

The Enigma of Autobiography: Critical Reflections on *Surprised by Joy*

In 1955, Lewis published *Surprised by Joy*, subtitled “The Shape of My Early Life.” It is one of Lewis’s most cited works, and contains some of his finest prose and most intimate reflections. No study of Lewis can fail to engage with (and, at certain critical points, depend upon) Lewis’s personal narrative of conversion. Lewis had no hesitation in referring to this “story of my conversion” as his “autobiography.”¹ But what did he mean by this? What are we, his readers, to understand by this term?

The Ambivalence of Autobiography in Lewis’s Literary Outlook

The teasing title of Lewis’s autobiography draws on the opening words of the Miltonic sonnet of the same name by the English Romantic writer William Wordsworth (1770–1850).²

Surprised by joy – impatient as the wind.

Wordsworth wrote this sonnet in the aftermath of the death of his three-year-old daughter, Catherine. On experiencing a rare moment of joy following Catherine’s death in 1812, Wordsworth found this precipitated a series of emotional traumas. His fleeting experience of delight gave way to a somber realization that the one person with whom he longed to share that joy – Catherine – was gone, followed immediately by a pang of guilt over his ability to forget her even for that brief moment.

Lewis chose to appropriate the title, rather than the substance of Wordsworth's poem, and develops the idea of "Joy" in his own distinct way (see chapter 5). *Surprised by Joy* is a narrative of a human collision with divine reality, in which old ways of thinking were shattered and disrupted, and new ways of seeing opened up. Picking up on the "visionary gleam" of joy³ that so briefly intruded into Wordsworth's grief, Lewis offers his reflections on the source of a deeper vision of Joy, rooted at one level in the yearnings of the human heart, and at another in the nature of God. For Lewis, it is God who shoots such "arrows of Joy" as a means of heightening his sense of longing, stimulating his reflection, initiating his questing, and ultimately achieving his transformation.

Surprised by Joy remains something of an enigma among Lewis's works, not least because at first sight it seems to subvert Lewis's own views on the significance of texts. Especially during his "Personal Heresy" controversy of the late 1930s with E. M. W. Tillyard, Lewis made his reputation by insisting that the historical and experiential worlds of an author were not of great importance; what really mattered was their writings. Writers were not themselves a spectacle; their texts were rather a set of spectacles through which the world might be viewed.⁴

The poet is not a man who asks me to look at him; he is a man who says "look at that" and points; the more I follow the pointing of his finger the less I can possibly see of him.

Yet, by definition, an autobiography invites its readers to look at its author. In writing *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis would seem to be pointing his finger *at himself*, choosing to make himself into a spectacle.

Perhaps this helps us understand why Lewis is almost apologetic about the whole enterprise of writing the story of his conversion. It is not something he *wants* to do; it is something he has *been asked* to do. The rhetoric of self-deprecation with which the work opens is not to be seen as a false humility on Lewis's part. It is something rather more interesting – a belief that this kind of work is, in the first place not of importance *as history*; and in the second, is not something he feels sits easily with his views on literature. It is possible that this helps to make sense of its otherwise puzzling tendencies to mis-remember things in their proper context.

If Lewis is true to himself, we must see this work not as something we are meant to look *at*, but something we are meant to look *through*. The poet is "not a spectacle but a pair of spectacles;" a window through which we attend to the landscape.⁵ If we follow the "pointing of his finger," we find Lewis inviting us to attend to the "arrows of Joy" that rain down

upon us, and reflect on their deeper significance. Memory, joy, and longing then become gateways to God. Perhaps we should read *Surprised by Joy*, not primarily as a book about the life of C. S. Lewis, but a book about life itself. Lewis's autobiography is then to be seen as much as a reflection on the meaning of human life in general as it is on the meaning of his *own* life.

Perhaps the most obvious influence on Lewis at this point is G. K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (1908). Although Chesterton himself dismissed this as a "slovenly autobiography," most critics have regarded it as one of Chesterton's finest works.⁶ Probably modeled on John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* (1864), Chesterton's autobiography is a powerful intellectual defense of the rationality of the Christian faith, and especially its capacity to make sense of things. Christian doctrine is not something that was forcibly imposed upon reality, but is rather the key that unlocks "life's real meaning." The Christian faith, he argued, was to be considered as a hypothesis which, once tested, can become a means of perception, making sense of what was previously obscure. While still an atheist, Lewis had been deeply impressed by Chesterton's *Everlasting Man*;⁷ his subsequent career could be seen as a gradual assumption of Chesterton's mantle as an apologist.

Might reading Chesterton have helped Lewis to grasp the apologetic potential of a spiritual autobiography? And alert him to how a potentially self-aggrandizing literary genre might be subverted for more noble ends? Or are we to see *Surprised by Joy* in a more literary and cultural context, understanding it, at least in part, as Lewis's attempt to make sense of his own identity and agency, discerning or constructing a coherent narrative within his life?⁸

Surprised by Joy is not Lewis's only autobiographical work. Lewis's first attempt at autobiography is found in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), where Lewis represents his understanding of his own intellectual journey to faith through a proxy – the "pilgrim," named John. Lewis's difficult and at times perplexing work, written in two intense weeks during August 1932, surveys and assesses the intellectual byways that he explored – and occasionally inhabited – as he sought the true goal of the longings he experienced within himself.⁹ This work of allegory, modeled only very loosely on John Bunyan's seventeenth-century classic *Pilgrim's Progress*,¹⁰ remains an important source for any understanding of Lewis's struggle to reconcile reason and imagination, yet makes little reference to identifiable events in the external world. In many ways, it shows a preoccupation with internal mental struggles and reflections, even if this is presented in the form of an historical journey.

The third autobiographical work is *A Grief Observed*, written in the aftermath of the death from cancer of Lewis's wife, Joy Davidman, in July 1960. This work, initially published in 1961 under the pseudonym "N. W. Clerk," offers a raw account of Lewis's emotions and doubts following his bereavement. Once more, the focus is on Lewis's internal thoughts, documented without any attempt to blunt its force or soften its tone.¹¹ Lewis allowed himself to express his grief "in all its rawness and sinful reactions and follies." Although *A Grief Observed* "ends with faith," it nevertheless "raises all the blackest doubts *en route*."¹² The work remains a classic account of the bereavement process, and is an important source for understanding the difficulties and pressures of Lewis's final years.

