of Holofernes as 'eġesful eorla dryhten', 'terrifying lord of earls' (line 21a) is taken over in its entirety in line 4 of Lewis's poem. The poem's following line describes how Holofernes, buoyed by the drinking at the feast, 'hlōh ond hlȳdde, hlynede and dynede', which Lewis essentially repeats as line 5. Line 6 of Lewis's poem echoes the description of Holofernes as 'nerġende lað', 'hateful to the Saviour' (line 45b), as he lies in wait for Judith to be brought to his tent. The description of Holofernes, peering through the netting hung around his bed, includes the epithet 'bealofulla' (line 48b), which Lewis here pairs with 'bocere' in his ascription of it to Wyld. The compound *lar-sele*, 'teaching hall', is unattested in Old English; the word has been coined by Lewis by analogy with *gold-sele*, 'gold-adorned hall', in *Beowulf* line 1253a; this source is further suggested by the collocation with *warode* in line 1253b. Not content with characterizing Wyld as Holofernes, Lewis here draws further parallels with the monster Grendel.

Similar methods of composition lie behind the other poems. Line 1 of Poem V is lifted verbatim from *The Iliad* Book XIII, line 99, where it forms part of Poseidon's rallying cry to the exhausted and despondent Trojans. The big beast of line 2 may be compared with that marvelled at and subsequently devoured by Odysseus's men in *The Odyssey*, X.180.

The second half of line 4 draws upon the description of Diomedes in *The Iliad* V.278 as 'ἄγριον αἰχμητὴν κρατερὸν'.

The opening verse of Poem VI is a version of a line from Act 1 scene IV of Corneille's play *Le Cid*, which begins with Don Diégue exclaiming:

> 'Ô rage! ô désespoir! ô vieillesse ennemie!
> N'ai-je donc tant vécu que pour cette infamie?'[29]

While preserving the opening apostrophes, Lewis changes 'vieillesse' 'old age' to 'vieillard' 'old man' and applies it to Wyld. He then proceeds to lament that Wyld must be suffered as a colleague in an academy that includes such towering figures as Raleigh and Murray. The former of these was Sir Walter Raleigh, the first Professor of English Literature at Oxford, who served from 1904 to 1922. As a literary critic, Raleigh's scholarship was far more in sympathy with Lewis's own tastes. Lewis studied Raleigh's works closely as part of his undergraduate degree, and continued to read them when a tutor at Magdalen College. In his diary he records having bicycled to the Oxford Union library to take out Raleigh's *Six Essays on Johnson* (1910), which he considered 'excellent'.[30] Lewis was not always unequivocally positive in his response to Raleigh's criticism. Having spent a morning studying his *Milton* (1900), Lewis concluded that, while it is 'full of good things', it is not a good book.[31]

The second figure named here is George Gilbert Murray (1866–1957), a classical scholar who was elected Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford in 1908, a position he held with distinction until 1936. Lewis first read Murray's *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* in 1915, describing

[29] W. D. Howarth (ed.), *Corneille, Le Cid* (London, 1988).
[30] *All My Road Before Me*, 255.
[31] *All My Road Before Me*, 433.

him as a 'bad verse translator' whose work he read with 'dire anger', provoked by the way Murray degrades Homer and prefers that 'snivelling metaphysician Euripides to Aeschylus'.[32] However, the experience of attending Murray's twice-weekly lectures on Euripides' *Bacchae* at Christ Church, when reading for his first degree, was strikingly different. Lewis considered Murray to be a 'real inspiration', criticizing only his regrettable dress sense. In 1924 Lewis read Murray's *Rise of the Greek Epic*, which he describes as a 'great piece of imaginative work', and which he found himself enjoying as much as on previous occasions.[33]

