

LEWISVALDI

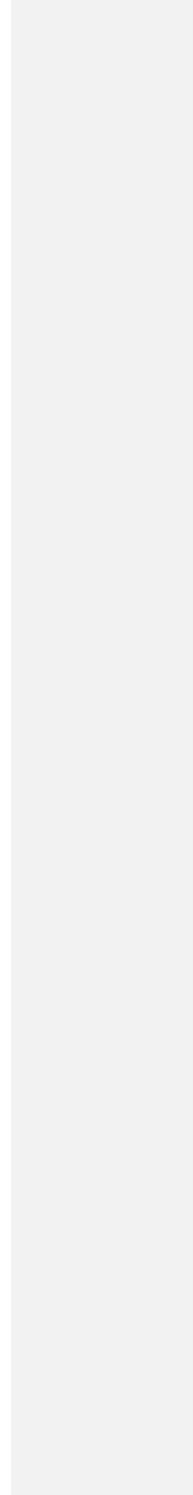
Seth Myers on C.S. Lewis and the Seasons

With the onset of Spring, it dawned on me that not only did Lewis have a fair amount to say about new life and Spring, he also had quite a bit to say about all the seasons at one point or another. Using some of Lewis's own words, usually poetic enough on their own unmetered merits, they are here arranged as a sequential journey through the seasons, though it doesn't rhyme all that much. Some explanation is given.

Without further ado:

An Unexpected Journal

Summer 2019 • Vol. 2, Issue 2



Lewisvaldi - Surprised by the Seasons

Sol, Earth's husband in Summer,
tends a garden rich in soil,
pure fountains, paradisaal palms.

Mere ball of flaming gas?
not what Sol truly is.

Father Sky, celestial light of reason
shines on Mother Earth,
herself warm, dark, obscure
and infinite. Holy.

Light beam piercing musty shed
gaze through, not at, gracious tool supplied;

Believe in the Son,
Who like the Sun has risen,
and by Whom all else we see;

Like nested gardens
wall in wall, hedge in hedge
each more secret, fragrant, fertile
the further you enter in.

Idea of autumn, pangs of joy,
Harvest of summer's long day.

Nutkin scampers to and fro
to squirrel Sol's harvest away

All leaves of Heaven rustle,
whispering
“some day we shall get in.”

Always Winter, Christmas never
but ... guilt forgiven, wrath ended.
Winter passed, woes mended,
white witch kneels to magic deeper.
Jocund revel, ladies laughter,
lion-hearted, by Jove,
Father Christmas here at last!

Unless a seed
dies in the ground,
there will be no Spring.
Gods who die
gods who wake,
or the Son of Man?
Energy, fertility, urgency,
exultant Psalms,
audacity of things that grow;
Dark places, holy places,
give life and strength,
not found in book or word.
Enormous bliss of Eden
bluebells, wallabies,
birds sing overhead.

S. Myers

Lewisvaldi

When Britain's rule is Logres;
enthroned in France is Reason,
the Clearness Divine;
and ruling in China
the Order of Heaven true:
Then it will be Spring.

Thus the seasons cycle
round and round and round,
images - not lines - rhymed,
meanings most profound.
Climes join in – deserts to irrigate
or jungles to hew down?

Long inhibition over,
dry desert left behind.
Off to lands of longing,
we find our way once more
hearts at once exalted,
yet broken as ne'er before.

Compelle intrare – compel them to come in.
Divine mercy with depths unplumbed.
Hardness of God,
softer than
kindness of men.
His compulsion,

our liberation.
Joy - not the wave,
but the imprint
on the sand.
Joy that moves the seasons,
mere road signs to me now.
Though written on pillars of silver,
and with letters of gold.
The road leads ever to Jerusalem
true life, forever, unfolds.
Weight of glory, surprised by joy, a hidden
strength is found.
Gloom of Tenebrae,
long dark weekend;
Easter morning,
eternal Spring abounds!

Notes:

Some explanatory notes are in order after such an amalgam of imagination and lines of prose (however poetic on their own) never intended to be shoehorned into a poem; these endnotes are, for the record, much shorter than those given by, say, T.S. Eliot after his 1922 poem, *The Waste Land*. The imagery, and much of the wording, are taken from various writings of C.S. Lewis, who was an Oxford

and Cambridge Professor of Literature, noted Christian writer (1898 – 1963), and friend of J.R.R. Tolkien.