Surprised by Joy is different. Written at a time when Lewis's reputation as a scholar and popular Christian writer was at its height, this autobiography mingles personal historical information and theological reflection. The publication of the "Chronicles of Narnia" had generated huge interest in Lewis, both as a writer of fiction and as a Christian apologist. How, many wondered, did Lewis come to discover Christianity? Lewis presents *Surprised by Joy* as his response to that question.

In fact, Lewis had already begun to draft such a work much earlier. Lewis's brother Warren noted in his diary entry for March 25, 1948, that Lewis was working on his "autobiography," which by that stage was focusing on their Belfast childhood. Lewis's surge in creative genius during the late 1940s and early 1950s led to the writing of the Narnia series, which both delayed the production of his autobiography on the one hand, while creating a sustained public interest in it on the other.

Lewis presents *Surprised by Joy* as unproblematic.¹³ Its goals are quite simple: it "aims at telling the story of my conversion and is not a general autobiography, still less 'Confessions' like those of St. Augustine or Rousseau."¹⁴ It is Lewis's own account of how he "passed from Atheism to Christianity." Yet while this illuminates the topic of the book, it discloses little concerning its literary form, style, or approach to its topic. Lewis clearly presents himself as narrating the *histoire d'une âme*. But how should one tell such a story? What narrative vehicle is to be adopted? What models shaped this narration?

Augustine of Hippo: A Model for Lewis?

Although Lewis eschews any suggestion of similarity between his own *Surprised by Joy* and Augustine's *Confessions*, written during the years 397–8, the close reader of both works is left wondering quite what

Lewis meant by this statement. The parallels between the two works sometimes appear more striking than their divergences. Lewis's writings from the mid-1930s show that he clearly had a high regard for Augustine's *Confessions*,¹⁵ and it would be surprising if its ideas, themes, and narrative structure were not directly or indirectly echoed in *Surprised by Joy*.

Both the *Confessions* and *Surprised by Joy* concern what Augustine vividly describes as the "fields and vast mansions of memory."¹⁶ For Augustine, memory is a means of discernment of meaning and identity, storing treasures as a resource for the construction of narratives and preservation of continuities with other worlds: "The huge repository of the memory, with its secret and unimaginable caverns, receives and stores all these things, to be retrieved and brought out for use when needed."¹⁷

Like Augustine before him, Lewis uses an autobiographical format to weave together into a complex (and occasionally confusing) narrative factual recollections of the external world, "suffocatingly subjective"¹⁸ memories of his own emotional states, and theological interpretation of the course of his life which is subtle in its intentions, though perhaps not in its execution.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Augustine's *Confessions* is the implicit recognition that "autobiography" is closely related to – indeed, entails – "conversion," in that any attempt to narrate one's own life constantly demands *two* authorial voices: the protagonist and the narrator. With Augustine, the voice of the narrator dominates – a narrator who is somehow outside the narrative and who can look back at the protagonist's life and discern its fundamental patterns. The narrator knows more than the protagonist, who is unable to stand above and beyond the flow of his life, and discern its patterns.

The gift of retrospection often allows an incident, perhaps seen as somewhat peripheral or tangential at the time, to be seen against a broader backdrop, and its place in the overall trajectory of events to be discerned. Augustine thus notes five incidents in his life which he comes to realize stood out from the continuum of his experience: his youthful stealing of pears,¹⁹ the death of an unnamed friend, his escape from his mother through an act of deception, his conversion experience in a garden, and the mystical vision he and his mother shared shortly before her death. The point which Augustine appreciated is that the significance of these events was not always obvious at the time. Similarly, Lewis singles out his reading of George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and a visit to Whipsnade Zoo as marking turning points in his life, on the basis of his later discernment of what proved significant to bringing him to the "vita nuova" of the Christian faith.

Yet perhaps the most important parallel between the two autobiographies is the manner of their depiction of God.²⁰ God is not represented or understood as a passive object, a concept hidden in the interstices of the cosmos, awaiting discovery by the active, questing agent – whether Augustine or Lewis. Even the human experiences of longing and desire, which lead to the apprehension of God, are to be seen as “arrows of Joy” (Lewis), originating from God, with the objective of leading the soul back to God.²¹ Both Augustine and Lewis portray God as an active questing subject, who masters, overwhelms, and seduces the narrator. The autonomy of the narrator is thus *subverted*, in that God becomes both a voice and presence – however subtle and understated – in the narrative process.

There is, however, another point at which Augustine can be seen to offer an appropriate point of comparison with Lewis. Lewis’s “re-conversion”²² involved two stages; an initial conversion to theism, and a subsequent conversion to Christianity. It is clear that Lewis himself regarded these as two quite distinct outlooks, with the latter having a richer “mythopoeic” dimension absent from his more philosophical theism. Some scholars have also discerned two phases in the development of Augustine’s thought. Older studies spoke of Augustine’s earlier “neo-Platonic” phase following his conversion in 386, characterized by a generally philosophical disposition, followed by a later transition to Christianity proper.²³ Some would suggest that Lewis’s conversion was initially philosophical in character, arising from his developing commitment to Idealism, which only later developed into an explicitly Christian commitment, particularly through his realization of the theological implications of the notion of “myth.”

Yet it is important to be cautious here. Like Lewis, Augustine offered a later retrospective on his intellectual and religious development, which tends to emphasize the continuity of his development, rather than point to fundamental breaks or discontinuities.²⁴ Similarly, although Lewis’s correspondence points to a moment of spiritual breakthrough as a result of his conversations with Hugo Dyson and J. R. R. Tolkien about the nature of myth in September 1931, *Surprised by Joy* offers a subtly modulated narrative, which makes only a veiled reference to this event. Dyson and Tolkien, Lewis recalls, gave him “much help” in “getting over the last stile.”²⁵ What his correspondence of the time suggests to have been either a discontinuity or a dramatic leap forward is accommodated in *Surprised by Joy* within an essentially continuous narrative of development, conceived as a series of distinct yet interconnected moves in a chess game.

Autobiography and the Medieval *Ars Memorativa*

Lewis scholarship has generally failed to engage with the issues of literary genre arising from *Surprised by Joy*. We should not be surprised that Lewis, who established his reputation as one of the finest scholars of medieval literature of his day, should draw on the classics of this age in searching for literary models for his own narrative of retrieval of memory and self-disclosure.²⁶ Who can miss the parallels with Dante's *Vita Nuova*, which its author described as *il libro della mia memoria*?²⁷ Dante there relates his journey *per librum experientiae* (to borrow a phrase from Alan of Lille), offering a model of autobiography which is clearly based on Augustine's *Confessions*, while developing the approach in new directions.