Although these six poems are all copied into a single volume, they appear to have been entered at different times. The final couplet of Poem I refers to a statement made by Wyld in 1922, which fits with the period in which Lewis was attending his lectures as an undergraduate. The left-leaning aspect of the handwriting in which this poem was copied resembles other dated instances of Lewis's hand from this period. The more upright script in which the later poems are written contrasts strongly with this opening instance; this difference, combined with other distinctions in individual letterforms, has led Charlie Starr to suggest that the poems were added in a series of discrete stages rather than at one time. Starr dates Poem II to 1927–1928, while he considers poems III–VI to have been written between 1922 and 1926.[34] It is important to note that these dates relate to the period in which they were copied into the volume; their dates of composition may of course predate these by some years. But the likeliest explanation of the dates proposed by Starr is that Lewis returned to this volume at various points throughout the 1920s in order to add new poems as he composed them. This scenario concurs with the evidence of Lewis's diary, which records him revisiting Wyld's published works in 1926 and 1927, as he prepared his teaching materials and marked student essays as a tutor at Magdalen College. So, while the initial stimulus may have been attending Wyld's lectures on the history of English in 1922, Lewis continued to channel his dislike of Wyld, and his scholarly approach, in poetic form over a number of years.

Indeed, these six poems are not the full extent of Lewis's satirizing of Wyld in verse. An unsigned copy of Wyld's *The Historical Study of the Mother Tongue* (1920), now in private hands, preserves the following poem on an inner flyleaf:

VII
There was a time ere Oxford's woes began
When every lecturer was a gentleman;
When spirits humane were dons (in Saturn's reign),
Their discourse easy, and their wit urbane;
But golden ages pass without repeal
And WYLD has ushered in the age of steel,
— Enormous WYLD, of whom the Muses sung
That from no mortal seed the portent sprung;
But Insolence, dire goddess, Stygian whore,
To several sires the barking infant bore.
Insolence, Charon's daughter, loosed her zone
To Braggadocio, nor to him alone;
For Pistol, too, her couch did next enjoy,
And Kestr[e]l topp'd her third, that roaring boy.
Thence grew the windy babe, who shewed the fires

[32] *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, 3 volumes (San Francisco, CA, 2004–2007), II, 158.
[33] *All My Road Before Me*, 299.
[34] I am indebted to Dr Starr for his help with dating these poems and for the many detailed comments he supplied regarding their palaeography and transcription. For an account of his method of dating Lewis's handwriting, see Charlie W. Starr, '"Villainous Handwriting": A Chronological Study of C.S. Lewis's Script', *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, 33 (2016), 73–94.

Of all his mother — and of all his sires;
Even in his cradle boomed the boastful child,
Th'infernal gossips shrieked and called him WYLD.
    Escaped from hell, his earthly life began
In Cardiff as a lavatory-man,
Whom soon the Corporation, when they found
Him stealing paper, spued from underground:
Next as a New-York peeler, clubbing beggars
And cripples, he was pensioned by boot-leggers,
Until, for being bribed to get a black
A l[y]nching, he at last was giv'n the sack.
Thence he returned, and since he could not be
A sergeant-major, learned Philology;
S[ei]zed on a chair, talked louder and became
Our joke in Oxford, and abroad, our shame,
The Miles Gloriosus of the schools,
The scorn of scholars and the fear of fools,
Loud among women at the Viva-board
But humble to a millionaire or Lord,
In peaceful times a Tory, but nigh Red
When guns are cocked and Riot Acts are read,
The genuine race of the Tartarean whore,
The bully, coward, braggart, snob and bore.[35]

Although there are no ownership inscriptions in the volume, the poem was clearly written in Lewis's hand.[36] An additional link between this poem and the others is the use of the term 'miles gloriosus'—originally the title of a play by Plautus, later used as a term for any boastful soldier in renaissance drama. Here Wyld is the 'Miles Gloriosus' of the schools—Oxford slang for the Examination schools on the High Street where Wyld's lectures were delivered. It seems likely that this is the very copy that Lewis records having bought in the diary entry for 6 May 1926 mentioned above. Marginal annotations in the volume also fit with Lewis's despairing comments in his diary about Wyld's flawed exposition. For instance, alongside the discussion of modern English forms that cannot be accounted for on p. 272, Lewis records the following objection: 'This is a science! Why can't the quack say that he doesn't know—no one expects him to be infallible.' In another marginal comment Lewis expresses the view that Coleridge had already 'exploded this ladies' theory once and for all', and elsewhere he observes a contradiction with a statement found in Wyld's *Short History of English* and notes: 'he changes his mind (to be equally dogmatic in the new position)'.[37]

The identification of this volume with that purchased in 1926 fits with Charlie Starr's dating of the script of the poem to 1927–1928, based upon the appearance of an 8-shaped letter 'g' and a cursive 'f', which first appeared in Lewis's handwriting in October 1926 and were replaced in January 1929. The current owner of the book purchased it from a former colleague who had acquired it in England in 1954; the date is telling, since it was in that year that Lewis moved to Cambridge, when he may have decided to trim his extensive library.