Winter includes overt references from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), the opening book of the seven-book series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956); specific references come from lines in Lewis's poem "Reason" about Jupiter (Jove), the thematic planet of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, as found in Lewis's poem *The Planets* (and discussed by Michael Ward, see references). Summer observations about the composition of stars are found in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the third book in *The Chronicles* series.

Summer offers a chance to write about the sun and light, in general. Images of summer come from Lewis's poem "Reason," as well as the discussion of Sol (the sun) in his poem *The Planets*. The stanza concludes with observations from Lewis's essay "Meditation in a Toolshed," which is fundamental to understanding his excursions into imaginative literature. In the essay, Lewis declares that "you can only step outside one experience by stepping inside another . . . one must look both *along* and *at* everything." Reason *and* experience provide the most full criteria by which to assess anything. Thus, Lewis often portrays the Good and the True in terms

of their intrinsic Beauty, thereby integrating reason and feeling, just as he advocated in his educational treatise, *The Abolition of Man*. The concluding line is from *Is Theology Poetry?*, which also adorns Lewis's marker in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey. His induction was in no small part orchestrated by Michael Ward on the 50th anniversary of Lewis' death, 2013. Just as the Bible and Lewis's *Surprised by Joy* begin and end with garden imagery, so does this stanza, drawing in its finale from Lewis's *A Grief Observed*.

Lewis's "Idea of Autumn" was inspired by Beatrix Potter books. This was one of his early experiences of "joy" (or longing), as described in the first chapter of his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*. Heaven's leaves rustle and seem to whisper in his sermon turned essay, *Weight of Glory*.

Spring: Jesus's actual words seem wise to include, as the poem is largely about him ("unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds," John 12:24). Other imagery comes from the first and the concluding chapters of *Surprised by Joy*. *That Hideous Strength*, the finale to Lewis's trilogy sci-fi series, supplies observations about Logres and other lands. Dying and rising gods show up in Lewis's essay "Myth Became Fact". Lewis

there claims that the Christian story has the inspirational power of myth, but is “a myth which is also a fact.” Lewis refers to dark places as holy places in *Till We Have Faces* in Book I: Chapter 5, echoing the theme of his poem “Reason,” which was actually composed two years before his conversion to the Christian faith. Regrettably, imagery from Eliot such as how “April is the cruellest month” and the sources of his vegetative imagery were not included.

The final summarizing stanzas use Lewis’s description of his conversion taken from the final chapters of *Surprised by Joy*. Lewis argued in *Abolition of Man* that, when it comes to the cultivation of proper moral sentiments, people are more often like deserts in need of irrigation than jungles in need of pruning. Life from death and the meaning of Easter is otherwise the key theme of this collection. Remembrance of a friend who “graduated” from this life to life eternal on Easter weekend also profoundly factors in the ending - we will have some good stories to share someday!

References:

- Eliot, T.S. “The Wasteland” in *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909 - 1950*. Also available online <https://poets.org/poem/waste-land>.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*. (1943). See also *An Unexpected Journal's* inaugural issue on *Abolition of Man*, at <https://anunexpectedjournal.com/archive/vi-issue-1-spring-2018/>.

- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed* (1961).
- Lewis, C.S. "Is Theology Poetry" in *The Weight of Glory and other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan, 1980).
- Lewis, C.S. "Meditation in a Toolshed" in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).
- Lewis, C.S. "Reason" in *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, 1992). Online
<https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/reason-3>.
- Lewis, C.S. "The Planets" in *Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, 1992). Online
<https://apilgriminnarnia.com/2013/05/27/poem-the-planets/>.
- Lewis, C.S. *That Hideous Strength* (1945). See also
<https://anunexpectedjournal.com/abolition-of-man-as-sci-fi-c-s-lewis-space-trilogy/>.
- Lewis, C.S. *Till We Have Faces* (1956).
- Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950).
- Lewis, C.S. *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952).
- Ward, Michael and Williams, Peter S. ed. *C.S. Lewis at Poet's Corner* (Cascade Books, 2016)
- Ward, Michael, *The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford University Press, 2010). See also Michael Ward's site www.planetnarnia.com, and *An Unexpected Journal's* celebration of the 10th anniversary of Planet Narnia at <https://anunexpectedjournal.com/archive/v1-issue-4-advent-2018/>.
- Ward, Michael. *Narnia Code* (Tyndale, 2010).