Dante's masterpiece is a luminous example of the "high art of a singular human memory discovering meaning in history."²⁸ It concerns the retrieval and transformation of memory, offering a means by which the retrieval of the past acts as a key to unlock the meaning of the pilgrimage of life. Medieval writers were intrigued by Aristotle's argument that the human gift of memory distinguishes humanity from the animals.²⁹ Although Aristotle concedes that animals can remember certain things, they cannot preserve, polish, and return to their memories of the past. Human beings alone are able to use and develop this power of memory, using this *ars memorativa* to find continuity, integrity, and purpose in life.³⁰ The *ars memorativa* was not understood in terms of a wooden rote learning, but was conceived and practiced as a tool of invention and discovery, through the retrieval and selective combination of memories.

The medieval concern with memory was not, however, limited to the retrieval, interpretation, and colligation of memories; it also engaged the question of how certain memories might be forgotten or suppressed, purged from the individual's recollection of the past. This deliberate and selective act of forgetting was itself seen as an activity of memory. Some late medieval treatises on the *ars memorativa* specifically engage what might be called the *ars oblivionalis*.³¹ How can painful and inconvenient memories – such as that which evoked Wordsworth's "Surprised by Joy" or Lewis's traumatic memories of the Great War – be deliberately erased or systematically suppressed? How can one tell one's story *selectively*, omitting what is thought to be embarrassing to one's reputation, leading to contempt and ridicule; or disruptive to the pattern of meaning that is to be discerned within one's life, leading to anxiety and melancholy? The art of forgetting was seen as important to two audiences, one external (concerned with the writer's reputation), the other internal (concerned

with the writer's mental and spiritual wellbeing). Lewis's important unilateral "treaty with reality," to be discussed in the next essay (39–42), can be seen as reflecting this latter concern.

Writing *Surprised by Joy* clearly allowed Lewis to heal some of the wounds from his past through the cultivation of the *ars oblivionalis*. In his narrative, Lewis passes over certain moments of his own past, clearly considering these to be ambivalent or disturbing.³² It is as if he has "vetoed" incidents that are too painful to discuss in public.³³ By the time he moved to Cambridge in January 1955, Lewis seems to have come to terms with his past, and purged himself of both the pain and guilt of such memories. Perhaps the writing of *Surprised by Joy* contributed to this process of healing.

Yet while these medieval influences have clearly affected Lewis's approach in *Surprised by Joy*, we also find other means of recalling the past woven into his narrative. One of the most remarkable of these concerns the ability of a fragrance to evoke memories, seemingly without any intermediate active process of recollection. Perhaps the most famous literary example of this found in Marcel Proust's vast autobiographical *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), when he recalls how an emotional and vivid recollection of a childhood experience was evoked by the aroma of a "piece of madeleine."³⁴ Lewis's memory of a childhood event was similarly triggered by an odor – the fragrance of "a flowering currant bush on a summer day." Lewis describes how this evoked his "memory of a memory" in a strikingly realistic and dramatic manner.³⁵

So what principles appear to have guided Lewis as he wove together his memories and reflections? In order to reflect on this, we need to locate Lewis's work on a conceptual map, which is best done by considering more about the literary genre of autobiography itself.

The Nature of Autobiography: Critical Reflections

What is an autobiography? What conventions govern or inform this literary genre? Some scholars hold to a straightforward literary understanding of autobiography as a personal memoir, an account of an individual's life written from the standpoint of the subject rather than of external observers.³⁶ Yet this is to overlook the role of literary conventions and forms in shaping the text,³⁷ and the author's intentions and agendas in writing.³⁸

Lewis wrote *Surprised by Joy* before literary theorists began to take an interest in the literary genre of autobiography. In one of the first scholarly works to take this genre seriously, Roy Pascal declared that "autobiography proper" was essentially a retrospective account of things that was ultimately

a “search for the true self.”³⁹ Writing an autobiography was about self-discovery. Yet Pascal was perhaps too willing to overlook the fact that some writers seem to have been concerned to construct – rather than discern – their selves. Autobiography is thus about the person we had hoped we would be, or the person that we would wish others to discern – with appropriate adjustments being made to the narrative in order to achieve the desired outcome.⁴⁰ For this reason, autobiography could rightly be described as “simultaneously historical record and literary artefact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological testament.”⁴¹

This point is reinforced by research into the reliability of personal recollections by individuals, concerning the past in their own lifetime, which suggest that memories of the past are sometimes actively constructed in response to certain needs. In recent years, some scholars have begun to use the somewhat clumsy (yet potentially illuminating) term “mnemohistory” to emphasize that history is an active process of the construction of meaning over time, giving identity to communities or individuals – an “ongoing work of reconstructive imagination.” Mnemohistory is not concerned with “the past as such, but with the past *as it is remembered*.”⁴²

Approaching *Surprised by Joy* with such a framework in mind alerts us to its complexities, and prepares us for some of the difficulties that the text raises for us. One of the most obvious of these difficulties concerns Lewis’s curiously extended account of his schooldays at Malvern College (“Wyvern”), which seriously slows the pace of his narrative, and overwhelms his readers with detail of his trials and tribulations.⁴³ Lewis seems bent on securing revenge on those who he believed to have tormented him as a schoolboy by ridiculing them. “If I had never seen the spectacle which these coarse, brainless English schoolboys present, there might be a danger of my sometimes becoming like that myself.”⁴⁴ There seems to be an overall stylistic dissonance between these chapters and their neighbors, suggesting that they may represent earlier autobiographical fragments that were redacted – not entirely successfully – into a work with a somewhat different focus.

While the provenance of these passages requires further consideration, their accuracy has long been disputed. One of the significant sources of tension between Lewis and his brother in the late 1950s was Warren Lewis’s belief that Lewis had significantly misrepresented his time at Malvern College in *Surprised by Joy*. Lewis himself later conceded that he had not been entirely honest in his account of this period of his life. George Sayer (1914–2005), a close friend who penned one of the most revealing and perceptive biographies of Lewis, recalls Lewis admitting

later in life that his account of his time at Malvern was “lies,” reflecting the complex interaction of two strands of his identity at that time.⁴⁵ Humphrey Havard, a member of the Inklings, mischievously – but seriously – suggested that *Surprised by Joy* should be entitled *Suppressed by Jack*.