[35] I am grateful to the owner of this volume, Professor Shaun F. D. Hughes, for supplying me with an image of the poem and giving me permission to reproduce it here.
[36] I am grateful to Dr Starr for confirming my attribution of the unsigned poem to C. S. Lewis on palaeographical grounds.
[37] I am very grateful to Professor Hughes for supplying me with details of these annotations.

In an article discussing Lewis's diary and its account of Wyld's lectures, Tom Shippey recalls having seen a further copy of one of Wyld's books in which an earlier owner had added a poem in heroic couplets lampooning its author on the fly-leaf:

> Now, somewhere in my fairly recent travels I have been in a study with somebody, and that somebody pulled off the shelf a copy of one of Wyld's books and opened it up and showed it to me … Inside the fly-leaf of this book was a long poem in heroic couplets, entirely abusive of Wyld. The whole thing had clearly been written in one of Wyld's lectures, commenting on the lecture as the poem was written, and it was a pretty good poem! What's irritating is that I've forgotten who it was, and I've been ringing people up and asking if they've got a copy, and would they mind looking in the fly-leaf. They all say it wasn't them, so either I dreamt it all, or it's someone I've forgotten. The point is, I can almost remember the end of the poem. It ends up something like "That fearful cad and bounder H.C. Wyld".[38]

In a footnote, Shippey observes that, since the poem was 'so witty, and so metrically skilful', he wonders whether Lewis himself might be its author. Unfortunately, Shippey has been unable to trace this poem; nor did a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* asking readers to check their copies produce the elusive volume.[39] Without the book itself it remains impossible to be sure of its provenance, but, the evidence of the poems reproduced here, combined with the use of the word 'cad' to refer to Wyld, makes it highly likely that this is yet another example of Lewis venting his fury in poetic form.

Lewis's experience of being lectured to by Wyld fostered a suspicion of, and hostility towards, philology that continued into the early years of his appointment as a member of the English Faculty. It was his friendship with J. R. R. Tolkien that was to challenge and finally overcome Lewis's antipathy towards a purely linguistic approach to the study of Old and Middle English texts. Lewis's account of an encounter with Tolkien at a meeting of the English Faculty in 1926 indicates that, while he found his new colleague genial and approachable, they clashed over the importance of philology to literary studies. Lewis noted Tolkien's view that 'language is the real thing in the School' and that he was unable to read Spenser, a poet to whom Lewis was devoted, 'because of the forms'—a reference to the artificial and archaic diction in which Spenser wrote. It is presumably for this reason that Lewis summed up his initial assessment of Tolkien with: 'No harm in him: only needs a smack or so.'[40] Lewis's full report of the meeting in his diary reads as follows:

> 'He is a smooth, pale, fluent little chap—can't read Spenser because of the forms—thinks the language is the real thing in the school—thinks all literature is written for the amusement of *men* between thirty and forty—we ought to vote ourselves out of existence if we were honest—still the sound–changes and the gobbets are great fun for the dons. No harm in him: only needs a smack or so.'[41]

Reflecting on their friendship in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis recalls how, when he first arrived at the English Faculty, he had been explicitly warned never to trust a philologist, but that his friendship with Tolkien had led him to overcome that prejudice.