Sayer’s recollection of the difficulties in penetrating the “smoke screen” Lewis created around himself leaves readers of *Surprised by Joy* wondering about both the extent and motivation of Lewis’s reconstruction of his past.⁴⁶ Northrop Frye is one of many to observe that an autobiographical narrative ultimately leads to reality being *constructed*, as much as reported.⁴⁷ Frye notes how most autobiographies have certain covert teleological goals which influence the choice of material to be included, its position within the narrative, and the manner in which it is interpreted. Sayer’s misgivings about *Surprised by Joy* reflect this ambivalence toward history, which Frye regards as intrinsic to the genre of autobiography.

Yet there is no doubt that the autobiographical genre permits precisely this reconstruction of the past. As medieval authors made clear, the *ars memorativa* was a tool for the forging of personal identity. The genre of the autobiography allows a reaffirmation and reassertion of the identity and importance of the self,⁴⁸ especially at a time when an individual’s personal or cultural identity is seen as being under threat.⁴⁹

Autobiography thus becomes a manner in which the identity and purpose of the self is constructed, allowing a pattern to be seen in what might otherwise be simply a parade of historical happenstance.⁵⁰ This theme can be discerned in Lewis’s reflections. In a letter written to Dom Bede Griffith in 1956, shortly after the publication of *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis reflected on the importance of being able to discern patterns within one’s life. This was something that writing his autobiography had made possible; he could now discern a pattern to things. “The gradual *reading* of one’s life, seeing the pattern emerge, is a great illumination at our age.”⁵¹ For Lewis, the narration of his own story is about the identification of a pattern of meaning within his life, which enabled events to be seen in their proper context, and assume their true and deeper meaning.

This point is clearly anticipated in Augustine’s *Confessions*. One of Augustine’s most significant insights is that the full significance of events does not become clear until later. A seemingly inconsequential happening may turn out to be laden with significance, in the light of later developments. It is only at the end of one’s life that one can discern its patterns of meaning, and fully understand the significance of its constituent events. A mere narrative of happenings fails to disclose their significance; an interpretative standpoint is necessary to identify their meaning. For Augustine, conversion to Christianity provided him with a standpoint from which he could deploy a critical detachment, enabling him to look

at his past and decipher what was hitherto opaque, shrouded in mist, or out of focus. To borrow Plato's famous term,⁵² Christianity provided Augustine with a *synoptikon* – a way of seeing things (whether the cosmos or his own personal existence) in their totality, allowing their inner coherence to be perceived.

The Historical Reliability of Lewis's Autobiography

One of the more troubling questions raised by a close reading of *Surprised by Joy* concerns the reliability of Lewis's memory. Although there is no reason to doubt Lewis's recollection of his own inner experiences and feelings, as described in this book, there are significant questions about the accuracy of Lewis's correlation of these subjective recollections with the objective world of places and dates. Does he get his dates wrong? This is not necessarily a question of *inventing* the past to serve certain agendas, but may simply be a matter of a failure to recall when certain things actually took place.

Lewis himself remarked on this failing in 1957, shortly after the publication of *Surprised by Joy*: he could now, he confessed, "never remember dates."⁵³ His brother did not consider this to be a development dating from Lewis's later career. Lewis, he declared, had a "life-long inability to keep track of dates."⁵⁴ When Lewis became Vice-President of Magdalen College, Oxford in 1941 – a fixed-term appointment with essentially administrative responsibilities, which rotated around the fellowship – he was soon found to be incapable of carrying out one of the chief responsibilities of this role: arranging for the booking of rooms for college meetings or private engagements. Lewis simply could not remember dates. Rooms were double-booked, if they were booked at all. In the end, his brother Warnie was enlisted to carry out this role, and the problem receded.

This issue of the correlation of Lewis's vivid and subjective memories with the objective realities of historical calendars becomes acutely difficult in relation to what is perhaps the central event described in Lewis's autobiography – his conversion. The passage describing this development in *Surprised by Joy* is remarkably (and uncharacteristically) precise about dates. "In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."⁵⁵ Oxford University's official publications for the academic year 1928–9 allow us to narrow this down to some point in the eight weeks between April 28 and June 22, 1929.⁵⁶

Lewis offers no indication of the identity of the external landmarks by which his subjective memory of submission to God can be correlated with events in the world around him. Yet while there are no reasonable

grounds for doubting Lewis's vivid memory of "giving in," and "admitting that God was God," there are four very good reasons for challenging Lewis's recollection that this is to be dated to Trinity Term 1929.⁵⁷

First, a close and continuous reading of his works – especially his correspondence – reveals no sign of a significant change in tone or mood throughout 1929, and even into the first weeks of 1930. Between September 1925 and January 1930, Lewis's writings disclose no hint of any radical change of heart or mind. If Lewis was converted in 1929, this supposedly pivotal event made no impact on his writings – including his letters to his closest friends at that time, Owen Barfield and Arthur Greeves.

Second, Lewis's father died in September 1929. If Lewis's chronology of his own conversion is accepted, Lewis had come to believe in God at the time of his father's death. Yet Lewis's correspondence makes no reference at all to any impact of a belief in God, however emergent, upon his final days spent with his father, his subsequent funeral, and its emotional aftermath. Lewis's father knew that he was dying. He had a robust belief in God, and was reconciled to his own imminent death. If Lewis did indeed come to believe in God as a living personal reality (as opposed to an abstract philosophical idea) in Trinity Term 1929, that faith seems to have made no impact on him at a time when it would be expected to have functioned as a significant consolation for him, not least in that his father had shared that faith.

Third, Lewis's account of the dynamics of his conversion in *Surprised by Joy* speaks of God closing in on him, taking the initiative, and ultimately overwhelming him. We find echoes of this language in a short letter to Owen Barfield, written hastily on February 3, 1930.⁵⁸

Terrible things are happening to me. The "Spirit" or "Real I" is showing an alarming tendency to become much more personal and is taking the offensive, and behaving just like God. You'd better come on Monday at the latest, or I may have entered a monastery.