Like Lewis, Tolkien began his career as a student of *Literae Humaniores*, but his decision to take a paper in Greek Philology with Joseph Wright was influential in his decision to switch

[38] Tom Shippey, 'The Lewis Diaries: C.S. Lewis and the English Faculty in the 1920s', in Roger White, Judith Wolfe, and Brendan Wolfe (eds), *C.S. Lewis and His Circle: Essays and Memoirs from the Oxford C.S. Lewis Society* (Oxford, 2015), 135–49. I am very grateful to Professor Shippey for discussing this poem with me and for his assistance in trying to locate it.
[39] Tom Shippey, 'H.C. Wyld', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 April 2018, 6.
[40] *All My Road Before Me*, 393.
[41] *All My Road Before Me*, 393.

to English, focusing on philological studies for the Final Honour School.[42] After a stint working under Henry Bradley on the *Oxford English Dictionary*,[43] Tolkien took up a lectureship at the University of Leeds, where he was responsible for promoting the study of Old and Middle English and the history of the language. The partisanship he showed towards his own field is apparent in poems he composed, along with his colleague E. V. Gordon, which were privately published in an anthology titled *Songs for the Philologists* in 1936.[44] One of these verses, entitled 'Two Little Schemes', concerns a rivalry between 'Lit' and 'Lang'. Lit, having expressed a dislike of philology, dies of homophemes, words that look the same when spoken, suggesting an unwillingness to look in detail at the written form of the words. Lang, showing little remorse for this loss, responds by wiping away a tear and pouring a celebratory drink.[45]

When his former tutor, William Craigie, moved to the University of Chicago in 1925, Tolkien applied to be his successor in the Rawlinson and Bosworth Chair of Anglo-Saxon. In his application letter Tolkien drew the electors' attention to the positive changes he had implemented at Leeds with the result that, for his growing group of language students, philology appeared to have lost 'its connotations of terror, if not of mystery'. In setting out his candidacy for the chair, Tolkien committed to promoting a closer relationship between linguistic and literary studies, 'which can never be enemies except by misunderstanding or without loss to both', and to 'continue in a wider and more fertile field the encouragement of philological enthusiasm among the young'.[46] In an earlier letter to Elizabeth Wright, wife of his former tutor Joseph Wright and a philologist in her own right, Tolkien reported the progress that philology was making at Leeds: 'The proportion of "language" students is very high, and there is no trace of the press-gang!'[47] This tacit recognition that attracting students to the language side of the syllabus could be a battle contrasts with philology's heyday in the nineteenth century, when Max Müller, Joseph Wright's predecessor in the chair of Comparative Philology, entertained London's high society with his lectures at the Royal Institution.[48]

Tolkien successfully beat his former tutor, Kenneth Sisam, to the position, and took up the Rawlinson and Bosworth Chair in 1925. Tolkien seems to have been more positively disposed towards Wyld during the period in which the two men worked together. That Wyld and Tolkien were more than just colleagues is suggested by an anecdote recounted by Tolkien in his Valedictory lecture of June 1959, in which he recalls witnessing Wyld wreck a table in Oxford's Cadena café with the vigour of his representation of minstrels chanting the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*.[49]

That he shared some of Lewis's reservations about Wyld's teaching methods and their efficacy is implied by a second remark regarding Wyld in the same lecture. Tolkien recalls that, when he wrote to congratulate Wyld on his appointment to his chair, the latter responded: 'if there are any *dyrne gastas* still about, I will deal with them.'[50] Tolkien's wistful observation, 'Alas! He was not Beowulf', suggests that he did not consider Wyld to have been successful in tackling the concealed spirits that continued to oppose the philological approach.

[42] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford', in Christopher Tolkien (ed.), *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (London, 2006), 224–40, 238.
[43] Peter Gilliver, Jeremy Marshall and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Ring of Words: J.R.R. Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 2006).
[44] J. R. R. Tolkien, E. V. Gordon and others, *Songs for the Philologists* (London, 1936).
[45] This poem is reproduced at <https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Lit%27_and_Lang%27> accessed 12 March 2024.
[46] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London, 2006), 12–13.
[47] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 11.
[48] Haruko Momma, *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), 60–94.
[49] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford', 238.
[50] This comment is only found in the version of the lecture printed in Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (eds), *J.R.R. Tolkien: Scholar and Story-teller, Essays in Memoriam* (London, 1979), 16–32, 31. For the reference to *dyrne gastas* see *Beowulf*, line 1357. For a brief account of the different versions of this lecture see Christopher Tolkien's Foreword to *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, 4.