Barfield was unequivocal about the significance of this letter for Lewis's spiritual development: it marked "the beginning of his conversion."⁵⁹ The letter reflects Lewis's language about the pressures he experienced immediately before his conversion, which is clearly *ahead* of him, not *behind* him.

Fourth, Lewis made it clear that his behavior changed as a result of his new belief in God. Although still not committed to Christianity, he now began to attend both his local parish church (Holy Trinity, Headington Quarry, Oxford) on Sundays, and college chapel on weekdays. Yet Lewis's

correspondence makes no reference to regular attendance at any Oxford church or Magdalen College chapel in 1929, or the first half of 1930.

Yet things change decisively in October 1930. In a letter to his close friend and confidant Arthur Greeves, dated October 29, 1930, Lewis mentions that he now goes to bed earlier than he used to, as he has now “started going to morning chapel at 8.”⁶⁰ This disclosure – mentioned to no other correspondent – is presented as a *new development*, a significant change in his routine, dating from the beginning of the academic year 1930–1. If Lewis’s own date for his conversion is correct, he should have begun attending college chapel in October 1929. Yet the date of this change of habit makes sense if Lewis discovered God in the summer of 1930.

The traditional date of Lewis’s conversion, based on his own narrative in *Surprised by Joy*, and repeated in every major study of Lewis to date,⁶¹ clearly needs review. The best explanation of things is that Lewis’s subjective location of the event in his inner world is regarded as reliable, but his chronological location of the event in terms of his outer world is misplaced. If Lewis was converted during any Trinity Term, it was the Trinity Term of 1930, not 1929 – namely, at some point between April 27 and June 21, 1930.

There are also points of importance for any understanding of Lewis’s *itinerarium mentis ad Deum*. Following his rediscovery of faith in God, Lewis gradually came to a more explicit acceptance of the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. A conversation of September 19, 1931, between Lewis and Hugo Dyson, a lecturer in English at Reading University, and J. R. R. Tolkien at Magdalen College led to Lewis realizing that Christianity was a “true myth,” opening the way for a new and more imaginative understanding of his faith. On October 1, Lewis wrote to his confidant Arthur Greeves, telling him of his new outlook on life.⁶²

I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ – in Christianity. I will try to explain this another time. My long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a lot to do with it.

Lewis then wrote Greeves a second, more detailed letter on October 18, explaining his new understanding of things in some detail, allowing Greeves to understand the critical role that Tolkien and Dyson played in his conversion to Christianity, and above all the importance of the nature of “myth” in helping him overcome his remaining difficulties. Yet *Surprised by Joy* records merely that Tolkien and Dyson provided Lewis with “much help in getting over the last stile.”⁶³ This short statement about Tolkien and Dyson is not fleshed out or given substance, despite

the critical importance of their intervention for Lewis's spiritual development, and subsequent reflections on the role of myth (a matter we shall return to in a later essay: 55–81). Without those two letters of October 1930 to Greeves, we would never have understood quite what was involved in Lewis's final conversion to Christianity, nor the role played by Tolkien.

Lewis's account of his development in *Surprised by Joy* offers an impressionistic overview of his conversion to Christianity, organized more in terms of the ideas involved in Lewis's spiritual journey than the dates of critical milestones along the way. We learn much about Lewis's recollections of his inner feelings and reflections, but little of any historical landmarks which might allow us to organize these themes into a coherent narrative. Furthermore, Lewis's memory of historical landmarks is not entirely reliable. At one critical point Lewis seems to have merged his memories of this important period, conflating two events into one.

Lewis's narrative in *Surprised by Joy* includes an account of a visit he made to Whipsnade Park Zoo in Bedfordshire, in which the gradually coalescing elements of his understanding of the Christian faith finally crystallized Christologically, leading to his mature understanding of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ:⁶⁴

I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought.

Lewis scholars agree that this development probably took place shortly after Lewis's extended discussion of September 19, 1931, with Tolkien and Dyson about the nature of myth. This journey is traditionally assigned to September 28, 1931, nine days after these conversations, when Lewis's brother Warren drove Lewis to Whipsnade in the sidecar of his motorbike. Warren later remarked that it was during this "outing" in September 1931 that Lewis decided to rejoin the church.⁶⁵

Lewis's vivid account of that critical day at Whipsnade Zoo in *Surprised by Joy* includes a poetic passage recalling "the birds singing overhead and the bluebells underfoot," commenting that "Wallaby Wood" had been quite ruined by subsequent development work.⁶⁶ The impact of seeing vast expanses of bluebells in the woods of his native Shropshire inspired one of the finest lines by the English poet and literary scholar A. E. Houseman (1859–1936):⁶⁷

And like a skylit water stood
The bluebells in the azure wood.

Yet Lewis's reference to bluebells in *Surprised by Joy* – perhaps given added significance on account of his heightened perception of the iconic significance of a “blue flower”⁶⁸ – raises certain difficult questions. The English bluebell typically blooms from late April into late May, and its leaves wither and disappear by the late summer. The simple fact is that there would have been no “bluebells underfoot” at Whipsnade in late September. Lewis's recollection of the birds and bluebells at Whipsnade Zoo recorded in *Surprised by Joy* is clearly a memory of a late spring or early summer day, not a day in early autumn.

Lewis seems to have merged his memories of two, quite different visits to Whipsnade – a first visit made in September 1931, and a *second* visit, made in the first week of June 1932, when Lewis was again driven to the zoo – but this time in a car on a “fine day” by Edward Foord-Kelcy (1859–1934). On June 14, shortly after this trip, Lewis wrote to his brother, specifically noting the “masses of bluebells” he had seen, and commenting on the state of “Wallaby Wood”⁶⁹ in terms very similar to the critical passage in *Surprised by Joy*. The sight of such expanses of bluebells at Whipsnade Zoo is often highlighted in their publicity literature, along with the significant observation that the bluebells bloom slightly later there than elsewhere, on account of the zoo's elevated and exposed conditions.⁷⁰

While it remains possible Lewis's Christological breakthrough took place later than traditionally accepted – that is to say, in June 1932, rather than September 1931 – this seems unlikely, given the very specific Christological comments made by Lewis in his letter to Arthur Greeves of October 1, 1931, stating that he had “just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ.”⁷¹ Lewis seems to have fused his memories of two quite distinct visits to Whipsnade, mingling his memory of an observation and reflection which took place in September 1931 with an event which took place in June 1932. Once more, the historical reliability of Lewis's narrative needs to be treated with caution.