Tolkien could also take issue with Wyld's scholarship. His copy of Wyld's *A Short History of English* (1914) includes a number of pencilled corrections, indicating shortcomings in Wyld's explanations or bibliographical references. Wyld's claim that Mercian spellings with <oe> reflect a rounding of the vowel after <w> provokes Tolkien into adding an exclamation mark in the margin, where he notes that these are in fact the result of the mutation of ō.[51] Tolkien's shock at this philological slip was no doubt partly fuelled by the particular affection in which he held the Mercian dialect of Old English; in a letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien lamented the spread of global English and threatened to speak nothing but Old Mercian.[52]

Tolkien and Wyld would have also disagreed about the correct pronunciation of *waistcoat*, since Tolkien placed the 'weskit' version in the speech of Gaffer Gamgee—hardly the kind of gentleman with whom Wyld associated it. This fits with the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s labelling of the 'weskit' form as found in 'representations of vulgar pronunciation',[53] although this is perhaps unsurprising since a check of the *OED* archives reveals that Tolkien was responsible for composing this usage label as part of his work on the entry for *waistcoat*.[54]

Wyld died suddenly in January 1945; in a letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien referred to his unexpected demise, affectionately adding 'God rest his soul'.[55] Wyld's death did, however, create a degree of inconvenience for Tolkien. In a letter to his publisher, Stanley Unwin, he expressed a concern that finding Wyld's successor would devolve onto him, thereby taking up much of the Easter vacation.[56] As it turned out, Tolkien's prediction that the responsibility of replacing Wyld would fall upon his shoulders came truer than he imagined, since he was elected as his successor.

The deep division that Tolkien encountered in the Oxford English School had its origins in the initial proposals for its foundation. Despite a determination that there be a balance between literature and language in the syllabus devised in 1898, in order to prevent the school being divided into two separate halves, only one of the papers attempted to combine the two approaches. But, rather than seeking to encourage students to apply both approaches to works by Chaucer and *Piers Plowman*, the examination paper included six literary questions and a further six dealing with philology. D. J. Palmer, in his account of the rise of English Studies as a discipline, considers this to epitomize 'the artificial and mechanical balance between the two sides of the school, and the failure to reconcile them properly'.[57]

Tolkien set out his approach to philology and its role in the English syllabus in an essay entitled 'The Oxford English School', published in *The Oxford Magazine* in 1930.[58] Accepting that the distinction between philology and literature was 'notoriously marked' in Oxford, Tolkien argued that the division was not helped by the use of the terms 'language' and 'literature' for the two sides of the course; he preferred instead to use the letters 'A' and 'B'. The A course was focused on literary, historical, critical and linguistic studies of Old and Middle English texts. Central to this approach was philology, which went 'hand in hand with as full a study from all points of view of the old and mediaeval periods as is possible in two years'. Tolkien suggested revising the B course by substantially reducing the study of modern literature and substituting it with a rigorous focus on Old and Middle English texts. Instead of the 'meagre' philology on offer to students of the B course, he proposed offering them 'real' philology, encompassing all periods studied as literature, as well as the Middle Ages.

[51] H. C. Wyld, *A Short History of English* (London, 1914). The volume is now Weston Library, Oxford, Tolkien VC 7. The note referred to is on p. 83. On the umlaut of */o(ː)/ to /øː/, spelled <oe>, in dialects of Old English see Richard M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English Volume I: Phonology* (Oxford, 2011), 121.

[52] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 65.

[53] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, eds J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford, 1989), s.v. waistcoat.

[54] I am very grateful to Beverley McCulloch for giving me access to the *OED* archives. For Tolkien's work on words beginning with <w>, including the entry for *waistcoat*, see Gilliver, Marshall and Weiner, *The Ring of Words*, 15–19.

[55] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 114.

[56] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 114.

[57] D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (London, 1965), 115.

[58] J. R. R. Tolkien 'The Oxford English School', *The Oxford Magazine* XLVIII, 778–82.

Tolkien viewed the discipline of philology as central to the study of all the Northern tongues; without it, Old English poetry, the Gothic translation of the Bible, and the Old Icelandic sagas could not be read at all. Philology was thus essential to the critical toolkit wielded by both student and scholar: 'The poems and prose they study – the senses of their words, their syntax, their idiom, metre, and allusion – were rescued from oblivion by philologists'. Tolkien placed philology at the core of the scholarly endeavour and at the centre of his proposed revisions of the Oxford English syllabus. Rather than attempting to find a half-hearted compromise position between the two narrow modes of Language and Literature, Tolkien proposed a third way: a broader and more comprehensive approach with philology at its heart. According to Shippey, this third dimension, at right angles to both literary and linguistic applications, was the perspective from which Tolkien also wrote his fictional works.[59] Following this syllabus, students would be expected not just to grasp the philological method and its results, but also to apply it themselves and 'share in the labour'. Underpinning Tolkien's proposals was the belief that language is more important than any of its functions, only one of which concerns the development of a literary language, so that engaging with it is both 'profound' and 'fundamental'.

The following year, Tolkien read a paper to the London Philological Society which analysed the northern dialect in the speech of the Cambridge students in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*.[60] In arguing for Chaucer's accuracy in his depiction of northern dialect, Tolkien recruited the poet to the language side of the debate, claiming that Chaucer would have preferred the company of the Philological Society to that of the Royal Society of Literature. The title of the paper as it appeared in the society's transactions in 1934, 'Chaucer as a Philologist', is even more explicit in its association of Chaucer with Tolkien's linguistic cause. Jill Fitzgerald has noted the significance of this appropriation of Chaucer, since his works traditionally straddled the borderline between linguistic and literary approaches.[61] Tolkien's recruiting of Chaucer to philology, therefore, was a deliberate attempt to stake a claim for the works of a canonical writer felt to belong more in the literary camp.

In his valedictory address of June 1959, Tolkien continued to defend philology, the foundation of humane letters, against 'misology', a 'disqualifying defect or disease'. In this lecture Tolkien returned to the factionalism brought about by those legendary bogeymen *Lang* and *Lit*, two sides of one subject responsible for the creation of opposing parties who fight each other for more of the candidates' time. Instead of viewing one side as the cuckoo in the nest, bent on expelling her bed-fellow, Tolkien offered an image of *Lang* and *Lit* as conjoined twins, with two heads but one heart, whose health is much more robust when they work in harmony.[62]

It is indicative of the influence Tolkien was to have over Lewis that he came to support Tolkien's proposed syllabus, with its focus on philology and the study of Old and Middle English language. The extent of the hostility that was sparked by their conspiratorial plotting is apparent from Lewis's warning Tolkien to be on his guard when amongst their colleagues: 'Forgive me if I remind you that there are disguised orcs behind every tree'.[63] Their combined efforts were successful in moulding a new syllabus in 1931, along the lines set out in the article in *The Oxford Magazine*, requiring all students to engage in detailed study of the language of medieval English texts. Lewis described their victory to his brother Warren as a 'great feather in my cap', characterizing their success as having forced the new syllabus upon the junto 'after much hard fighting'.[64] In his diary, Tolkien privately admitted that the reformed syllabus went beyond his 'wildest hopes'.[65]

[59] Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*, 8.
[60] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Chaucer as a Philologist: The Reeve's Tale', *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1934), 1–70.
[61] Jill Fitzgerald, 'A 'Clerkes Compleinte': Tolkien and the Division of Lit. and Lang', *Tolkien Studies*, 6 (2009), 41–57.
[62] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford', 225, 230.
[63] Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London, 2002), 195.
[64] *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, II, 9.
[65] Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 185.

But Lewis's conversion to philology may not mark the end of his campaign of hostility against H. C. Wyld. In the meantime, Wyld had been continuing his promotion of the superiority of the standard form of the English language. In 1934 he published his most outspokenly prescriptive statement concerning its merits in relation to dialect usage in a tract issued by the Society for Pure English: 'The Best English: A Claim for the Superiority of Received Standard English'. Both the title of the tract itself, and that of the society responsible for its publication, unashamedly highlight the linguistic agenda which this argument serves. Here, the Best English (termed Received Standard English) is somewhat circularly defined as that spoken by the 'best people': members of the highest social class who attended the 'great public schools'. In it, Wyld concedes that dialect speech is acceptable in the provinces and among the uneducated, but views it as totally unacceptable among the educated speakers of the highest social classes. He therefore urges that dialect speakers who aspire to public office aim to eliminate the 'grosser forms of provincialism'. According to Wyld, the finest exponents of Received Standard English are British Army officers, the modern-day equivalents of the great men of the Elizabethan court: 'The utterance of these men is at once clear-cut and precise, yet free from affectation; at once downright and manly, yet in the highest degree refined and urbane'.