The Implied Audience of “*Surprised by Joy*”

Finally, we must reflect on the readership that Lewis envisaged for this work. What clues does the text of *Surprised by Joy* disclose about Lewis's hopes or expectations for his implied audience? By this time, Lewis had mastered the art of scholarly prose on the one hand, and translating his ideas into the cultural vernacular on the other. “Lewis did not set out to

write at a particular stylistic level or texture; rather, he maintained that an author's style must be molded and modified to meet the needs of his particular audience.⁷² Unusually, Lewis was capable of writing at a number of levels, the choice resting on his assumptions concerning a given book's likely audience. It is normally quite easy to work out (especially from his shorter pieces) who Lewis has in mind from his vocabulary, style, level of analysis, and authorial tone.

Surprised by Joy proves surprisingly resistant to such an analysis. In the first place, the intellectual demands made of its readers are unexpectedly high. Some representative examples may be noted to illustrate this point. The rich and complex German technical term *Sehnsucht* is used without explanation or contextualization.⁷³ Novalis's "Blue Flower" motif is mentioned without elaboration,⁷⁴ apparently on the assumption that the reader knows that it symbolizes a longing for the elusive reconciliation of reason and imagination, between the observed world outside the mind and the subjective world within.

Furthermore, Lewis punctuates his text with untranslated maxims and epigrams in French,⁷⁵ German,⁷⁶ Italian,⁷⁷ and Latin.⁷⁸ As a rare concession, Lewis at one point offers a footnote providing an English translation of an untransliterated Greek epigram he cites in his text: "Oh, I desire too much."⁷⁹ This epigram is often encountered in Renaissance art – for example, in Moretto da Brescia's "Portrait of a Young Man" (1516–18), which incorporates this slogan into a band on the subject's feather beret. Lewis seems to assume his readers are aware of its cultural significance, so that it requires no explanation or comment.

Surprised by Joy also assumes that the reader is familiar with Lewis's everyday worlds, and does not need jargon or technical terms explained. This is perhaps most obviously the case when speaking about his extended time at Oxford University, when Lewis uses Oxford jargon without explanation. For example, we learn that Cecil Harwood was a student of "The House."⁸⁰ Someone such as myself, steeped in this cultural milieu, knows immediately that this is a reference to Christ Church – Oxford's college and cathedral, re-founded in 1546 by Henry VIII as *Aedes Christi* ("The House of Christ"). Yet Lewis makes no attempt to introduce or explain such terms to outsiders.

Lewis also assumes that his readers are deeply steeped in the western literary tradition; otherwise, they would be unable to appreciate his turns of phrase and lines of thought – such as his extensive use of allusion. For example, consider the following statement, made in the simplest of styles: "No more Avalon, no more Hesperides."⁸¹ The sentence is a mere six words long; yet its meaning and impact are determined almost entirely by the capacity of the rich imaginative literary associations of "Avalon"

and “Hesperides” to evoke memories, aspirations, and yearnings. To read is not necessarily to understand, still less to be engaged at the deep level that Lewis intended – and presumably experienced for himself.

Lewis is a master of translation, having discovered that effective communication entailed the learning of the language of his audiences, and restating and explaining ideas and concepts in accessible ways (131–3). Despite Lewis’s stated supposal of his likely audience, such translation is conspicuously absent from *Surprised by Joy*, which makes considerable linguistic and cultural demands of its readers. Lewis’s facility for translation of complex literary and religious notions for the benefit of his readers is well known. So is Lewis here subtly indicating that his readers must rise to his level, rather than expect him to descend to theirs?

It is as if Lewis imagines himself to be conversing with someone rather like himself, who shares his own deep knowledge of the field of western literature and the curious habits and customs of Oxford dons. He clearly believes that he can share his thoughts and allusions without having to explain them. Might Lewis actually be writing for *himself*?

Perhaps. But there is another explanation. To make sense of *Surprised by Joy*, his readers need to learn Lewis’s language, and realize that this inversion of Lewis’s normal approach is really a compliment to his readers. When Lewis bares his soul, he does so on his own terms, obliging his readers to come to terms with his unaccommodated language and allusions. The price of being allowed access to Lewis’s private world is that we must allow him to speak to us on his own terms – and in his own words.

Conclusion

In the end, *Surprised by Joy* remains something of an enigma. Fully unlocking its key would require access to whatever notes Lewis used in compiling it, successive dated revisions of the manuscript, and the deeper recesses of Lewis’s creative mind – above all, his capacity to weave narratives, correlating and colligating his external and internal worlds. It is unlikely we shall ever achieve such an understanding. Yet perhaps the unanswered questions which hover over its pages help explain its abiding appeal. To cross the threshold of *Surprised by Joy* is to enter a private world, revealed only in part, with darkened recesses tantalizingly beyond our reach.

Surprised by Joy is a curious work – one that arguably seeks to conceal as much as to reveal, and which raises important and difficult questions concerning the correlation of Lewis’s external and internal worlds. Oscar

Wilde (1854–1900) famously quipped that “To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim.” So can autobiography be art? Or must it conceal its author if it is to disclose its artfulness? It is difficult not to see the wisdom of James Como’s comments:⁸²

The consideration of C. S. Lewis’s self is a very great challenge. He at once hid it absolutely, distorted it, and invented parts of it to parade forth; he repressed, explored, and denied it; he indulged and overcame it; certainly he would transform, and then transcend it; almost always he used it.

Perhaps Lewis intends us to see his own story, so artfully presented, as a mirror of the human soul – a mirror in which we can discern our own story reflected in part, while being seen in the light of a greater vision of reality, which – like Plato’s *synoptikon* – sets everything in its proper context. Lewis’s personal story is then to be recognized as an echo of the “grand narrative” of God and the universe – something worth exploring in its own right, but more fundamentally because of its ability to disclose something greater and deeper.

Notes

- 1 See Letter to Peter Milward, July 4, 1955; *Letters*, vol. 3, 627; Letter to Arthur Greeves, August 18, 1955; *Letters*, vol. 3, 642.
- 2 William Wordsworth, *Major Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, 334. In a letter to his publisher, Jocelyn Gibb, Lewis indicated that it did not matter “whether the title suggests Wordsworth or not,” implying that a knowledge of Wordsworth’s original poem was not important to an understanding of his own work: Letter to Jocelyn Gibb, June 1, 1955; *Letters*, vol. 3, 614.
- 3 *Surprised by Joy*, 276.
- 4 C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1939, 11.
- 5 Lewis and Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy*, 12; 21.
- 6 See William Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The Making of GKC, 1874–1908*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 341–67.
- 7 *Surprised by Joy*, 260.
- 8 See the points made in Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, “Die Realität des Subjekts: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Identität.” In *Subjektdiskurse im gesellschaftlichen Wandel: Zur Theorie des Subjekts in der Spätmoderne*, edited by Heiner Keupp and Joachim Hohl, 75–97. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006.

- 9 Andrew Wheat, "The Road before Him: Allegory, Reason, and Romanticism in C. S. Lewis' *The Pilgrim's Regress*." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 51, no. 1 (1998): 21–39.
- 10 U. Milo Kaufmann, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Pilgrim's Regress*: John Bunyan and C. S. Lewis on the Shape of the Christian Quest." In *Bunyan in Our Time*, edited by Robert G. Collmer, 186–99. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1989.
- 11 Ann Loades, "C. S. Lewis: Grief Observed, Rationality Abandoned, Faith Regained." *Literature and Theology* 3 (1989): 107–21.
- 12 Letter to Sister Madelva, October 3, 1963; *Letters*, vol. 3, 1460.
- 13 For useful reflections on Lewis's rhetorical purposes in this work, see Michael Ward, "C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963." In *The Heart of Faith: Following Christ in the Church of England*, edited by Andrew Atherstone, 121–30. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2008.
- 14 *Surprised by Joy*, ix.
- 15 Lewis explicitly refers to re-reading Augustine's *Confessions* in Lent 1936; see his letter to Dom Bede Griffiths, April 24, 1936; *Letters*, vol. 2, 190. He later debated with Griffiths – who he encouraged to read Augustine's work in the original Latin – over whether a "Berkeleyian idealism" could be discerned in this text: Letter to Dom Bede Griffiths, April 19, 1938; *Letters*, vol. 2, 225. Lewis consistently recommended Augustine's *Confessions* to those who asked to be directed toward some stimulating Christian reading: see, for example, his letter to Mrs Morland, August 19, 1942; *Letters*, vol. 2, 529; Letter to Margaret Gray, May 9, 1961; *Letters*, vol. 3, 1265.
- 16 Elizabeth de Mijolla, *Autobiographical Quests: Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, and Wordsworth*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1994, 13–45; Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience*. Leiden: Brill, 2004, 18–27.
- 17 Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.8.13.
- 18 *Surprised by Joy*, x.
- 19 Danuta Shanzer, "Pears before Swine: Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4.9." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 42 (1996): 45–55.
- 20 Lawrence Byrne, "Writing God's Story: Self and Narrative Structure in Augustine's *Confessions*." *Christianity and Literature* 38 (1989): 15–31.
- 21 For Augustine's description of this process, see Carl G. Vaught, *Access to God in Augustine's Confessions: Books X–XIII*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, 36–80.
- 22 For Lewis's use of this term to refer to his return to Christianity, see *Surprised by Joy*, 135.
- 23 See the analysis in Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2006, 4–18. Harrison rejects the "two Augustines" notion in favor of a narrative of continuous development and reformulation.
- 24 Karla Pollmann, "*Alium sub meo nomine*: Augustine Between His Own Self-Fashioning and His Later Reception." *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 14 (2010): 409–24.

26 *Critical Reflections on Surprised by Joy*

25 *Surprised by Joy*, 252.

26 On this general theme, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

27 Dante, *Vita Nuova*, 1, 1.

28 Barbara Nolan, "The 'Vita Nuova': Dante's Book of Revelation." *Dante Studies* 88 (1970): 51–71; quote at 52.

29 Aristotle, *De memoria et reminiscencia* 1.450a–b. For further comment, see David Bloch, ed., *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection: Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

30 For the use of texts and images to enhance this "art" in the later Renaissance, see Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory: Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

31 Bolzoni, *Gallery of Memory*, 139–45; Mary J. Carruthers, "Ars oblivionalis, ars inveniendi: The Cherub Figure and the Arts of Memory." *Gesta* 48 (2009): 1–19. For this issue in human culture as a whole, see Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004, especially 19–37. As Weinrich notes, the idea was re-introduced by Umberto Eco in 1966, apparently unaware of its historical provenance: Weinrich, *Lethe*, 12. Martin Heidegger's suggestion that *aletheia* is essentially the suppression or overwhelming of *lethe* should be noted here, although the scholarly evidence for this is somewhat unimpressive: Ernst Tugendhaft, "Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit." In *Heidegger: Perspektiven zur Deutung seines Werks*, edited by Otto Pöggeler, 286–97. Weinheim: Beltz, 1994.

32 The three significance "absences" from *Surprised by Joy* are his complex relationship with Mrs Moore, his difficult relationship with his father, and the trauma of the Great War. See McGrath, *C. S. Lewis – A Life*, 123–4.

33 Louis A. Renza, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography." *New Literary History* 9 (1977): 1–26.

34 A madeleine is a small vanilla-flavored cake. For the phenomenon of odor-evoked memories, see Rachel S. Herz and Jonathan W. Schooler, "A Naturalistic Study of Autobiographical Memories Evoked by Olfactory and Visual Cues: Testing the Proustian Hypothesis." *American Journal of Psychology* 115, no. 1 (2002): 21–32; Marieke B. J. Toffoloa, Monique A. M. Smeets, and Marcel A. van den Hout, "Proust Revisited: Odours as Triggers of Aversive Memories." *Cognition and Emotion*, 26, no. 1 (2012): 83–92.

35 *Surprised by Joy*, 16. The "flowering currant" (*Ribes sanguineum*) is a fragrant flowering bush, common in Belfast gardens around this time.

36 For example, Arthur Melville Clark, *Autobiography: Its Genesis and Phases*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1935, 10–21.

37 See especially Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly, eds., *Early Modern English Lives: Autobiography and Self-Representation, 1500–1660*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

38 Leigh Gilmore, "The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre." In *Autobiography & Postmodernism*, edited by Kathleen M.

- Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters, 3–18. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.
- 39 Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, 39.
- 40 A point made particularly by James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972. The issue is somewhat more complex than Olney suggests: see, for example, Wolfram Fischer, “Über die allmähliche Verfertigung des Selbst beim Sprechen von Sich. Begrenzung und Entgrenzung der Erinnerung im autobiographischen Dialog.” In *Psychotherapie in Zeiten der Globalisierung*, edited by Bernhard Strauß and Michael Geyer, 307–36. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.
- 41 Albert E. Stone, *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981, 2.
- 42 Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997, 9 (my emphasis).
- 43 *Surprised by Joy*, 95–135. Lewis’s account of Malvern College takes up 18 percent of the text of the book.
- 44 Letter to Arthur Greeves, June 5, 1914: *Letters*, vol. 1, 59.
- 45 Sayer, *Jack*, 86.
- 46 Sayer, *Jack*, 326–7.
- 47 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957, 307–8. See further Charles Berryman, “Critical Mirrors: Theories of Autobiography.” *Mosaic* 32, no. 1 (1999): 71–85.
- 48 See the analysis in Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal, “Melancholie der Identität und dezentrierte biographische Selbstbeschreibung. Anmerkung zu einem langen Abschied aus der selbstverschuldeten Zentriertheit des Subjekts.” *Bios: Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung und Oral History* 12, no. 2 (1999): 143–68.
- 49 Clare Blake, “Making Sense of the Self: Cultural Identities under Pressure.” In *The Uses of Autobiography*, edited by Julia Swindells, 56–63. London: Taylor & Francis, 1995; Wohlrab-Sahr, “Die Realität des Subjekts: Überlegungen zu einer Theorie biographischer Identität.” See also the earlier piece by Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement.” In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, 67–82.
- 50 Paul John Eakin, “What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography?” *Narrative* 12, no. 2 (2004): 121–32. See also Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984; Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self Invention*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- 51 Letter to Dom Bede Griffith, February 8, 1956; *Letters*, vol. 3, 703.
- 52 Plato, *Republic*, 537C7.
- 53 Letter to Laurence Krieg, April 21, 1957; *Letters*, vol. 3, 848.
- 54 W. H. Lewis, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography* (1974). Unpublished typescript held in the Wade Center, Wheaton College, Illinois, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, 43.

- 55 *Surprised by Joy*, 266.
- 56 *Oxford University Calendar 1928*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928, xx–xxii; *Oxford University Calendar, 1929*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929, xiii–x. Lewis is here referring to the eight-week “Full Term” during which tutorials and lectures took place.
- 57 I first pointed this out in McGrath, *C. S. Lewis – A Life*, 141–6.
- 58 Letter to Owen Barfield, February 3, 1930; *Letters*, vol. 1, 882–3.
- 59 Owen Barfield, in *C. S. Lewis Remembered: Collected Reflections of Students, Friends & Colleagues*, edited by Harry Lee Poe, and Rebecca Whitten Poe, 25–35. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- 60 Letter to Arthur Greeves, October 29, 1930; *Letters*, vol. 1, 942.
- 61 For example, see David C. Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C. S. Lewis’s Journey to Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- 62 Letter to Arthur Greeves, October 1, 1931; *Letters*, vol. 1, 974.
- 63 *Surprised by Joy*, 252.
- 64 *Surprised by Joy*, 275.
- 65 W. H. Lewis, “Memoir of C. S. Lewis.” In *The Letters of C. S. Lewis*, edited by W. H. Lewis, 1–26. London: Bles, 1966. Quote at 19.
- 66 *Surprised by Joy*, 276. On this passage, see Michael Ward, “Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis’s Depictions of Conversion.” In *C. S. Lewis: Lightbearer in the Shadowlands*, edited by A. J. L. Menuge, 143–67. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997.
- 67 A. E. Houseman, *A Shropshire Lad*, XLI, 17–18. This poem, written in 1896, is noted for its stylistic simplicity and its nostalgic depiction of pastoral life in rural England. See Benjamin F. Fisher, “The Critical Reception of *A Shropshire Lad*.” In *A. E. Houseman: A Reassessment*, edited by Alan W. Holden and J. Roy Birch, 20–36. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000. Shakespeare’s “azured Harebell” (*Cymbeline*, IV, 2) is actually the English bluebell.
- 68 *Surprised by Joy*, 6.
- 69 See his letter to Warnie Lewis, June 14, 1932; *Letters*, vol. 2, 84.
- 70 “Beautiful Bluebells”; ZSL Whipsnade Zoo Press Release, May 17, 2004.
- 71 Letter to Arthur Greeves, October 1, 1931; *Letters*, vol. 1, 974.
- 72 Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C. S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009, 83.
- 73 *Surprised by Joy*, 6.
- 74 *Surprised by Joy*, 6.
- 75 E.g., *Surprised by Joy*, 58: “maison tolérée” (a euphemism for a brothel).
- 76 E.g., Goethe’s phrase “*des Lebens goldnes Baum*,” which comes from Goethe’s *Faust*: *Surprised by Joy*, 230. There is a misprint here: “goldnes” ought to be “goldner.” Merely translating this decontextualized phrase fails to indicate its significance; it needs to be set in its full context: “Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.” “All theory, dear friend, is gray; and the golden tree of life is green.” Goethe’s point – with which Lewis agreed totally – is that theory fails to capture the richness and vibrancy of reality. Similarly, Lewis cites the German libretto of Wagner’s opera *Siegfried* at one point, but this time offering an English translation: *Surprised by*

- Joy*, 265. As with the Goethe quote noted above, the German is misprinted, offering the nonsensical “Spärer” in place of Wagner’s original “Spürer” (“spy” or “tracker”). Both these misprints date back to the first edition: see C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955, 188; 218.
- 77 E.g., *Surprised by Joy*, 60: “ogni parte ad ogni parte splende,” a reference to Dante, *Inferno* VII, 75.
- 78 E.g., *Surprised by Joy*, 221: The Latin tag “odora canum vis” comes from Vergil’s *Aeneid*, IV.131 – “keen-scented dogs.”
- 79 *Surprised by Joy*, 16. In transliterated Greek, this reads: *iou lian potho*. The Greek is incorrectly rendered in recent editions of *Surprised by Joy*, which contract these three Greek words into two, and incorrectly render the Greek letter *upsilon* by the typographically similar *nu*. The first edition presents the Greek correctly: see C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955, 22.
- 80 *Surprised by Joy*, 233.
- 81 *Surprised by Joy*, 237.
- 82 James Como, *Branches to Heaven: The Geniuses of C. S. Lewis*. Dallas, TX: Spence, 1998, 54.