The publication of this tract coincided with the appearance of the following poem in *The Oxford Magazine* with the title 'The King's English', accompanied by an explanation that: 'Professor H.C. Wyld is of the opinion that the "best" English is most consistently heard at its best among Officers of the British Regular Army':

Our Officers and Gentlemen
Have now another claim
To back their reputation as to
How to Play the Game.

They hold the King's Commission and
His uniform they wear,
But the way they speak his English
Is quite beyond compare.

For purity of language
Both ante-room and mess
Show how an English gentleman
May best himself express.

No longer can the pulpits or
The College lecture rooms
Compare with the parade ground where
The brevet-major booms.

The regimental orderly room
Now has a reputation
For delicate apostrophe
And high-toned conversation.

The days C.B. allotted to
Such men as are ill-shaved
Are couched in so good English that

Their *amour propre* is saved.

The fourteen days' detention
For absence without leave
Are exquisitely uttered and
A pleasure to receive.

The terror in young officers
Which adjutants inspire
Is mixed with admiration for
Their well-phrased, urbane ire.

And even on manoeuvres when
All things go sadly wrong,
The officers are mindful of
Our glorious English tongue.

Throughout the whole battalion,
The soldiers swell with pride,
Because their colonel's language is
The best in the brigade.

Alas! Poor Territorial!
Efficient though you are;
Your English is not quite as if
You were a Regular.

At once downright and manly, and
Both clear-cut and precise,
Yet free from affectation or
Some other vulgar vice,

The Regular army officer
Beneath his sturdy breast,
May well be proud that he can speak
Our English at its best.[66]

Although this poem is unsigned, its sarcastic treatment of Wyld's tract is entirely in keeping with the attitude displayed in Lewis's earlier verse lampoons, suggesting that he may be its author. But, while the content and attitude towards Wyld's thesis that it portrays align with Lewis's earlier verses, its simplistic rhyme scheme, along with such half-rhymes as *wrong* and *tongue, pride* and *brigade, are* and *regular*, sets it apart from the other poems published here, as well as other highly ambitious metrical forms employed in Lewis's known poetic output.[67] Whether the poem is Lewis's work, or that of another Oxonian irritated by the claims of Wyld's

[66] *The Oxford Magazine*, 26 April 1934.
[67] An example of this is the highly complex system of consonances, assonances, internal and end rhymes that are found in Lewis's poem 'Le Roi S'Amuse'. See the analysis by Michael Ward, 'A Look at Lewis's Poetry': <https://www.cslewis.com/a-look-at-lewiss-poetry/> accessed 12 March 2024.

tract, its appearance in *The Oxford Magazine* demonstrates the opposition to such arguments and to Wyld's class-consciousness in the university at that time.

Another reason for suspecting Lewis's authorship of this poem is the appearance of several poems by him in subsequent volumes of *The Oxford Magazine*. In the issue dated 10 May 1934 Lewis published 'The Shortest Way Home';[68] this was followed by the poem 'Scholar's Melancholy' in the issue of 24 May.[69] Both these poems were printed under the pseudonym 'N.W', an abbreviation of Nat Whilk ('I know not whom'), suggesting a reluctance to be identified as their author. Given that Lewis and Wyld were at this point colleagues in the English Faculty, it is hardly surprising that he should have chosen to publish a poem satirizing his views without any indication of his authorship, even that of a pseudonym. These two poems that appeared in May 1934 were not Lewis's first submission to *The Oxford Magazine*; on 30 November 1933, Lewis and Owen Barfield published a jointly authored poem, entitled 'Abecedarium Philosophicum', with an attribution naming both authors.[70]

The poem critiquing Wyld, then, appeared at a time when Lewis was in the habit of submitting his verse for publication in *The Oxford Magazine*. Perhaps it was his Belfast origins that prompted Lewis to take issue with Wyld's view that Received Pronunciation was the 'best' accent. Or perhaps Lewis recognized the spuriousness of Wyld's argument that RP combined the condition of maximum resonation, or sonority, with the clearest possible differentiation of the sounds, acknowledging that it was simply a preference based upon self-interest and a sense of entitlement and superiority. Or perhaps it was Lewis's tolerance of linguistic variation, born of his extensive engagement with the varied forms of medieval English, and a longstanding interest in semantic change, as manifested in the series of lectures which were posthumously published as *Studies in Words*. Lewis recognized that language changed, irrespective of attempts to halt it, or to impose upon it models of correctness.

Despite this, Wyld's prescriptive crusade had a long reach; his phrase 'grosser forms of provincialism' lies behind accounts of the 'purging of grosser provincialisms' that scholars have sought to trace in accounts of fifteenth-century written usage.[71] Wyld's claim for the superiority of Received Pronunciation was also cited approvingly by A. S. C. Ross in his highly influential study of U and non-U (Upper and Middle class) usages, where he claims Wyld as a particularly valuable authority, being both a philologist and a gentleman. Although Ross does concede that, by the 1950s, Wyld's dictum that 'No gentleman goes on a bus', is one that most gentlemen had been forced to neglect.[72]

The question of the balance of the language and literature components of the Oxford English syllabus came up for reconsideration in the early 1950s, when a sub-committee was tasked with devising proposals to be voted on at a full meeting of the Faculty. Tolkien, now the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, was a member of the working-party, which proposed more opportunities to study modern literature, including making a paper on English Literature from 1830–1920 a compulsory component.[73] Lewis was incensed at Tolkien's decision to turn against the syllabus the two of them had devised. His scorn for the new proposals is apparent from a poem he wrote and submitted to the editor of *The Oxford Magazine*. Titled 'Ichabod',

[68] *The Oxford Magazine*, 10 May 1934.
[69] *The Oxford Magazine*, 24 May 1934.
[70] *The Oxford Magazine*, 30 November 1933.
[71] See, for instance, M. L. Samuels, 'Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology', *English Studies*, 44 (1963), 81–94; reprinted in Margaret Laing (ed.), *Middle English Dialectology: Essays on some Principles and Problems* (Aberdeen, 1989), 64–80 and Jeremy J. Smith, 'Standard Language in early Middle English?', in I. Taavitsainen et al. (eds), *Placing Middle English in Context* (Berlin, 2001), 125–39.
[72] A. S. C. Ross, 'Linguistic Class-Indicators in Present-day English', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 55 (1954), 20–56, 23.
[73] Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion & Guide: Reader's Guide, Part II* (London, 2017), 956.

meaning 'the glory has departed', the poem ruefully records how the March of Progress has compelled the English School to pare down the Middle Ages, to prune 'bowery Spenser to a leafless stick' and fob off Milton with the same share as once fell to Hoccleve, Hunt and Blair:

> 'Small is the loss; their works are out of touch
> With Life (i.e. not read at Cambridge much);'
> (lines 9–10)[74]

The poem was not published, however, since Lewis's vigorous campaigning and passionate oratory prompted the majority of Faculty members to reject the new syllabus; even Tolkien was persuaded to vote against the proposals he himself had contributed to devising.[75]

The scornful reference to the Cambridge English School, with the implication of its relative inferiority, is ironic, since in 1954 Lewis took up the newly established Chair of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge University. In switching to the Cambridge English School, Lewis found himself in a department with little interest in formal language study. At Cambridge, Lewis appears to have ended his long-standing spat with Wyld and philology—selling his copy of *The Historical Study of the Mother Tongue* containing one of his satirical poems—only to encounter a new foe, in the form of F. R. Leavis and the study of Literary Criticism—with 'the largest possible capitals for both words'.[76]

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[74] Quoted from Don W. King (ed.), *The Collected Poems of C.S. Lewis: A Critical Edition* (Kent, OH, 2015), 385–6.
[75] Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London, 2006), 229–30.
[76] C. S. Lewis, 'Interim Report', in *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* (London, 2002), 231. For a comparison of Lewis and Leavis and their opposing approaches to literary criticism, see Bernard Bergonzi, 'Lewis, Leavis, and Other Oppositions', in Bergonzi (ed.), *Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture* (Oxford, 1991), 40–70.